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**Sent:** Sunday, December 19, 2010 1:01 AM

**To:** 'Carolyn Weishahn'; 'Daymond Hoffman'; 'Joanne Waterman'; 'Joe Ordonez'; 'Mayor Jan Hill'; 'Scott Sundberg'; 'Sean Brownell'; 'Sean Gaffney'; Julie Cozzi

**Cc:** 'Jan Hill'; 'Mark Earnest'

**Subject:** Ideas on Skier Days and the Map

To Mayor Hill and the Members of the Heli-Ski Committee,

It turns out that I won't be able to attend the meeting on Monday the 27th. We had to rearrange our work trip to Juneau because of the cancellation of the Fairweather, and I won't be back until late in the day on Tuesday the 29th.

I would like to present some ideas here that the committee can think about and discuss.

\*The Map – I would like the committee to address the concerns that Cary Weishahn had with some of the additions to the heli-ski zones. I will leave the map with Daymond before I go.

\*Additions to the Map - Sean B. and Scott have expressed interest in adding the Takhin Ridge and the BLM Goat Monitoring and Control Area to the heli-skiing areas. Here are my thoughts on this.

The existing areas where heli-skiing is allowed (the red areas on the map) total, by my estimation, about 153 square miles. The new areas that we have added (in purple on the map) total about 139 square miles. The Ferebee addition alone adds about 60 square miles. The current areas plus the additions total around 292 square miles.

I'd like to put this in perspective. For eight winters I lived at a medium sized ski area in California. Bear Valley has 9 chairlifts, a vertical drop of 2100 feet, and occupies about three square miles of forest service terrain. On any given Saturday in winter, 5000 skiers can be accommodated in those three square miles.

The question that comes to mind is, "If 5000 skiers a day can be happy in three square miles, why can't 1200 skiers, spread over a three month season, be happy in 292 square miles?"

Granted, ski area skiing and heli-skiing are two different experiences. Heli-skiing is marketed as a premium experience, and clients are charged accordingly. You can buy a season pass at Bear Valley for \$459 and ski every day from Thanksgiving to Easter. One day of heli-skiing in Haines costs \$750, or about \$80 per run.

We have been asked to go to Klukwan to ask the Village Council to reverse their vote against heli-skiing on the Takhin Ridge. Likewise, we talked about inquiring to the BLM about removing the Goat Monitoring and Control Area. Why? Isn't 292 square miles enough space for 1200 skiers spread over 90 days?

Reasons that came up at the map committee meetings for wanting more area were that operators were tired of skiing the same old runs, and that clients, having paid for a premium skiing

experience, do not want to ski across anyone else's tracks.

In my opinion, these reasons are petty. Creating noise impacts to residents of Klukwan and Chilkat Lake, and potential disturbance to wildlife is not warranted. I believe the committee should abandon the idea of going to Klukwan to ask about the Takhin Ridge, and support the continuation of the BLM control area for goats. There have to be areas left alone for other uses. There must be enough ski runs available in 292 square miles to satisfy 1200 skiers. We have almost doubled the area in which heli-skiing is allowed. This should be enough.

\*Skier Days - I think there are several ways to approach this. It's helpful to consider why the limit on skier days is there at all. Since helicopter noise is presumed to have an impact to residents near the heliports and along the flight routes, limiting skier days limits the number of flights and the impacts to residents.

Also, a limit on skier days protects the heli-ski companies. If there were no limit, it is presumed that any number of other heli-ski companies would want to come here and grab a piece of the market. For example, I think it was mentioned that there are 5 companies operating out of Valdez. Of course, the other way to protect the local businesses would be to limit the number of permits issued, as is done in fishing, guiding and liquor licenses.

Setting Limits Based on Impacts – Skier days could be apportioned by the impacts, or lack of impacts, they create. For example, there are more residents near 33 Mile than there are near 18 Mile, and fewer still near the airport. Also, the flight route and destination have a lot to do with who hears the helicopter and who doesn't. Some examples of this are from 33 Mile, a flight going over the ridge to the north will probably be heard by fewer people than a flight that goes across the Klehini Valley to the south. From 18 Mile, flights that go to the Takshanuk Ridge and the Ferebee may not be heard at all once the helicopter goes down river from the landing strip. From the airport, a flight up the Takhin would have much less impact than one that crosses in front of residences on its way to the Rainbow Glacier area.

Skier days could be allotted to each company according to areas. An area that has higher impacts might get fewer skier days, while areas with little or no impact could have a very high allotment. The advantages to this method are that the companies would never have to turn away business late in the season for lack of skier days, and impacts to residents would be limited. The disadvantage is that the companies would be less able to skip around and sample different areas in the same day, as each client landing in an area would count toward that area's allotment. The GPS data would allow the skier days to be tallied easily for each area.

A starting point would be to find out approximately how many skier days are used by each company in each of the current areas (Area 1 – South of the Klehini River; Area 2 – North of the Klehini River; Area 3 – South of the Takhin River; Area 4 – Mt. Emmerich and South). If current levels are acceptable to residents, keep them. Add skier days in areas with presumed low impacts, such as the Takshanuk (Area 5) and Ferebee (Area 6), and increase existing skier days in areas of low impact, such as south of the Takhin River (Area 3) if accessed from the airport. If the companies use up their skier days in the high impact areas, there will be skier days available in the low or no impact areas.

\*Adding a Third Permit - I think a permit for daily heli-skiing can be given to Alaska Mountain Guides with minimal added impacts. At the very least, they can be permitted for the Ferebee (Area 6) with access from Skagway. I also think that allowing them access to the area south of the Takhin (Area 3) with access from the airport would have minimal impacts.

\*Trial Period – Whatever we, and ultimately the Assembly, decide does not have to be cast in stone. I think a trial period of a year would be reasonable to see if it is working for all concerned. Then adjustments can be made. As the plan forms into something that is acceptable to all, then the permits can be extended and we can all get back to the pursuit of happiness, whatever that is.

Thank you for considering this proposal, and for all your hard work.

Happy Holidays!

-Rob

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