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First name: Aaron

Last name: Kessler

Organization:

Title:

Comments: The Bighorn Nation Forest is a recreational paradise. As noted on page 19 of the current Bighorn National Forest management plan, "The physical setting and scenic beauty of the Bighorn National Forest will continue to draw visitors. Recreation opportunities ranging from primitive to developed will be available. The Forest will continue to attract visitors for a variety of recreational opportunities. There will be a well-developed system of motorized and non-motorized trails which address recreational demand as well as protection of wildlife habitat. Both motorized and non-motorized winter and summer recreation opportunities will be present on the Forest."

A ski area does not exist if the snow that falls throughout the winter season is not protected against the many forces of nature. The Pole Creek Nordic Ski area happens to reside in an area in which multiple factors make providing a high-quality recreation area challenging. For the past 50 years, dedicated winter recreationalists have made it their mission and goal to improve and maintain this area of which the current Pole Creek Management Project has slated for several clear-cut projects. Examples of why the proposed changes to the existing area would be catastrophic and an insult to all the work that has been accomplished by hundreds of volunteers are listed below.

The wind in the Pole Creek drainage is well known to all who have skied the areas. The exposure to wind from the parking lot (zero tree cover), requires a strong constitution and a knowledge that within are short one-hundred-yard sprint to the trailhead (surrounded by trees) reprieve from the elements will be gained. We do not have to theorize what the area will be like without the protection from the existing trees, the evidence is unfortunately clear where ever the existing ski trails leave the protection of the mature trees. The predominantly north and west winds as well as the southern exposure to the daytime sunshine, strip the snow fall from the trails at an exponentially faster rate than the areas with nature's protection. The amount of time required to replace the proposed stands of trees in a clear cut will require more time than can be allowed. Generations of skiers will be affected by this project. The decades required to grow a lodgepole pine to the size that helps improve the catching and sheltering of the snow will have dramatic effects on the quality of the ski area. A natural buffer to prevent the rapid deterioration of the ski area is mandatory. How can this be achieved if the clear-cuts are allowed?

The residents of Johnson County have shown with their volunteer hours donated to improving the ski area, (rock removal from ski trails, selective tree removal, stump grinding, tree limb trimming, trail sign posting) estimated at roughly \$100,000 for the past 10 years, using the Forest Service's day-rate for labor calculation, Pole Creek is a major priority. Johnson County has also shown with the multiple grant dollars received by the ski club who maintains and improves the trail systems at Pole Creek, that this long standing recreation area is a priority. Grants and donations of over \$150,000 have been given and utilized at Pole Creek in improve the winter recreation opportunities in this unique area. The proposed clearcutting of the area would dramatically degrade the hours and dollars that have been given to help bolster up this unique recreational opportunity location. The time, the money and the effort that would be required to build a new Nordic ski trail facility to replace the existing ski area would be daunting to say the least. If the Forest Service were to ignore the requests of the local citizens, does the Forest Service have a new destination for the replacement of the established Nordic trails due to the destruction of the Pole Creek Trail system? Does the Forest Service have the money and manpower that will be required to provide an equally comparable ski area with all of the requirements (12 foot wide trails, stumps removed below the surface, majority of the rocks removed from the trails, signage at each trail junction, blue diamonds erected along the trail in both directions) that make the Pole Creek Nordic Ski area the preferred ski area in the region?

On any given day of the week during the winter season, the parking lot at Pole Creek is filled with vehicles transporting skiers from their homes to the trail head. The diversity of license plates is staggering. Recreators from Johnson County as well as residents from all of the surrounding Wyoming counties and adjacent states have found that skiing at Pole Creek provides a predictable and superior skiing experience to the areas around

their hometowns. Modifications to the existing forests would negatively impact the snow pack and in turn, negatively impact the skiing experience at Pole Creek. The solitude found on the existing forested trails, as well as the proximity to the town of Buffalo make skiing at Pole Creek a very easy endeavor. If the area around the Pole Creek ski area is logged and the above mentioned environmental factors deteriorate the skiing conditions, skiers will travel elsewhere to spend their time and their money. The benefits that the community of Buffalo receive from visiting skier dollars cannot be unrecognized. Local hotels have links to the Powder Pass Nordic Club's website (Buffalo's Nordic Ski Club maintains and improves both Pole Creek and FS 449 recreation areas) so that their winter time tourists have updated reports on conditions and events. Travelers also purchase fuel, food and help local business during the year when tourism is slower than summer time. Has the Forest Service done an analysis of the revenue generated by the nonmotorized winter recreationalists who use the ski area from late November to mid-April and determined how much money will be lost to the local economy?

Aaron and Lorajane Kessler

Concerned Citizens