

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/8/2023 4:22:37 AM

First name: Mark

Last name: Wood

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I appreciate the opportunity to share my views and concerns in regard to the proposed Granite Goose Scoping Information, primarily the winter closures that are recommended and discussed.

To start with, to pursue the idea of a unique area exclusively for backcountry skiing in the Granite Mountain area is understandable, as Brundage Ski Resort has managed to acquire the permits for this endeavor for many years. Along with their permit from the Payette National Forest and their Outfitter and Guide permit from the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association, they have provided this service to their customers. With that being stated, only their customers and/or the hearty souls that want to walk, ski-skin, or snowshoe up these slopes within this area are going to enjoy the fruits of this restricted area.

Only when the snow depths are adequate does Brundage Resort start building their cat roads in the area to accommodate their program. This usually occurs the first part of January as it takes the December snowstorms to create the depths required to get the access roads established. Being that this is the case it is usually just prior to mid January that Brundage Resort has established the "Boulevard" for snowmobiles to access the "snowmobile-open area" that rests halfway up the east face of Granite Mountain. Prior to that, snowmobiles pick any line/route that they can muster to ascend the mountainside to get to this area. Once the January 15-March 31 Closure goes into affect, the "Boulevard" is established and snowmobiles utilize it to get to the "snowmobile-open area". Also, some of the cat-ski roads that ascend the upper portion of the mountain are the actual boundary for the "snowmobile-open area". This gives a snowmobiler an opportunity to physically see where the cat-ski closure boundary is. It would be advantageous for this to occur on the complete closure area, as snowmobilers would not have to try and determine where the imaginary line exists. For example, a cat-road that would be visible with some signage could/would be the boundary.

With this being said, to propose a winter-long motorized-closure for this area is basically restricting the complete area as snowmobiles will not be able to access the upper portion that is open to snowmobiling until the "Boulevard" has been established. This is, in essence, completely restricting the area that is supposed to be open for motorized use. This is an invitation for hard feelings and intrusions.

Using the pretense that there needs to be a "back-country" ski area that is closed to motorized use whether there is an outfitter and guide service, such as Brundage, could prove to be not as practical as USFS management might like to think. Without that outfitter and guide service providing the cat-roads, the boundary identification, and the establishment of the boulevard, only imaginary lines that are difficult at best to identify would determine most of the closure. To expect the USFS to take over these tasks would be the next possible scenario but I don't believe that this is within their scope of manpower or budget. I believe it best to leave the Granite Mountain Cat-ski Closure as it exists today with a January 15 - March 31 Closure.

Also, I feel that it is best to leave it as an annual order and not a permanent closure. Everyone, including the USFS, comments on global warming and changing weather patterns. If weather patterns change and/or skiing is not as popular, a permanent closure creates an area that is closed for no one to use or access. This creates a closure that benefits no one. As stated earlier, I feel that a permanent closure of this

area for backcountry skiing is just a pretense to create a permanent closure for the sake of excluding motorized use, rather than creating an area for backcountry skiing. Except for the financially elite, a lot of backcountry skiers like to access their favorite areas by snowmobile and do their own transporting. This adds to the challenge and the experience. The existing closure excludes these individuals and the current proposal would do so even more. So, this current proposal restricts those that it says it is trying to provide more opportunities for.

With all of this being said, it brings up the possible concern that Brundage Ski Resort's cat-ski program is only for the elite skier and that the average backcountry skier is being slighted and restricted. Here is an area that is closed off and restricted to possibly 98-99% of the potential users/user groups for the sake of a very small and elite group of skiers willing to pay for the private use of the Payette National Forest, at everyone else's expense.

A 2017 Economic Impact and Importance Study was compiled by Boise State University for the Idaho Department of Recreation. It was determined that snowmobiling related products and services brought into Valley County an amount in excess of \$32 million a year. It projected that in following years it could/would exceed \$40 million a year. These are not trivial amounts and to provide this type of revenue on an annual basis needs to be seriously taken into consideration. It is common knowledge that recreation is the economic backbone of Valley County. In regards to the Bear Basin Closure Proposal, I am not opposed to a closure determined annually but do oppose the permanent closure that is currently proposed. Also, if this closure is to be approved it needs to have avenues for neighboring property owners to access the groomed snowmobile trail on the north side of Bear Basin. There was an established verbal agreement made when the Cross-country Ski Trail System was first planned and has worked out quite well. Most of the intrusions by motorized users have been early in the season by out-of-town guests prior to any of the local snowmobile trails being groomed and established for the season. Proper signage could eliminate many of these issues. At this point in time, being that this area is not under any actual documented closure, the crosscountry grooming management is not allowed by the USFS to post any signage of any restrictions.

Also, the proposed Bear Basin Closure has been enlarged to encompass the east side of the Bear Basin Road under the pretense that there needs to be a groomed trail system for fat-tired bicycles. This particular area is used by many homeowners on the east side of Bear Basin Road, and along Warren Wagon Road, to access the groomed trail system. This area borders Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) property and currently IDL has no restrictions on motorized access. Snowmobile intrusions could essentially be the entire north south distance of this area since only a surveyor would know where the property boundary lays. The USFS would then be utilizing the non-visible section and quarter section lines that separate the property ownership between USFS ground and IDL ground as a motorized/non-motorized boundary. Hence, an imaginary line. Utilizing the established, and visible, Bear Basin road as an east boundary and the established groomed road/trail on the north side of Bear Basin is what would create the best scenario. Again, having this particular area under an annual decision and not a permanent closure would create the opportunity for change if it was so desired and agreed upon.

I appreciate the opportunity to make comments on this proposal. If there are any questions on my comments feel free to contact me.