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First name: REGGIE

Last name: CRIST

Organization:

Title:

Comments: February 24, 2023

To: Objection Reviewing Officer Intermountain Regional Office

324 25th Street

Ogden, UT

84401

From: Reggie Crist

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Submitted via email to objections-intermtn-regional-office@usda.gov

Re: Sawtooth National Recreation Area Outfitter and Guide Management Plan Objection

To whom it may concern,

I wanted to express my appreciation for all the hard work and effort that has been made on this Outfitter and Guide Management Plan. As local resident that has been frequenting the SNRA for 45 years, I would like to follow up on my public comment on August 31, 2022 and make a formal objection regarding design element A08 for the following reasons:

1) Design element A08 has been created to address the problem of "crowding, conflicts, and competition," however there is no data to support that heliskiing is causing overcrowding issues in our backcountry. In fact, the current usage of heliskiing user days on the SNRA is well below the number that has been deemed acceptable by the Environmental Impact Study. Furthermore, in the 12 years that I worked for Sun Valley Heli Ski, I never heard of a single complaint from backcountry users regarding the use of helicopters in the area. For the most part, Helicopters access terrain that is inaccessible to other user groups. In fact the current heli ski operator in this region has access to the largest acreage of any heli ski operator in the lower 48.

2) If the primary purpose of A08 is to avoid overcrowding then it would make sense to reduce the total number of user days rather than the number of operators. In many instances, competition encourages all operators to increase efficiencies and improve safety protocols which ultimately benefits the general public. As an example, Sun Valley Guides and Sawtooth Mountain Guides work harmoniously to provide the public with the best and safest backcountry skiing experiences.

3) Placing a hard restriction on the number of operators effectively creates a virtual monopoly on public lands.

Eliminating design element A08 will not open the 'flood gates' as the SNRA still maintains the ability to regulate the permit process. We should not be placing a hard line restriction on an activity which has been identified as 'high priority use.' Perhaps we should gather more information before we eliminate future potential opportunities that could generate revenue for the USFS and meet the demands of the general public. I don't believe I stand alone as we have heard similar concerns expressed by the Sun Valley Economic Development Committee regarding limiting the future economic potential of the SNRA.

Thanks for taking a closer look at design element A08 and I sincerely hope it will be eliminated from this Outfitter and Guides Management Plan.

Best Regards,

Reggie Crist