

Julie Cozzi

From: Scott Sundberg [sunny@skiseaba.com]
Sent: Tuesday, January 25, 2011 10:40 AM
To: Rob Goldberg
Cc: Carolyn Weishahn; Daymond Hoffman; Joanne Waterman; Joe Ordonez; Mayor Jan Hill; Sean Brownell; Sean Gaffney; Julie Cozzi; Mark Earnest
Subject: Re: Working Toward Consensus

Good Morning,

Consensus is going to be hard because all of the specific details really have not been worked through concerning the map. I feel that the core impacts, the flight access routes have been worked out, the GPS is very acceptable and will protect the industry when it comes to false accusations.

Unless miracles happen today I am not ready to give my o.k. on this and i know that there are others that would not give the o.k. either. I personally believe that even though the ordinance is shaping up to be effective and enforceable, the map and the skier days are always going to be contentious.

I have written comments in blue text for those to read through regarding some of the ideas Rob has presented. I would like to thank Rob again for spending time and effort on this project, it is not an easy task, nor an enjoyable one.

On Mon, Jan 24, 2011 at 1:44 PM, Rob Goldberg <artstudioalaska@yahoo.com> wrote:
Hello Everyone,

Working Toward Consensus

I think that the working group has lost some momentum over the past few weeks as people have been away. Many are back now, and it is time for us to focus on giving the assembly as close to a finished product as we can on Tuesday. In order to do that, we are all going to have to be flexible. I have been emphasizing that no one is going to get everything they want, but everyone is going to get something. I think we all need to focus on what we are getting, and not on what we didn't get. I will have more to say on this later.

I am contributing these recommendations in an effort to help the group reach consensus. Throughout this process I have largely checked my own opinions at the door in an effort to make sure that everyone has had their opinion heard, and that everyone gets at least part of what they wanted coming into this. My goal all along has been to try to facilitate a compromise that is as fair as possible. I hope these recommendations will be accepted in that spirit.

The Map

Takshanuk Ridge – I think this area, which had been proposed as an addition to the heli-ski area, should be removed because of concern from the residents of Klukwan for their subsistence hunting of goats in the area.

The Chilkat Indian Village council is having another meeting regarding the requests from heliski companies to use the Takshanuk Ridge in a very low impact way. We hope that this will happen this week. We have requested that they allow us to use the ridge as a break for weather and to allow staging areas for safety for the Ferebee. All together we are looking at using the ridge less than ten days in a 90 day season.

Little Boulder Creek – An area was added for heli-skiing that extends to within a half mile of the road. Residents have expressed their concern about noise, so I think this area should be withdrawn.

What residents, residents that live at 38 mile, not in the drainage of Little Boulder. Need more hard evidence for me to move on this one.

Summit Creek – At a previous meeting I recommended withdrawing this newly added area out of concern for the concentration of goats. After further discussion with biologist Kevin White, I think this area can be left in. One of the GPS collared nannies is in this area, and the data shows that she, and presumably her group, are wintering on a south facing slope outside of the heli-skiing boundary. Kevin did caution that the helicopters should avoid flying or landing near this group of goats.

I am going to speak with Ryan Scott again today regarding our plan to integrate SEABA GPS flight logs with these collared goats. We need to know right now where all of the collared nannies are located and what their habits have been.

Even Kevin suggests through Rob's words that this use on the north side of Summit Cr drainage is o.k. but to be aware that this group is on the south facing slopes.

In our industry this is a given, we always suspect goats, especially in vegetated, steep south facing terrain with thin snow packs. We don't ski there, and avoid hovering or flying near or over this terrain. If we could somehow reach an agreement on this topic, most of the map issues would go away.

Kicking Horse – An area we added extends down to the river. Recreational users have requested that this area be removed because landings in the valley would disturb cross country skiers. I have personally skied up this valley to the glacier many times, and I know others who do, so I recommend that we remove this area.

I am willing to work the lines out better in this area, but I will say one thing. This year alone, no skiers have gone up the drainage, but two wolverines and a wolf have been trapped out of this drainage by snow machine. Sounds like a great place to go Nordic skiing, predator traps, snow machines, and a helicopter, even if it isn't allowed to land near the valley floor, will still be flying overhead going to and from ski terrain all day long from the airport. The realities of some of these areas are that they are multiple use, and in my opinion areas should not be closed to heliskiing unless they are critical goat habitat, i.e. areas where nannies and kids winter; areas that were already non-motorized like Mt. Ripinski. Areas that are connected or have maintained drive up access, Chilkat river tidal estuary, Chilkoot Lake, Ripinski, 7 mile saddle, Mosquito lake campground, 24 mile flats, and the golf course, are generally were the public recreate in the winter. Only a small handful of people, like Tom and Eric, venture into the back country where there are no roads, or access. We have to keep in mind that there are plenty of areas that do not get impacted by heliskiing. The industry has stated before, that if these people are interested in doing a trip in an area, since that we are more than willing to accommodate them.

Boundary Glacier – This is an area west of Flower Mountain that we have not yet considered. I think it should be added to the heli-skiing area. According to Kevin there are few or no goats in this area, and it would be a logical extension of the existing heli-ski boundary.

This area although out of sight out of mind, is a better Nordic ski area, than a heliski area. Even in the past, before lines were drawn on a map, we have never used this areas because of its southern aspect and low angle.

Telemark Ridge – This area is used by SEABA as the starting point for most of their heli-skiing trips, but it is also desired by those who like to climb up and ski. Recreational use pre-dates heli-skiing on this ridge. Can we come to some shared use agreement for this small area? Two possibilities are to time-share, such as weekdays for heli-skiers and weekends for recreational skiers, or a courtesy system, where recreational skiers could call and ask heli-skiers not to go there for a few days. This will require a willingness to share the area, and trust between both sides.

As I mentioned before, we are more than willing to do a courtesy system. There seems to be plenty of agreement on this. Closures on the weekends would necessitate use of the area by other recreational users. In the system utilized by the Chugach National forest, at least 25+ people on average per weekend use the closure areas on the weekends. This is well documented use, and in all cases, these areas are connected by a maintained road that the public can utilize as an access point.

Access Routes

At the last meeting the question was asked, “How wide will the access routes be?”

The reason for designated access routes is to keep helicopters as far from residents and recreational users as possible. Our map clearly shows private land in white. Since the private land is clustered in a few areas, it should be possible to direct the helicopters away from them.

I don't think the access routes have to be a strict line on the map, but rather a verbal description of which valleys to fly in, and which places to avoid.

Suggested Access Routes

From 33 Mile - Use Porcupine Creek, McKinley Creek or Little Salmon to access Porcupine Peak and Flower Mountain areas. Avoid Jarvis Creek, lower Glacier Creek and Klehini River to keep noise away from residences. Use a direct route to Mt. Jonathan Ward area to avoid residences. Use a route directly behind 33 Mile to access Four Winds area.

From 18 Mile - Take off and approach should be down river to avoid residences. Routes to skiing areas should go directly across the Chilkat River and into the mountains. Avoid flying parallel to the Chilkat or Klehini Rivers. When flying to and from the Ferebee Glacier area, avoid Chilkoot Lake and Lutak residents.

From Haines Airport – Fly directly up the Takhin Valley to access areas south of the Takhin and Tsirku Rivers. Fly directly across the Chilkat River and up the slope between Haska Creek and the Kicking Horse River to access areas south of Mt. Emmerich. Avoid Haska Creek and Kicking Horse River. Avoid traversing slopes facing Chilkat Inlet to avoid residences.

Haska Creek Drainage has only two formal complaints on file for the use that occurs in this drainage. These complaints stem from residents that are located 3 miles from Haska lake, which is nestled in the sub alpine at 2800 feet. I propose that there be a time of operation put on the Haska Creek drainage as a ski area and flight corridor. If safety is the main concern of operators for staging their people in this area, when the weather is questionable, then operators will most likely not be in the drainage before 8:30 am and certainly not after 6:00pm. In good weather scenarios operators will use this area to get people up into the mountains and then further back. If weather is questionable, and we have to stay close to the front range, then we could observe these hours. These are essentially working hours for the public and then, in the evenings in April, people might be able to enjoy sitting on the deck, while late returning filmers will not be using this drainage as a pick up for groups, or an access route for other areas in the range.

Helicopters transiting between heliports should fly on the opposite side of the valleys from residences.

Helicopters may use areas outside the recommended access routes if forced to do so by bad weather conditions or mechanical difficulties.

Low Impact, No Limit Heli-Skiing Zones

One of the main goals of this heli-skiing plan revision was to find areas of low impact that could have unlimited heli-skiing. Most of the noise impacts occur at the heliports. 33 Mile and 18 Mile have greater impacts because of residences nearby. The Haines airport is acknowledged to have fewer impacts. The

Skagway airport has little or no impact on Haines residents.

To be considered for the designation “Low Impact – No Limit” an area has to be accessed from a low impact heliport. The two “Low Impact – No Limit areas we have identified are the area south of the Takhin and upper Tsirku Rivers and west of the Bertha Glacier when accessed from the Haines airport, and the Ferebee Glacier area when accessed from the Skagway airport.

I like this idea as an outlet for the management of skier days, but most of the low impact area is in the BLM properties, so in effect the BLM is going to limit some areas that the borough is trying to manage. Other areas that are further west of Takhin Peak, are not economically feasible to access from the airport, without using some medium impact areas on the way to and from these zones.

We also can't assume that all permitted operators are going to be able to operate out of the Skagway airport. AMG is already accessing the BLM properties in the Skagway borough, they have infrastructure there, but other companies do not. This seems like a bonus for an operator with Skagway roots.

Skier Days

Keeping the skier day limit at 1200 will keep the impacts from heli-skiing close to current levels. However, the addition of the No Limit zones should allow the heli-ski companies to expand their skier days considerably, and eliminate the need for them to petition the borough for more during the season.

Permits

Currently we have two permits for heli-skiing and one for filming. I think the permit for filming should be separated from the other two and kept as a special case. There have been varying opinions as to whether the borough should issue a third permit for heli-skiing. I think that at the very least, Alaska Mountain Guides (AMG) could be issued a permit to access the Ferebee Glacier area from Skagway, where they are already operating. The next step up would be to allow AMG to operate out of the airport only and fly to the area south of the Takhin River and west of Bertha Glacier.

Who Gets What?

Again, if we are going to make this work, I think we all need to focus on what we are getting, rather than on what we are not getting.

Heli-Ski Companies Get

More Terrain – Heli-skiers will have approximately 135 square miles of NEW area for skiing. This is in addition to the approximately 150 square miles that are already permitted.

Logical Boundaries – The new boundaries do not cut off ski runs in the middle. Skiers will be able to complete runs and be picked up at the bottom.

Indeed the Ferebee is new terrain, but all of the areas on the map added or extended are not new, we used these areas even with the old map because of safety and operational concerns specifically designed around the area of use. The Ferebee without a staging area on Takshanuk, is useless to operators that are based in Haines as a no limit area. This definitely benefits Skagway based operators.

One concept that we have not really discussed is even though we have this much area, 285 sq.miles, only perhaps 50% of this area inside the boundaries actually is utilized by skiers. The lines are drawn in large bubbles.

I would suggest looking to the industry, as the BLM has requested, to draw up the specific areas of use that each company wants to utilize as ski areas. This includes pick ups, and drop off points, and a polygon showing the more detailed run. This could be submitted to the borough assembly as part of the operating plan. Number of Landings/skier days could be considered in the medium impact areas, and the use limits in the no limit zones would be negligible. The idea is that each operator may have different use for a specific area or that they simply are not going to use it at all. These areas would assimilate into areas that are on the new map, but areas in the new map that are included would be excluded, as they are not very operable or advantageous to the operator. The key here is that it is not the gross area, specifically, that is important to the industry to be successful, but the areas that we are allowed to utilize that have the most promise for skiing/snowboarding. Look at it like mineral concentrations in a mining plan, they specifically target the areas with the minerals, even though the whole area could be available to mine. The rock that surrounds the mineral is negligible, it is the product or access to that product(mineral) that is important.

More Skier Days – The No Limit areas allow heli-ski companies to book as many clients as they need.

Residents Get

Reporting - GPS verification of skiing within boundaries and bi-weekly accounting of skier days.
Flight routes that keep helicopters as far as possible from residences.

Recreational Users Get

Places to go that are free from heli-skiing. These include the Takshanuk Range, the Chilkoot Valley and the Ferebee River. Additionally, there are places where, although there is heli-skiing nearby, helicopters have been directed to avoid. These include Jarvis Creek, the Klehini River flats, the Kelsall, Chilkat Lake, Kicking Horse River, Haska Creek and Rainbow Glacier.

Subsistence Users Get

Goat hunting areas on the Takshanuk and Takhin Ridges that are free from heli-skiing.

Overall populations are up, and it has been determined that heliskiers and goats are not looking for the same terrain, and there is no proven correlation that heliskiing has been a direct factor in the reduction of populations anywhere on the North American continent.

Wildlife Gets

Language in the ordinance that keeps helicopters away from goats and other wildlife. Heli-ski areas that have been drawn to avoid winter goat habitat.

Continuing GPS data that will guide modification of the heli-ski area map.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. I'll see you Tuesday.

-Rob

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Scott Sundberg
General Manager/Owner
Southeast Alaska Backcountry Adventures LLC
907 314 0445
P.o. box 1426
Haines, Ak 99827

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