

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/8/2026 4:48:04 AM

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Organization: Payette Lakes Ski Club

Title: Executive Director

Comments: Payette Lakes Ski Club (PLSC) submits the following comments regarding the proposed new parking lot in Bear Basin.

PLSC supports the development of a new designated parking area in Bear Basin. A formal parking facility will support both winter and summer recreation and help reduce the impacts of dispersed, user-created parking throughout the area.

As part of our master development planning, PLSC has identified the need to relocate our primary winter trailhead. The existing trailhead has several significant deficiencies. It is located on a residential road, where parking capacity is insufficient during peak use periods. The trailhead also requires users to cross a dangerous intersection at Club Hill Road and Highway 55. In addition, the current location provides extremely limited beginner terrain and presents challenging access to the broader trail system, where more suitable beginner trails exist.

Due to these deficiencies, PLSC has evaluated alternative trailhead locations. The corral area-currently used by summer visitors for parking-has been identified as a preferred alternative. This location would better serve winter operations and directly address the limitations of the existing trailhead.

While we recognize that the proposed parking lot is primarily intended to serve summer users, PLSC is the winter Special Use Permit (SUP) holder in Bear Basin and respectfully requests that our operational needs be considered. We have identified several challenges with the currently proposed parking lot location.

The proposed Granite Goose parking site is located at a lower elevation than the existing trail system and lies on the opposite side of Bear Basin Road (FS Road 451). This location is outside both the proposed winter non-motorized area and the proposed SUP boundary for the Bear Basin Nordic Center.

Locating parking at this lower elevation would require substantial ground disturbance to establish access routes to the main trail system. It would also create the inverse of our current condition: instead of parking at a high point with efficient trail access, skiers would need to climb from a low point, creating challenges for both access and return. While there is some beginner terrain near the proposed site and we have identified a potential low-grade route to the main trails, all such routes would fall outside both our current and proposed SUP boundary and the proposed winter non-motorized area.

In contrast, parking at the corral location would require little to no trail rerouting to access the main trail system. The corral site is immediately adjacent to the proposed boundary and use changes, providing a clear and effective delineation between motorized and non-motorized uses, as well as SUP boundaries. This location also provides more direct access to beginner terrain within the core SUP trail system. Additionally, the open meadow offers a unique opportunity to host Nordic ski race events capable of attracting regional, national, and international participants.

The corral location is already familiar to a wide range of users and continues to experience parking-related impacts. Attempts to close or restrict parking at this site may simply push vehicles farther north into areas already experiencing growth in user-created parking. Fully developing the corral area as a designated trailhead would encourage users to park in a single, well-designed location with convenient access to popular trails.

Construction considerations also favor the corral location. The Granite Goose site would require the removal of a significant number of trees and is situated on wetter ground, which is likely to present challenges during spring runoff. PLSC has experienced similar issues at the current trailhead, where water collects beneath the parking surface and creates mud pits, requiring repeated additions of road base. It is likely that the proposed Granite Goose site would require more excavation and imported material to construct and maintain a functional parking lot.

The corral site, by comparison, is high, dry, and primarily basalt-based, which could substantially reduce the need for imported materials. Its drier conditions would help mitigate additional environmental damage during wet spring and fall periods. Forest Road 451 could be routed along the southern edge of the corral parking area to provide safe separation between traffic and parking.

PLSC recognizes the increasing year-round recreational use of Bear Basin and is proud to help showcase the unique attributes of this landscape so close to town. We are committed to being a constructive partner in the preservation and thoughtful development of this cherished public resource. We believe that establishing a trailhead at the corral location would create a distinctive and celebrated gateway to recreation on the Payette National Forest.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Colby Nielsen

Executive Director

Payette Lakes Ski Club