

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Decision Record
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-Y020-2014-024**

May, 2015

**Indian Creek Commercial Climbing
Special Recreation Permits
For Four Walls**

Location: Indian Creek, Monticello Field Office

Applicant/Address: BLM Monticello Field Office

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Introduction

The BLM Monticello Field Office (MtFO) proposes to authorize the issuance of Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for commercial guided climbing in the Indian Creek Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). There are currently 13 guided climbing operators in Indian Creek, in addition to 3 expired permits and 7 new applicants. In order to evaluate the entire SRP program for commercial climbing guides MtFO completed a programmatic analysis of existing and projected use documented in EA-DOI-BLM-UT-Y020-2014-024 (EA).

Decision

It is my decision to approve the issuance of Special Recreation permits for guided climbing as proposed under Alternative B. The permitted area of operation consists of approved routes on the following four walls: Battle of the Bulge, Donnelly Canyon, Supercrack, and Blue Gramma. Guides will use existing infrastructure located at the Donnelly Canyon parking area for staging and will access climbing walls using only existing trails. Camping is limited to designated sites in Indian Creek. SRPs may be issued for up to five years subject to annual validation. All existing and expired operations would be approved at maximum historic user day levels, but new and future applicants would be allocated a maximum of 50 user days per year. This will result in 1,126 projected use days, as described below:

Current and Expired SRPs: 16 operators x 36 user days/operator = 576 historic use days

New Applicants: 7 operators x 50 days/operator = 350 new applicant use days

Future Applicants: 4 operators x 50 days/operator = 200 future applicant use days

The following expired and new operators will be eligible for permit issuance upon submission and acceptance of satisfactory SRP Application Form 2930-1 and supporting documentation:

- KAF Adventures
- Moab Desert Adventures
- Red River Adventures
- Outward Bound
- Colorado Mountain College
- Moab Base Adventures
- Mountain Madness
- Apex Ex Colorado
- Peak Mountain Guides
- Mountain Bureau LLC

Authorities

The authority for this decision is contained in 43 CFR 2932, Special Recreation Permits for Commercial Use, Competitive Events, Organized Groups, and Recreation Use in Special Areas and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. FLPMA mandates multiple use of public lands, including recreation use. One type of valid recreation use is responsibly guided climbing.

The BLM SRP regulations at 43 CFR 2930 provide for SRPs to be issued on public lands. The purpose of the EA was to analyze permitted commercially guided climbing in the Monticello Field Office.

The issuance of Special Recreation Permits for commercial guiding is recognized as an appropriate use of public lands in the Record of Decision and Approved Monticello Field Office Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision.

Compliance and Monitoring: BLM conducts regular monitoring of commercial SRPs and is aware of resource conditions and potential for user conflicts. The proposed use would be minimal when compared to other casual climbing in Indian Creek, however, BLM would continue to monitor for potential user conflicts by requiring itineraries in advance of planned commercial climbing. Permittees must allow the BLM to accompany tours for monitoring purposes.

Terms / Conditions / Stipulations: The following conditions that apply to this decision stem from the Proposed Action as documented in the Interdisciplinary Team Checklist and the environmental assessment. The terms and stipulation that will apply to these permits can be found in Section 2.2 of the environmental assessment.

Plan conformance and consistency

The proposed action has been determined to be in conformance with the terms and conditions of the Monticello Resource Management Plan (October, 2008) as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

- REC-17, page 91, states: *Special Recreation Permits will be issued as a discretionary action as a means to help meet management objectives, contact visitor use, protect recreational and natural resources and provide for the health and safety of visitors.* The proposal meets the objective to provide for the issuance of commercial permits.
- REC-18, page 91, states: *All SRPs will contain standard stipulations appropriate for the type of activity and may include additional stipulations necessary to protect lands or resources, reduce user conflicts, or minimize health and safety concerns.* Stipulations specific to the four walls analyzed in the EA have been added to the standard National, Utah, and Monticello BLM SRP stipulations in order to protect cultural and wildlife values.
- Indian Creek SRMA Goals and Objectives, page 107, states: *Provide for premier rock climbing experiences, outstanding OHV opportunities, scenic vistas, cultural site interpretation at Newspaper Rock, destination camping areas, and a gateway to Canyonlands National Park.* As proposed, issuance of guiding SRPs meet the objective of providing for premier rock climbing experiences by allowing inexperienced climbers or those without proper equipment the opportunity to climb with a guide.

The action is consistent with the Master Plan for San Juan County. San Juan County's Master Plan (July, 2013) identifies recreation and tourism as an economic opportunity. The plan calls for working to promote recreation and tourism within the county.

- Page 29 states: *The county views recreation and tourism as an additional economic opportunity...this opportunity may only be in its infant stage. The county will continue...promoting the county's tourist industry.* The proposal as written allows existing operators to continue providing recreational tourism opportunities for the public. The proposal also allows for a growth in recreational tourism by accommodating new and future applicants.

This action is consistent with the Indian Creek Corridor Plan of 2005. This plan attempts to balance Indian Creek's increasing popularity as a recreation destination with the need to protect the abundant cultural and natural resources in the area.

- Page 1 of the Plan states: *Climbing will continue to remain open to the public. New routes and bolting will be allowed. Alteration of rock surfaces and removal of vegetation will be prohibited. The BLM will post signs at known cultural sites, where necessary, to alert climbers about restrictions.* The proposal increases access for the public by providing guided opportunities while protecting known cultural sites through permitting.

Alternatives Considered

Two action alternatives that considered existing and projected use were analyzed in the EA. Alternative A placed no caps on new applicants, and would have resulted in a maximum of 27 active SRPs at any given time and up to 3,073 use days per year. Alternative B placed a cap of 50 user days per year for new applicants and resulted in a maximum of 27 active SRPs at any given time and up to 1,126 use days per year. A No Action Alternative to deny Special Recreation Permits for commercial guided climbing was also considered.

Alternative A was not selected because although it conforms to the RMP, the high number of user days could potentially inconvenience other recreational climbers if the entire allocation for each operator was used. Specific concerns related to Alternative A included congestion at Donnelly parking area and overcrowding at popular routes on the four walls. The No Action alternative was not selected because it would not meet the needs of the applicants and no issues were identified that could not be mitigated with stipulations and conditions of approval.

Alternative B meets the needs of both historic and new operators while protecting other visitors' desire for a natural, uncrowded experience at Indian Creek.

Protest/Appeal Language:

This decision to issue these SRPs shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the authorized officer and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay. Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the authorized officer at Monticello Field Office, P.O. Box 7, Monticello, UT 84535.

If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the authorized officer.

If you wish to file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
- (3) The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the authorized officer.

A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons and all pertinent documents must be served on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the Office of the Regional Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, 6201 Federal Building, 125 South State Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84138-1180, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the authorized officer and/or IBLA.

Donald K. Hoffheins, Field Manager

Date