

DECISION NOTICE

and

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for the

Hoodoo Alpine Slide Project

USDA Forest Service
Willamette National Forest
McKenzie River Ranger District

September 2004

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INTRODUCTION

The Hoodoo Alpine Slide Project is located within the Hoodoo Ski Area (Hoodoo), in the central Cascade Mountain Range in Oregon, just south of Oregon State Highway 20/126 near Santiam Pass. Hoodoo operates under a Special Use Permit administered by the Willamette National Forest. In January 1996, a Final Environmental Impact Statement was completed to evaluate the alternatives for a new Master Plan. A new Master Plan was required to meet the terms of Hoodoo Ski Area's Special Use Permit, as mandated by Forest Service Manual 2700. The approved Master Plan meets the terms of the special use permit to operate on National Forest land. The Record of Decision was signed on January 12, 1996. On January 30, 2003, Hoodoo made a written request to the District Ranger on the McKenzie River Ranger District to construct and operate a summer use alpine slide within their permit area. This development was not addressed in the current Master Plan.

Actions are proposed to amend the Special Use Permit to authorize Hoodoo Ski Area to construct and operate a summer use alpine slide within their permit area, estimated to be 3040 feet in length from the top of a central ski run to the base of the Manzanita Chairlift. The immediate impacted area for the slide placement would be approximately 20 feet wide. Approximately 50 trees, 6" to 14" dbh will be removed. No road construction is proposed. This project also responds to the need to provide unique developments in the ski area to attract additional visitors during the summer months to increase summertime use of the ski area facilities including the lodge.

Legal description of the project area: Township 13 South, Range 7-1/2 East, Section 26, Willamette Meridian; Linn County, Oregon.

DECISION

This Decision Notice documents my reason for selecting and implementing Alternative A from the Hoodoo Alpine Slide Project EA. My decision is based on information in the analysis file, including but not limited to, the environmental assessment, comments from the public and other agencies, and applicable laws and regulations.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

I have selected Alternative A because it satisfies the primary purpose and need to provide opportunities within Hoodoo's permit area to encourage and increase summertime use of ski area facilities and to increase year-round use of the lodge, consistent with Forest Service Manual policies (Forest Service Manual 2343.1 – Winter Recreation Uses, 2343.11 Policy),

by encouraging summertime use of ski area facilities where that use is compatible with or enhances natural resource-based recreation opportunities. Alternative A constructs the alpine slide, which is a unique facility that will attract additional visitors to the ski area during the summer months.

The EA determined that best management practices, prescribed as mitigation measures, would minimize any impacts to soil, botanical resources and visual quality of the area and can be found in the EA on page 9.

Areas of disturbance and exposed soils will be seeded with non-invasive, native grasses. All material brought in for construction, including fill soil, gravel and straw mulch will be certified weed free. Excavation will only occur during the dry season, and soil fill heights will not exceed five feet and slopes will not exceed 15% to minimize erosion.

The constructed feature will be fabricated using a natural color that will blend with the earth and rock color at the project site. The slide surface will be made with a non-reflective, low glare color and material. The slide will be located to minimize cuts and fills and to fit the existing topography.

Alternative A

The selected alternative will authorize construction and operation of a summer-use alpine slide within the Hoodoo Ski Area. It is estimated to be 3,040 feet in length from the top of a central ski run to the base of Manzanita Chairlift. Initial installation will consist of a single track approximately 3 feet wide, with a second track installed parallel to the first at a future date. The immediate impacted area for slide placement will be approximately 20 feet wide.

The slide track will be fabricated using materials colored to blend with the natural surroundings. Design criteria will ensure the slide will be constructed at ground level, and will be accessed by the existing Manzanita chairlift. It will be operated during the summer months, during daylight hours only. Approximately 50 trees, 6" to 14" dbh will be removed, resulting in less than one acre of additional clearing to install and operate the slide. Disturbed ground will be planted with native vegetation to reduce the spread and introduction of noxious weeds and to reduce erosion. No temporary or permanent road construction is proposed.

Mitigation Measures for Alternative A

A number of mitigation measures accompany Alternative A. Mitigation measures help define the alternatives by describing more specifically how the actions will be accomplished and how the resources will be protected. The mitigation measures were outlined in the EA on page 9. The intent of these measures is to protect soil, visual quality and botanical resources.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative B – No Action

Alternative B continues current operational activities within the permit area of Hoodoo, but it does not implement the proposed action. It does not implement the construction and operation of a summer use alpine slide.

Alternative B would not meet the purpose and need for action to provide opportunities within Hoodoo's permit area to encourage and increase summertime use of ski area facilities and to increase year-round utilization of the lodge, by developing a unique facility to attract additional visitors during summer months.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Hoodoo Alpine Slide Project was initiated in 2003. It was first listed in the Summer 2003 issue of the Forest Focus—the quarterly schedule of proposed actions (SOPA) for the Willamette National Forest. The project has since appeared in the Forest Focus through the current issue (Summer 2004).

The Hoodoo Alpine Slide project began July 2, 2003, with a Scoping Letter mailed out to list of 44 addresses that included individuals, organizations, Tribes, and governmental organizations who have expressed a past interest in similar projects on the McKenzie River District. No scoping comments were received in response to this scoping letter.

The Hoodoo Alpine Slide EA was completed and released for a 30-day public review and comment period on July 12, 2004. The 30-day review and comment period ended on August 11, 2004. Comments were received on the proposal from Black Butte Ranch Resort and Bill Granger, SE Group Environmental. Black Butte Ranch Resort responded in favor of the development of an alpine slide as a way to compliment the other activities and facilities in the area east of Santiam Pass. Mr. Granger submitted the only substantive comment in his email of July 26, 2004. He requested that the NEPA analysis address several areas, including visitation trends, success of other alpine slides at ski areas and Forest Service direction allowing for the development and operation of an alpine slide at Hoodoo. Chapter IV of the Hoodoo Alpine Slide EA, Consultation with Others, has been updated with the release of this Decision Notice to include a full response to the comments. Substantive comments on the EA were analyzed by the project IDT and considered by the Responsible Official in preparation of the release of the Decision Notice/FONSI.

Significant Issues

Two significant issues had a direct influence on the development of the action alternative during the preparation of the EA. Alternative A responds to the following significant issues as indicated. The issue statement is in italics, and is followed by the manner in which Alternative A addresses the issue.

Soil Resources and Noxious Weeds

Construction activities would result in ground disturbance and soil displacement. Soil exposed in this manner would be vulnerable to increased erosion and an increased risk of noxious weed infestation. In addition, importations of soils, gravel and straw, as well as the use of construction equipment, are potential routes of introduction of weeds and weed seeds to these vulnerable sites.

Alternative A responded to this issue by including five specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) that provide for the protection of soil resources and reduce the risk of noxious weed infestation, as required by project mitigation.

Scenic Integrity of the Area

Proposed activities can influence the scenic integrity of the area. The proposed project is viewed from within Hoodoo Ski Bowl, and the area is likely visible from peaks in the surrounding area, including those located within the Mt. Washington Wilderness Area to the south.

Alternative A responds to this issue by including project mitigation requirements that will reduce the visual impact of the alpine slide on the scenic integrity of the area. Mitigation measures include incorporating specific design criteria that will lessen the visual impact of the new developments. Use of natural colors and non-reflective materials, and grading and re-vegetation of side slopes are practices consistent with design requirement for past developments in the project area to help retain naturalness of the landscape setting.

Other Issues

Other issues brought up through scoping were dismissed as significant and did not have an influence on alternative development for this project. These issues mainly involved resource management that has been decided by law or regulation, by forest plan standards and guidelines, or by other higher-level decision. Detailed descriptions of the other issues can be found in the EA at page 15.

- 1) **Cultural Resources.** An onsite cultural survey and internal programmatic review was completed and no heritage resources have been located within the project area.
- 2) **Fisheries.** There are no streams or fish within the vicinity of the project area. The nearest stream is Hoodoo Creek, an intermittent stream that is approximately 1200 feet away, and the nearest water body with listed fish is 9 miles away.
- 3) **Water Quality.** The entire project is located outside of riparian reserves, and landscape scale effects of the project on aquatic resources in the Upper McKenzie Watershed are not anticipated.
- 4) **TES Wildlife Species.** There are no known Threatened, Endangered or sensitive wildlife species or habitat within the project area.
- 5) **Botanical Resources.** There are no known sensitive plant species in the area.

- 6) **Management Indicator Species, Neotropical Migratory Land Birds, Former Survey and Manage Species, Protection Buffer Species, and Other Mitigation Species** The amount or characteristics of required habitat for these species would not be significantly changed. Activity will occur after nesting season of neotropical migratory land birds.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Considering site-specific environmental analysis documented in the Hoodoo Alpine Slide Environmental Assessment (EA), I have determined that this is not a major Federal action that would significantly (40 CFR 1508.27) affect the quality of the human environment (40 CFR 1508.14); therefore, an environmental impact statement is not warranted. Beneficial and adverse direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the Hoodoo Alpine Slide EA have been disclosed within the appropriate context and will have little intensity. This determination is based following factors:

- This action will have neither significant beneficial nor adverse effects. Sufficient information has been disclosed in the analysis to make a reasoned choice between alternatives and no significant impacts to the human environment have been identified. Information available from past actions of similar context and intensity in this area also indicate that no significant impacts would be anticipated. This information is described in Chapter III - Environmental Consequences.
- This action will not significantly affect public health or safety. All proposed activities are in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements designed for the protection of the environment.
- There will be no significant adverse impacts to historic or cultural resources (EA page 15), park lands (none in project area), wetlands and flood plains (none in project area), prime farm land and range lands (none in project area), wild and scenic rivers (none in project area). No significant effects to any ecologically sensitive or critical areas are anticipated (EA Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences).
- The decision will not likely cause highly controversial environmental effects because controversy in this context refers to cases where there is a substantial dispute as to the size, nature or effect of the actions, rather than opposition to its adoption. There have been no substantial disputes as to the size, nature, or effect of this action.
- This action is consistent with the goals, objectives, and direction contained in the 1990 Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (1994, 2001, 2004).

- There will be no expected significant irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. There will be no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to soil, water, fisheries, or wildlife resources or other components of the environment. The analysis of cumulative effects considered past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest lands. This information is described in the Environmental Consequences Chapter of the EA.
- Biological Evaluations (BEs) for Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive wildlife, fish, and botanical species have been completed and are located in Appendices to the Environmental Assessment. The BEs indicate that the proposed project will not have significant effects or adverse impacts on any species or their habitats.
- This action will not affect aquatic systems, recreational fisheries, or designated Essential Fish Habitat.
- This Federal action has been conducted in a manner that does not exclude persons (including populations) from participation in, deny persons (including populations) the benefits of, or subject persons (including populations) to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin, as directed by Executive Order #12898.
- The proposed action is consistent with the National Forest Management Act.

APPLICABLE LAWS AND REGULATIONS:

This decision is consistent with the intent of the Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan's long-term goals and objectives for Management Areas 12b, Developed Recreation Special Use Permit and 12b-08 Scenic Resources – Partial Retention. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines to protect resource values such as soil, water quality, vegetation and scenic quality while providing for improvements designed to complement existing area developments and to expand the Forest's capacity to accommodate additional recreation use.

Federal Laws:

The Preservation of Antiquities Act, June 1906 and National Historic Preservation Act, October 1966 -- Surveys of the proposed project area have been completed. Archaeological evidence was found. Consultation with SHPO via the Forest Specialist has resulted in a finding of “No Effect” to significant heritage resources.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 1969 -- NEPA establishes the format and content requirements of environmental analysis and documentation. Preparation of the Two Bee Project EA is in full compliance with these requirements.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA), December 1973 – The ESA establishes a policy that all federal agencies will seek to conserve endangered and threatened species of fish, wildlife and plants. Biological Evaluations for plants, wildlife, and fish have been prepared, which describe possible effects of the proposed action on TES species that may be in the Two Bee Project area.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA), 1976 – The alternatives were developed to be in full compliance with NFMA through compliance with the Amended Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (US Forest Service, 1990).

Clean Air Act Amendments, 1977 – The alternatives are designed to meet the National Ambient Air quality standards through avoidance of practices that degrade air quality below health and visibility standards.

The Clean Water Act, 1987 -- The alternatives meet and conform to the Clean Water Act, Amended 1987. This act establishes a non-degradation policy for all federally proposed projects. The selected alternative is not likely to degrade water quality below standards set by the State of Oregon. This will be accomplished through planning, application and monitoring of Best Management Practices (BMPs).

State Laws:

Oregon State Best Management Practices (BMPs) -- State BMPs will be employed to maintain water quality.

Oregon State Forest Worker Safety Codes, The Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Code for Forest Activities shall be met with implementation of the Alternative B.

ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL AND IMPLEMENTATION

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with Forest Service Regulations at 36 CFR 215. Only individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. Notice of Appeal must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

Appeals can be submitted in several forms, but must be received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, Forest Supervisor Dallas Emch, within 45 days from the date of publication of notice of this decision in the Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon. Appeals may be:

- 1) Mailed to: Appeal Deciding Officer, Dallas Emch, Forest Supervisor; ATTN: Appeals, P.O. Box 10607, Eugene, OR 97440;
- 2) Emailed to: appeals-pacificnorthwest-willamette@fs.fed.us. Please put APPEAL and HOODOO ALPINE SLIDE EA DECISION in the subject line;
- 3) Delivered to: Willamette National Forest, Supervisor's Office at 211 E. 7th Ave, Eugene, OR 97401, between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm, M-F; or

- 4) Faxed to: Willamette National Forest, Supervisor's Office, ATTN: APPEALS at (541) 225-6222.

If no appeal is filed, the USDA Forest Service will implement the Hoodoo Alpine Slide project five days after the close of the appeal period, which starts on the date the legal notice announcing the decision appears in the Register-Guard, Eugene Oregon. If an appeal is filed, implementation of this decision will occur 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition.

This project is scheduled for implementation in October, 2004 through August, 2005.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Recreation Planner Stacey Smith at 541-822-7210, or by mail to the McKenzie River Ranger District, McKenzie Bridge, OR, 97413.

Responsible Official: _____ Date: _____
MARY ALLISON
District Ranger

