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Organization: Exit Glacier Guides

Title: Co-Owner

Comments: To whom it may concern,

If I am interpreting the forest plan revisions accurately, many of the areas we operate in and around will be changed in their classification from a considered motorized area to a backcountry area. However, it also seems to say that the uses of any specific area by a commercial operator will be considered on a case-by-case basis because of the extreme variations in wildlife, terrain, public desires, etc.

It is of some concern to us that the areas we operate in are to be changed. We have been petitioning the Forest Service for 10 years to allow us to land our small helicopter slightly further in to the Godwin basin where we run glacier hiking and ice climbing trips with very small groups during the summer. We have worked amiably with the forest during this last decade and have, to the best of our knowledge, received no public complaints about our limited operation in the area.

The alpine area of Godwin that we land in is extremely difficult to access during the summer, and in the decade of operating there, we have never once seen a citizen that accessed the region on their own. Because of the danger and difficulty involved in accessing the area on foot or by any other non-motorized means, we don't believe that it is likely that the area will ever be accessed by the general public with the exception of an extremely rare visit by intrepid explorers and that our activities are unlikely to discourage or alter any future use of the area by the public. We also don't fly over primitive Forest Service areas to access the toe of Godwin - we approach from the ocean and fly over the area currently occupied by the maximum security prison and so cause little disturbance of backcountry use even with our flight path.

We'd like to point out that the Forest Service is expanding use of the areas we frequent to allow winter helicopter access by commercial operations. While we are not opposed to this action, it doesn't serve the needs of a vast majority of visitors that come to Alaska. We are local residents of Seward, and we have grown to employ almost 30 people in the summer, many of whom have chosen to become permanent residents of the area and active members of the local outdoor community. Taking away our helicopter access to Godwin or limiting our ability to move our approved landing zone would have a significant financial impact on our operations and on the operation of the local helicopter company we use and would certainly cost the area jobs and limit the unique, low-impact recreation opportunities that we have created in the area in partnership with the Forest Service.

Again, we're not sure how the proposed alternatives would affect our companies access to the Godwin toe, if at all, but if it does, please take into consideration the impact that it would have on the diverse, sustainable, and adventurous recreational opportunities that we have worked very hard to continue to create in Seward with our small local business.

Brendan Ryan