



Bryan Donner
Tally Lake Ranger District
1335 Highway 93 West
Whitefish, MT 59937

July 30, 2006

Dear Bryan,

The Flathead Audubon Society is a local, active group of people interested in sound stewardship and management of natural resources. Our members frequently use National Forest lands including the Big Mountain area for a variety of purposes.

After review of your letter requesting input on the "Big Mountain Ski Resort Hellfire Terrain Modification Project," and the discussion with you in the Tally Lake office, we submit the following comments.

The proposed project as described appears to have limited physical environmental effects however there also appears to be no compelling reason to do the project. Although "safety" is given as the primary reason, that is a weak argument at best. The Big Mountain has operated satisfactorily with the existing conditions for about 10 years so it is difficult to understand why it is a safety concern now that needs fixing. Also, several years ago the Forest Service approved an over-the-snow vehicle access route to the base of the chairlift in Hellroaring Basin that was supposed to improve safety by providing a better, more dependable, route for removal of injured skiers. That approved access route has never been developed. The fact that The Big Mountain has been unable to obtain the needed access across private land should not obligate the Forest Service to provide another access route.

If safety is not a valid reason for the project, that leaves improved skiing conditions on the ski run as the most likely reason for the project. This seems a weak reason to disturb another 700 feet of soil when Hellroaring Basin is supposed to be for advanced/expert skiers.

What are the cumulative effects of this proposed project in association with other known and projected projects on The Big Mountain and on other Forest Service lands in the area? Cumulative effects need to be analyzed and disclosed.

If the project is approved, it is very important that all applicable A19 motorized access standards be strictly followed. Also, erosion control, weed control, and revegetation plans need to be fully developed, incorporated in the decision, and monitored to insure full implementation.

Yours truly,

/s/Lewis Young

Lewis Young, Conservation Chair
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