

For

Samuel Alexander and Jordan Melcon

Latitude Six-Six LLC.

P.O. Box 42

Ft. Yukon, Alaska

FF096914

BLM-AK-F020-2015-0003-EA

Located In:

Eastern Interior Field Office

White Mountains National Recreation Area

Prepared By:

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Eastern Interior Field Office

1150 University Ave.

Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3844

I. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Bureau Land Management (BLM) Purpose and Need

The purpose for action is to determine whether or not to issue a 2930 Special Recreation Permit (SRP) to Latitude Six-Six. Latitude Six-Six has applied for a permit to guide skiers in the White Mountains National Recreation Area utilizing the public use cabins and winter trail network. The application is for the 2014-2015 winter season. The need for action is established under the authority of Section 302 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and the regulations found in 43 CFR 2930. FLPMA directs the BLM to regulate the use, occupancy and development of public lands. The purpose of the regulations found in 43 CFR 2930 is to determine when a permit is required to use public lands for recreational purposes and to establish procedures for the orderly and timely processing of permit applications.

Figure1. White Mountains National Recreation Area Map



Applicant's Purpose and Need

Mr. Samuel Alexander and Jordan Melcon with Latitude Six-Six have applied for a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) to conduct guided ski trips in the White Mountains National Recreation Area (WMNRA). The proposed times are primarily during the spring months (March and April) although the applicant's plan of operation refers to the 2014-2015 winter season. Mr. Alexander and Mr. Melcon are required to obtain a SRP in order to conduct commercial guiding activities on BLM managed lands.

BLM Decision to be Made

The BLM will decide whether or not to issue a 2930 SRP for the applicant's commercial operation. If a SRP is issued, the BLM will determine the terms, conditions and stipulations prior to issuance.

II. Potential Issues

Internal Scoping: The Valued Environmental Components (VEC) Matrix was routed to specialist to identify issues for analysis. The VEC Matrix is attached with comments. Concerns were addressed with stipulations and standard operating procedures for the action.

External Scoping: The EA was posted on the NEPA Register. No comments were received.

III. Location, Land Status and Conformance with Land Use Plans:

Location: The proposed action is in the White Mountains National Recreation Area. The applicant proposes using the White Mountains National Recreation Area public use cabins and winter trails network.

Land Status: The White Mountains National Recreation Area is managed by the BLM.

Conformance with Land Use Plans: The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of December 2, 1980 (ANILCA, PL 96-487) classified and designated the WMNRA.

The WMNRA encompasses nearly one million acres north of Fairbanks, located between the Steese and Elliott Highways. The proposed action conforms with and is tiered to the existing land use plan (LUP) and environmental documentation below.

- Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision for the WMNRA, February 1986.
 - Goal 3: Provide for multiple-use where compatible with primitive and semi-primitive recreation.
 - Objective 2: Where compatible with recreation goals, permit multiple-use of resources on land classified as semi-primitive.
 - **Management Direction:** Special Recreation Use Permits are required for commercial uses such as commercial outfitting and guiding and commercial river trips, etc.

- Recreation Activity Management Plan for White Mountains National Recreation Area, February 1988.
 - Commercial use: Commercial guides and outfitters may use the cabins only when the client has reserved the cabin and the guide or outfitter has the necessary commercial recreation permit.

IV. Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives:

Proposed Action Alternative:

Mr. Alexander and Mr. Melcon of Latitude Six-Six are interested in conducting guided cross country ski tours utilizing the White Mountains National Recreation Area's winter trails and cabins network. A plan of operation has been provided and estimates no more than six guided trips per winter season. Client size would range from four to ten people per trip. The applicants proposed dates are the 2014-2015 winter season. The applicant states that guided trips would not exceed seven days. Applicant proposes using the public use cabins in conjunction with pre-staged tent camp sites to overnight clients.

Applicant's plan of operation indicates no more than three "arctic oven" style tents per camp site. All human waste will either be back hauled out or burned.

As a component of the guided operation the applicant is teaching clients low impact winter camping techniques.

Applicant will notify BLM prior to any guided trip taking place. The detailed information provided by the applicant would be a description including the following: How many clients, trip details (where the trip starts, ends, the route), specific cabins rented by the clients, and where tent camps are planned on being staged.

Reserving public use cabins will be done by the commercial guide in accordance with the current cabin rental rules policy (Attachment 6). A copy of the cabin rental rules policy accompanies each cabin rental receipt.

No Action Alternative:

The no action alternative would result in the applicant not being issued a permit to conduct guided cross country ski trips in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

V. Affected Environment

The affected environment would be the BLM managed WMNRA, Beaver Creek Wild and Scenic River and the facilities associated with the WMNRA public use cabins and winter trails network.

Recreation

The WMNRA winter cabins and trails network has become a popular program for winter recreation. The data collected from cabin rental reservations (Recreation Management

Information System) and the cabin use analysis collected for the White Mountains-100 EA (DOI-BLM-AK-02000-2010-0005-EA) indicate that reserving a public use cabin can be difficult to obtain during the warmer months of winter and spring break. An issue arose during internal scoping, that a permitted commercial guide using the public use cabins would displace the general public from obtaining reservations and using the public use cabins. To address this concern, commercial guides will not get exclusive use for public cabins and must follow the same cabin rental protocols as the general public. The concept is that everyone, the commercial guides and the general public, will have the same fair chance to reserve a cabin. A copy of the "White Mountains National Recreation Area Cabin Permit Rules, Supplemental Information and Cancellation Policy" (Attachment 6) will be attached to the Special Recreation Permit and is referenced in the Stipulations (Attachment 4). Under the Stipulations it states that "Public use cabins will be rented by the commercial guide in accordance with the attached cabin rental guidelines."

The Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP, 1988) indicates a procedure for guides and clients renting the White Mountains public use cabins. Under section IV.B1d., page 13 of the RAMP it states that "Commercial guides and outfitters may use the cabins only when the client has reserved the cabin and the guide or outfitter has the necessary commercial recreation permit." The concept of the client reserving the cabin may have been founded on a rationale that was valid almost 30 years ago when it was written, but it is unclear what that rationale was. To give staff a greater level of scrutiny and prevent a double booking scenario by the guide and the clients, the BLM will not require clients to rent cabins as part of this permit. Instead all public use cabin rentals, associated with this Special Recreation Use Permit, will be done in the name of Latitude Six-Six LLC.

Visual Resources

The Beaver Creek River Corridor is a VRM Class I with the objective to preserve the existing character of the landscape. This class provides for natural ecological changes; however, it does not preclude very limited management activities. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and would not attract attention. Any camps need to be screened from travel routes and points of interest or colors to blend with the surrounding vegetation. VRM Class II areas are the Beaver Creek viewshed, and the Summit and Wickersham Creek Trails where activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any camps need to be screened from travel routes and points of interest or blend with the surrounding vegetation. All other areas are Class III where activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Tent camp sites are proposed to be of the same hue of the surrounding vegetation or adequately screened so as to not dominate the view from travel routes or points of interest.

The applicant will adhere to the following stipulations which address visual resource impacts:

1. Tent camp sites are to be located at least 1 mile from public use cabins and shelters.
2. Tent camp sites must be at least 50 feet off the established public use trails.

3. Tent camp sites must be located so they are not readily viewed from the public use trails.
4. Manmade site alterations at tent camp sites will be kept at a minimum. Removal of live trees and branches will not be approved. Minimal alder and willow brushing is approved.

Travel Management

The trail system that connects the public use cabins in the WMNRA is a multiple use trail system. Snow machines, skiing, dog mushing and also bicycles are popular forms of transportation along the winter trail network. The applicant's plan of operation indicates travel by cross country skiing with a snow machine providing support and assistance. The applicant's travel methods are compatible and appropriate for the winter trail system, and compatible with current uses, therefore no issues are expected.

Impacts:

- a. Direct. The camping component of the action raised concerns regarding environmental impacts. The attached stipulation sheet, the standard operating procedures and a post site inspection will insure compliance and mitigates the concerns raised regarding camping. Those concerns were: 1) Impacting cabin and trail users with tent camp sites. Mitigation-Tent camp sites will be no less than one mile from public use cabins and shelters, and 50 feet off the established winter trail. 2) Human and solid waste. Mitigation-all wastes including human will be back hauled to a preapproved waste facility. 3) Tents and the natural view shed. Mitigation-Not only will the camps be at least 50 feet off the trail they will be located so they are shield by trees and/or terrain.
- b. Indirect. The commercial use of the public use cabins and the displacement of the public by commercial guides and clients have been identified as a concern. To mitigate this concern commercial guides will not get special privileges reserving cabins and will be required to rent cabins under the same protocols as the general public users. A copy of the public use cabin rental rules will be attached to the permit.
- c. Cumulative. A concern was raised that too many commercial guides monopolizing the public use cabins and winter trails system could begin to displace the general public. Therefore, in the event that additional commercial guides apply for permits, that would include the use of the public use cabins and the winter trails network, the cumulative effects of multiple commercial operators using the winter cabins and trails network would be analyzed. For the purpose of this EA only the activity of the commercial guide's proposal to guide skiers and use the public use trails, public use cabins, and possibly establish long term tent sites was analyzed. The cumulative analysis for multiple commercial guides is not needed at this time because there is only one application for the use previously described.

Mitigating Measures for Proposed Alternative

The applicant will follow “Minimum impact” camping techniques. Stipulations and Standard Operating Procedures developed for the Eastern Interior Field Office’s Special Recreation Permit program will be attached to the permit.

Residual Impacts

There would be no residual impacts.

VI. Consultation and Coordination:

Persons/Agencies Consulted

Person	Title	Responsibility	Agency
Mr. Alexander and Mr. Melcon	Applicant		Applicant
Tim DuPont	Preparer	Environmental Justice, Farm Lands, Socioeconomics, Wilderness Character, and Travel Management	BLM
Jim Herriges	Wildlife Biologist	ACECs, Vegetation, Invasive, Nonnative Species, Threatened/Endangered Species, Subsistence, Wildlife/Terrestrial	BLM
Rebecca Hile	Physical Scientist	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	BLM
Ben Kennedy	Hydrologist	Air Quality, Floodplains, Water Quality, Wetlands/Riparian, Soils	BLM
Holli McClain	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources	BLM
Robin Mills	Archeologist	Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns	BLM

Person	Title	Responsibility	Agency
Jason Post	Fisheries Biologist	Essential Fish Habitat, Wildlife/Aquatic	BLM
Collin Cogley	Fire Management Specialist	Fire Management	BLM
Eric Yeager	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wild and Scenic Rivers, Recreation	BLM

VII.

Attachment 1- Assessment of Archeological, Historical, and Paleontological Resources

Attachment 2- ANILCA Section 810 Evaluation and Findings

Attachment 3 –General Terms

Attachment 4 –Stipulations

Attachment 5 –Valued Environmental Components (VEC) Matrix

Attachment 6 –WMNRA Cabin Rental Policy

_____ Preparer's Signature: 2/10/2015 Date
/s/Tim DuPont,
Outdoor Recreation Planner