

SILVERTON GUIDES LLC

P.O. Box 856, 1069 Greene St, Silverton, CO 81433 970-387-5706 info@silvertonmountain.com

Matt Dayer
BLM Tres Rios Field Office
Po Box 709
Silverton, CO 81433

1/20/15

Dear Matt,

After a successful term operating in the SRP we are pleased to be moving into an additional SRP term.

Silverton Guides has a stellar operating history and excellent track record in the SRP area with no accidents or significant injuries in the course of SRP operations. Silverton Guides has been offering a diverse range of services at different price points, allowing all types of backcountry enthusiasts to enjoy the BLM public lands through Silverton Guides.

Silverton Guides offers human powered ski and snowboard touring, helicopter assisted backcountry ski and snowboard touring (using human power once within the SRP), outdoor education, and helicopter skiing/snowboarding within the SRP. Helicopter skiing offerings are available in lower cost single run increments allowing the average skier/snowboarder to be able to participate. Silverton Guides is the only operator in the lower 48 States offering such a diverse array of options, making the SRP an important public use of BLM lands.

An operational issue that has been present since the first SRP operating season, is the lack of sufficient terrain to utilize during periods of higher avalanche hazard. Considerable hazard can persist during the majority of a ski season, and having more diverse terrain is important. There is very little terrain within the SRP that is located near and below treeline, where the hazard is generally lower throughout the season. The alpine terrain receives much more wind than the sub alpine terrain. More wind equals more challenging snow safety conditions as snow is loaded and distributed onto slopes in the form of slabs. The wind also creates a more challenging snow surface for skiing conditions for the clients, increasing the risk of possible injury.

Normal procedure is to utilize below treeline terrain or sheltered alpine terrain when the hazard is higher, or snow quality is compromised above treeline. With few areas of near

and below treeline terrain, and limited sheltered alpine terrain, our options are reduced. Additionally during periods of weather, there are many days where the helicopter does not have suitable visibility, wind conditions, or avalanche hazard conditions that allow us to operate in the alpine terrain. While at the same time on the same day the conditions are fine for operating and skiing below treeline, where the winds, visibility, and avalanche hazard are considerably better.

The SRP holds few areas of terrain that allow for skiing during those periods of time, and unfortunately the helicopter needs to fly above treeline to climb over the ridgelines to reach those areas making them inaccessible due to the current mapping of the SRP. Therefore those instances end up being down days, where the clients do not get to ski which has a negative effect on client satisfaction, and requires refunding the guests.

Having Pods with below treeline, and sheltered alpine terrain options would increase operational safety by providing much needed skiing in lower avalanche hazard terrain, while also increasing the quality of the public experience. These are goals identified in the EA. Silverton Guides is asking to exchange some of the existing SRP higher hazard terrain Pods, for some Pods with lower hazards. The existing Pods identified for exchanging are Houghton, Cinnamon, Grouse, Poughkeepsie, and Ross. The Pods identified with more suitable operational terrain that we are requesting (as studied, mapped and analyzed in the EA) are Southeast, Minnie/Maggie, Round, Illinois/Hancock, and Picayune. In the Southeast Pod we are suggesting a 1,000' buffer between any landings and wilderness areas. This will accommodate a large buffer from the wilderness, yet still allow skiers to access some of the most suitable lower hazard and wind sheltered terrain in Spencer Basin and Cunningham Gulch.

Having a helicopter onsite for the winter has been very important to the Silverton community, and there has never been a single Silverton Guides helicopter complaint filed. Keeping the helicopter located in Silverton for the winter is critical. It needs enough flight days however for it to stay in Silverton during the winter months. The Silverton Guides helicopter allowed Silverton Guides to become the most crucial player of the recent CDOT rockslide project. Highway 550 would not have been reopened nearly as fast this past winter without the helicopter dedicated to the project.

The Silverton Guides helicopter has also helped the San Juan County Sheriff department several times with essential time sensitive rescue missions. The Sheriff's department also used the Silverton Guides helicopter along with our specialized trained guide staff to quickly locate and extricate the backcountry avalanche survivor who had sustained substantial injuries above Gladstone in 2013. Silverton Guides transported our guide staff and rescue toboggans quickly to the avalanche accident site via helicopter (outside of the SRP boundaries) to help respond to the backcountry avalanche fatality near Gladstone in 2013. Additionally, having access to the helicopter for avalanche control at Silverton Mountain is more important than ever after the most recent CDOT avalauncher explosive accident put avalauncher use on hold industry wide.

We look forward to working with you for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron Brill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Aaron Brill
Manager

Cc: Andrew L. Spielman, Hogan & Hartson