

Keith Hammer <keith@swanview.org> 

May 6, 2014 9:45 AM

To: "Weber, Chip -FS" <cweber@fs.fed.us>

Cc: Joe Krueger <jkrueger@fs.fed.us>, "flatheadplanrevision@fs.fed.us"

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Late-Season Snowmobile Damage

4 Attachments, 644 KB

Chip;

Thanks for your reply about Skyland. Here are our thoughts and a few photos of the damage late-season snowmobiling is doing to forest roads, vegetation and wildlife security.

We appreciate that you chose to close the Skyland area at Hwy 2, where law enforcement of the closure can be most effective at protecting grizzly bears and cubs emerging from their dens.

The underlying premise of Amendment 24's late-season/post den emergence snowmobile areas, however, remains fatally flawed and we urge you to rescind these late-season provisions in your Revised Forest Plan.

Simply redirecting snowmobiling to the late-season Lost Johnny area until end of May, as your press release did, is akin to telling a child molester found in one playground to simply move on down the street to the next playground.

The Amendment 24 Biological Opinion makes it clear that, intentional or not, snowmobiles operating in areas where grizzly bears are emerging from their dens will result in harm and a "taking" of females with young due to their limited mobility and ability to simply abandon a den site they continue to use after emergence.

The absurdity here is to continue allowing snowmobiling anywhere after den emergence begins March 15 (which was not allowed prior to Amendment 24) knowing that it is harming bears, but essentially denying it until someone proves snowmobiles and dens are indeed in the same area through monitoring and photos like those presented at the NCDE IGBC meeting by Rick Mace and Mike Madel.

We ask you to return to the precautionary principle, truly "favor the bear" in its essential habitats, and ban snowmobiling across the Flathead beginning March 15.

Here is the photo I'd mentioned of unlawful snowmobile high-marking in the Camp Misery area that I took on April 19, 2014, which we also observed by eye and ear while climbing Infinity Ridge to the unnamed peak 6888 above Wildcat Lake. The Camp Misery area closed to snowmobiling end of March, but the Jewel Basin Road leading into it inexplicably remains open year-round to snowmobiling per Amendment 24:



And below are two photos taken several days later of what recent snowmobiling looks like on the Jewel Basin Road and on an old fire line being used to shortcut the milepost 3 switchback in the road:







We urge you to read our 2002 report "Snowmobiling's Endless Winter" to see photos of snowmobiles travelling off-snow and causing damage to road beds and off-road vegetation. You can download it at: <http://www.swanview.org/reports/endless-winter.pdf>

In addition to the above report, we in 2004 documented snowmobiles traveling for a full two miles on bare road to reach high-elevation snow pack in Doris Creek's Silver Basin on Memorial Day Weekend, continuing on to violate Jewel Basin Hiking Area. Below is just one photo of that 2004 snowmobiling up the abandoned Silver Run road:





When provided the above reports, your predecessor's response was to legalize such nonsense and damage with Amendment 24. You and your staff now have an excellent opportunity to set things right in your Revised Forest Plan.

Thanks again for your reply to our earlier email.

Keith

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"Nature and human nature on the same path."

On May 6, 2014, at 8:00 AM, "Weber, Chip -FS" <cweber@fs.fed.us> wrote:

Keith

I wanted to follow-up with you directly. You may have heard or seen some of the public releases that the Forest did, as a result of the verification of the grizzly bear emerging from a den with evidence of a cub or cubs in an area that was open to late spring snowmobiling.

In accordance with A24 the forest conferred with USFWS on the situation. Several options were discussed and considered acceptable. We chose to put an order in place that closed the Skyland/Challenge area at the Skyland road and Hwy 2.

The Forest is continuing to implement A24. We are also actively

working with the Lewis and Clark National Forest on the issue of use in a closed area. We will continue to have more dialog with USFWS and FWP biologists as appropriate. Chip

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