

From: Keith Hammer keith@swanview.org
Subject: Re: Public scoping notice for Shuttle and Guiding at Round Meadows X-Country Ski Area
Date: December 17, 2019 at 4:42 PM
To: Mulholland, Bill -FS bill.mulholland@usda.gov
Cc: Kianna Gardner kgardner@dailyinterlake.com, Julie Gerrior julie.gerrior@usda.gov

Dear Ranger Mulholland and Ms. Gerrior;

Thank you for your responses to our questions, below.

We disagree, however, that you need not contact the press and the general public in order to adequately scope/announce this project for public comment.

We just went through this last Summer regarding two marathon trail run permits, a separate permit for summertime Whitefish Shuttle and guide services, and the Wellness Program permit.

The Flathead NF agreed it needed to publicly scope and provide for public comment on those projects/permits - all of which were also to be issued using the Categorical Exclusion (CE) at 36 CFR 220.6(d)(8). Please see your public scoping packet for those permits at https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/111632_FSPLT3_4655952.pdf.

The Flathead also agreed that those projects needed to be listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (even though some of them didn't get listed until after the public comment period closed). Please see your most current SOPA at <https://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/components/reports/sopa-110110-2019-10.pdf>, which lists all four of those projects/permits.

So why on earth are you now once again claiming that a project/permit to be issued under the CE at 36 CFR 220.6(d)(8) (the Whitefish Shuttle and Round Meadows ski/snowshoe permit) need not be announced to the press or the general public, nor listed in the SOPA? You've attempted to run us around that bush before!

This Round Meadows proposal and permit has the potential to affect the quality of the public's recreational experiences there and must be adequately described to the general public (not just a select few "interested parties") along with an adequate public comment period so that public comment can help shape the resulting permit and permit conditions.

We again ask that you issue an adequate scoping packet for the Round Meadows proposal and provide 30 days for the public to provide comments on it before you issue any such permit.

Your behavior in these matters undermines the very foundation of engaging the public in the management of their public lands.

Please respond, in writing, about how you reconcile the Flathead's scoping, public comment and SOPA listings from last Summer with your position that the Round Meadows project/permit need not comply with the same requirements.

Please also respond, in writing, regarding whether or not you intend to provide a broader public scoping process for Round Meadow and a 30 day public comment period.

You received the request for this Round Meadows permit on October 1, so there is no good reason to have not conducted an adequate public scoping and public comment process

Thank you,

Keith

Keith Hammer - Chair
 Swan View Coalition
 3165 Foothill Road
 Kalispell, MT 59901
 406-755-1379 (ph/fax)
 406-253-6536 (cell phone)
keith@swanview.org
<http://www.swanview.org>
<http://www.swanrange.org>
<http://www.facebook.com/SwanViewCoalition>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/swanviewcoalition>

"Nature and human nature on the same path."

On Dec 17, 2019, at 3:51 PM, Mulholland, Bill -FS <bill.mulholland@usda.gov> wrote:

Hi Keith please see below for my response.

The proposal was received on October 1, 2019. Due to work capacity, this is the soonest we could process this proposal.

This authorization would be for a maximum of 200 user days on an existing trail system. Anytime a permittee brings a client onto the national forest, either guided or client drop off, that is a considered a user day.

There are currently no restrictions on hours of use. The vehicle can accommodate 14 passengers and one driver or guide. Only one shuttle or guided trip would be allowed per day.

On average this could equate to approximately 3-4 visitors a day at Round Meadows. Currently parking at the trailhead is limited during peak use times. Providing a livery service, where multiple forest visitors are in one vehicle, will help alleviate this issue.

Separate from this temporary special use permit, Whitefish Shuttle will be signing a volunteer agreement to help take care of the trails at Round Meadow by providing for both winter and summer trail maintenance.

Authorizations for Categorical Exclusions which a Decision Memo are not required are not placed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions. The day after the comment period is the earliest the permit could begin. A proposal as minor as this would not be something that would require notification of the press. We reached out to your organization because you've expressed a keen interest in multiple forest activities.

Thank you

<image001.png> **Bill Mulholland**
District Ranger
Forest Service
Flathead National Forest
Tally Lake Ranger District

p: 406-758-3527
bill.mulholland@usda.gov
650 Wolfpack Way
Kalispell, MT 59901
www.fs.fed.us
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Caring for the land and serving people

From: Keith Hammer <keith@swanview.org>

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2019 3:46 PM

To: Gerrior, Julie -FS <julie.gerrior@usda.gov>; Mulholland, Bill -FS <bill.mulholland@usda.gov>

Subject: Fwd: Public scoping notice for Shuttle and Guiding at Round Meadows X-Country Ski Area

Dear Ranger Mulholland and Ms. Gerrior;

We just received your email invite, below, to comment by December 22 on a Special Use Permit you intend to issue so ski and snowshoe shuttle and guide services can begin at Round Meadows on December 23.

How is the public supposed to provide meaningful comments within seven days, especially when you provide no details in your public scoping notice - and especially during the busy holiday season?

Why should the public think you will seriously consider their comments when you intend the Permitted uses to begin the day after public comment is accepted?

The public is supposed to have the opportunity to fully engage in the planning and permitting of activities on public lands, not be offered a token public comment period on an apparently already "done deal" in the midst of the holiday season.

To what degree can the Round Meadow Cross Country Ski Area accommodate the Whitefish Shuttle and ski/snowshoe guiding traffic, without overcrowding or compromising the experience of non-guided skiers/snowshoers?

What kind of limits would be placed on the number of shuttles and number of clients Whitefish Shuttle can provide/engage at the Ski Area?

Will all guided clients be shuttled to the Ski Area, or is there the potential for the guiding to create parking

problems if clients meet their guides at the Ski Area instead?

Is this a groomed X-Country Ski Area and, if so, will Whitefish Shuttle be required to contribute toward the trail grooming?

When was this permit requested and why did you wait until the week prior to its start date to ask for public comment?

How does this Whitefish Shuttle ski/snowshoe Permit relate to its previous request for a Permit to shuttle and guide mountain bikers and hikers? We see nothing on the Flathead National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions about this ski/snowshoe shuttle/guide Permit? <https://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/components/reports/sopa-110110-2019-10.pdf>

We've seen nothing about this in the news. Did you announce this proposed Permit and the public comment period via the press?

Please back up a bit, provide the public sufficient details about what is being contemplated, and then invite the entire public to provide informed comments within 30 days.

You are giving the impression that recreational development on the Flathead National Forest is out of control and is proceeding at a pace faster than the speed of public comment.

Please provide written comments to our above questions ASAP.

Thanks,

Keith

Keith Hammer - Chair
Swan View Coalition
3165 Foothill Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-755-1379 (ph/fax)
406-253-6536 (cell phone)
keith@swanview.org
<http://www.swanview.org>
<http://www.swanrange.org>
<http://www.facebook.com/SwanViewCoalition>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/swanviewcoalition>

"Nature and human nature on the same path."

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Gerrior, Julie -FS" <julie.gerrior@usda.gov>
Subject: Public scoping notice
Date: December 16, 2019 at 2:20:11 PM MST

Please see attached scoping notice.
Thank you.

Julie Gerrior
Natural Resource Specialist - Recreation

Forest Service
Tally Lake Ranger District
Flathead National Forest

p: 406-758-3542
julie.gerrior@usda.gov

650 Wolfpack Way
Kalispell, MT 59901
www.fs.fed.us

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Caring for the land and serving people

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