



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Glennallen Field Office
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<http://www.blm.gov/ak>

Special Recreation Permit(s) for Heli Ski Activities Southern Portion of Haines Block Planning Area

Categorical Exclusion, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2016-0004-CX

Case File, AA-083491, AA-081641, and AA-081925AA

DECISION RECORD

Background

The BLM Glennallen Field Office has received three applications for Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for winter helicopter-supported recreation use (heli-skiing) in the southern block of the Haines Planning Area. The BLM has considered whether to authorize three temporary (one season) SRPs for up to 300 landings (total; divided between the applicants) to conduct winter heli-skiing operations, subject to all stipulations and conditions included below and attached.

The SRPs would be valid for the 2016 winter/early spring operating season, February 1 through April 30, with the option to renew contingent upon the status and future decisions of the Ring of Fire Resource Management Plan Haines Amendment Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Haines SEIS); compliance with permit stipulations; new information, circumstances, or changes in resource conditions; and, ultimately, the Authorized Officer's discretion.

The 300 landings would be distributed across BLM-managed lands in the southern block of the planning area (see attached map Southern Block Haines Planning Area). The northern block of the planning area would remain closed to all helicopter landings. The SRPs would be subject to all ROPs/stipulations from the 2008 Ring of Fire Approved Resource Management Plan (ROF/RMP/ROD), including modifications based on resource conditions, and additional stipulations as needed to minimize impacts to resources and to aid with compliance monitoring.

Decision

It is my decision to implement the proposed action as described in the attached Categorical Exclusion documentation, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2016-0004-CX. The proposed action is in conformance with the ROF/RMP/ROD; BLM 2008. Planning Decision, Recreation Goal O-1, calls for managing to maintain a diversity of recreational opportunities and states opportunities for commercial recreation will be provided consistent with area objectives for recreation management.

Specifically, it is my decision to authorize:

- Commercial Heli-skiing within the southern block of the Haines Planning Area
- Issuance of three temporary (one season) Special Recreation Permits (SRPs)
- A date window of heli-ski operations from February 1 through April 30, 2016
- Up to 300 landings within the permitted area (total; divided between the applicants).
- Implement a 1,500 meter buffer from goat groups

The authorization would also be subject to all standard stipulations for commercial heli-skiing activities. (Attached below)

Rationale for Decision

The Bureau is authorizing temporary one-year permits to past permitted helicopter based recreation providers in 2016 to accommodate for this recreation activity and need.

In making this decision the following factors were taken into account:

- The need to act upon permit requests while the Haines SEIS planning effort is ongoing;
- The number of permitted landings (300) is based on past historical use of BLM managed lands that continue to remain in federal ownership;
- The decision considers recent scientific literature concerning helicopter impacts to goat groups which determined a 1,500 meter buffer from goat groups does not cause significant adverse disturbances to mountain goats. (Cote, S., S. Hamel, A. St-Louis, J. Mainguy. 2013. Do Mountain Goats Habituate to Helicopter Disturbance? Journal of Wildlife Management);
- The commercial operators authorized within this decision have previously operated under BLM Special Recreation Permits and offered heli-ski opportunities within the Haines Planning Area.

The decision does not preclude future BLM considerations and management alternatives in relation to the Haines Planning Area and Haines SEIS. As new scientific information becomes available pertaining to goat or goat habitats it will be incorporated into future management decisions for the planning area.

Laws, Authorities, and Land Use Plan Conformance

This categorical exclusion and supporting documentation have been prepared consistent with the Ring of Fire Approved Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (2008)

The proposed action is in conformance with plan because it is specifically provided for in the following planning decisions:

O. Recreation

Manage recreation to maintain a diversity of recreational opportunities. Opportunities for commercial recreation will be provided consistent with area objectives for recreation management (Approved RMP, p. 15).

Haines Block SRMA

Goals:

- i. Manage recreation to maintain a diversity of opportunities.
- ii. Provide opportunities for commercial recreation consistent with the area objectives for recreation management.

Preliminary Management Objectives:

- i. Manage the SRMA (special recreation management area) to maintain a diversity of opportunities, including designated ROS (recreation opportunity spectrum) classification.
- ii. Maintain the area for designated VRM (visual resource management) classification.
- iii. Develop further guidance for management of OHV (off-highway vehicle) use.
- iv. Manage commercial recreation activities to maintain the quality of user experience, avoid adverse effects on wildlife resources, and minimize disturbance to adjacent communities.
- v. Work collaboratively with landowners in the area, recreation users, and adjacent communities to develop management strategies and define enforcement responsibilities. (Record of Decision, p. 10).

Consultation and Coordination

On December 17, 2015 a certified letter was sent to the stakeholders below requesting comments regarding the 300 landings that would be distributed across BLM-managed lands in the southern block of the planning area for the 2016 season. No comments were received.

- Chilkat Indian Village
- Chilkoot Indian Tribe

On October 7-9 2014 BLM staff from the Glennallen Field Office travelled to Haines, Alaska, and met with various stakeholders within the Haines Planning Area. Stakeholders were briefed on various BLM projects and planning efforts. The topic and issues surrounding commercial heli-skiing activities were discussed with the following entities:

- Alaska Heli Ski
- Chilkat Indian Village
- Chilkoot Indian Tribe
- Haines Borough
- South East Alaska Backcountry Adventures
- Lynn Canal Conservation
- Takshanuk Watershed Council

The proposed action has been reviewed by Glennallen Field Office staff and appropriate stipulations (see attached) have been developed as a condition of operation for the duration of the permit. Based on the attached Categorical Exclusion review, I have determined that the proposed action involves no significant impact to the human environment and no further analysis is required.

Appeal Opportunities

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR § 4. To appeal you must file a notice of appeal at the BLM Glennallen Field Office, P.O. Box 147, Milepost 186.5 Glenn Highway, Glennallen, Alaska 99588, within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appeal must be in writing and delivered in person, via the United States Postal Service mail system, or other common carrier, to the Glennallen Field Office as noted above. *The BLM does not accept appeals by facsimile, email, or other electronic means.* The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to regulation 43 CFR § 4.21 (58 FR 4939, January 19, 1993) for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards: (a) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied, (b) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits, (c) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and (d) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR § 4.413); Office of the Regional Solicitor, Alaska Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 4230 University Drive, Suite 300, Anchorage, Alaska 99508; at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

/s/ Mike Sondergaard for Dennis Teitzel

2/5/2016

Dennis C. Teitzel
Glennallen Field Manager

Date

Attachments

1. Categorical Exclusion, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2016-0004-CX
2. Permit stipulations
3. Map