United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Supervisor's Office | 2930 Wetmore Avenue, Suite 3A Everett, WA 98201 (425) 783-6000

File Code: 1950-1/2720-1
Date: June 4, 2008

Dear National Forest User:

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest is initiating an environmental analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in response to a project proposal by Stevens Pass Ski Area (Stevens Pass). The environmental analysis will analyze and disclose the potential impacts from implementing the proposed Phase 1 projects of the 2007 Master Development Plan (MDP) for Stevens Pass Ski Area. Phase 1 includes mountain biking and a water treatment system upgrade. These projects are described below in the section called Proposed Action. This scoping letter initiates the public involvement part of the NEPA process. The details of the NEPA process, the purpose and need for action, the proposed action, the decision to be made and information on how and when to comment are described below. This scoping letter, and the maps and attachments that it references are available on-line at the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest projects website at http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/projects/.

Stevens Pass Ski Area is situated in the Cascade Mountains approximately 78 miles northeast of Seattle and 58 miles west of Wenatchee, Washington. New Stevens, LLC (Stevens Pass) is the operator of the Stevens Pass Ski Area under the terms of a Special Use Permit (permit) on the Skykomish Ranger District of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and Wenatchee River Ranger District of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

NEPA Process

In August 2007 Stevens Pass submitted a MDP to the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest as required by their permit. The MDP is intended to function as a conceptual tool, outlining the Ski Area's vision of what it could become over the next 10-15 years. It describes a number of possible projects based on Stevens Pass's current views about long-term capitol improvement at the resort including comments they have received at informational open houses on their MDP and its availability on their website over the past few months at http://www.stevenspass.com/Stevens/the-mountain/future-plans.aspx.

It is envisioned that the MDP will be amended and changed over time to reflect changes in Stevens Pass's vision of how best to invest in capitol improvements that serve the needs of the recreating public. The MDP is also intended to serve as a planning tool to assist Stevens Pass and the Forest Service in long-range planning efforts for National Forest System lands within the permit area (Map 1 Permit Map).

On May 14, 2008 I accepted the 2007 MDP for Stevens Pass Ski Area consistent with their permit (clause 1-G Master Development Plan). My acceptance was based on our initial review

of the entire MDP and the consistency of all of the projects with the applicable Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans). My acceptance of the MDP does not authorize the implementation of any of the projects in the plan. Environmental analysis must first be completed and the activities approved in an appropriate NEPA decision document with appropriate public involvement.

Stevens Pass has identified two projects out of the MDP that they propose to implement in the next 3-5 years, a mountain bike park and an upgraded water treatment system. These proposed projects are referred to collectively as Phase 1 of the MDP and are described in detail below. All of the remaining projects described in the MDP are not proposed at this time but will be considered reasonably foreseeable in our analysis of cumulative effects. From a NEPA stand point, the proposed Phase 1 projects are the "proposed action" in this NEPA analysis.

It is anticipated that there will not be significant impacts from the implementation of the Phase 1 projects and so an environmental assessment will be prepared. This scoping process is intended to identify preliminary issues and concerns that will help drive the analysis and potentially the development of alternatives. If through scoping or our analysis it is determined that significant impacts may result from implementation of these projects an environmental impact statement may be prepared.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need for action is based on the existing conditions at Stevens Pass and the desired conditions that lead to a proposed action. The purpose and need for mountain biking and the water treatment system upgrade, are described separately below as Projects 1 and 2. The projects are described in the section below called Proposed Action.

<u>Project 1 Stevens Pass Mountain Bike Park Initial Development Phase 1</u>

The Forest Plan objectives are to manage ski areas to provide a diversity of winter and summer recreation activities that emphasize the forest setting (USDA 1990, pages 4-85 and 4-182). Currently there are no formal summer operations at Stevens Pass. The growth of mountain biking has been strong over the past decade. Comparable to skiing and snowboarding, the technological advances of mountain biking equipment have evolved greatly in the recent past. As a result, the sport itself has progressed into a separate activity, discrete from street biking and other types of non-motorized riding. A recent trend has been the development of lift accessed mountain bike terrain that utilizes a similar footprint as a ski area, but on a more limited scale. Stevens Pass believes there is a need for a managed downhill mountain bike area that services western and north central Washington. This would provide recreationists with an area to come ride lift accessed, downhill mountain bikes. Stevens Pass believes a downhill mountain bike park at Stevens Pass would be a good complement to the growing mountain bike demand currently on National Forest System lands. Developing a mountain bike park at Stevens Pass Ski Area would provide diverse summer recreation opportunities consistent with the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie and Wenatchee Forest Plans, as amended. Formal summer operations at Stevens Pass may enhance the opportunity to partake in other recreational uses including sightseeing, accessing the Pacific Crest Trail, hiking, interpretive programs, etc.

Project 2 Water Treatment System Upgrade

The engineering firm of Hammond Collier Wade Livingstone prepared a comprehensive Water System Plan for Stevens Pass in July 2005. The plan was subsequently approved by the Washington State Department of Health. The existing water treatment system includes the treated water storage tank co-located with the treatment plant in the Big Chief Chairlift lower terminal at the base area of Stevens Pass.

The existing water treatment plant has been operational since it was built in 1979. Its production is 35 gallons per minute (gpm) which is inadequate to meet demand. HCWL and RH2 both recommend about 100gpm. Additionally, the current system has no redundancy or back-up should a system failure occur. A new redundant system that can produce the recommended 100gpm would ensure the system's reliability and capability of meeting demand into the future.

Power outages affect Stevens Pass a few days each season. The water treatment system including the treated water storage tank utilizes booster pumps for pressurization and flow to operate. Power outages create a potential risk in the ability to provide potable water. A gravity feed system would require less power and mitigate that risk.

The existing 27,000 gallon treated water storage tank is old and inadequate to provide water for the anticipated future use levels at the ski area. The tank received interim refurbishing in 2002. In the fall of 2007 an evaluation of the tank's structural integrity by Lakeside Engineering raised concerns over the tanks structural integrity. Those short-term solutions have already served longer than expected and replacement of the tank is now necessary.

Additionally, there are a number of ski clubs within the base area of Stevens Pass Ski area under their own Special Use Permits. Many of these clubs tie into the existing water system utilizing untreated water only. These clubs then treat that water individually for their own use. Providing them with treated water from the Stevens Pass water system would ensure clean water, if in the future they were not able to continue to provide their own.

The Yodelin subdivision currently provides its own treated water. However, at some point in the future, the Yodelin subdivision may ask to connect, or be required to connect to the water treatment system at Stevens Pass to ensure an adequate supply of treated water. The existing storage capacity of the Stevens Pass water system is inadequate to provide water to Yodelin in the event that this occurred.

The vegetation south and up slope of the current water treatment system located at the base of the Big Chief Chairlift has been impacted in the past by various projects and operations. Vehicle access via two adjacent roads to the Stevens Pass Alpine Club (SPAC) building contributes to this problem. Identifying and improving a single route to the SPAC building and properly decommissioning and revegetating the other area would improve access and resource conditions.

Proposed Action

The following proposed action is in response to the purpose and need described above for Projects 1 and 2, mountain biking and the water treatment system upgrade.

Project 1 Stevens Pass Mountain Bike Park Initial Development Phase 1

- Develop five mountain bike trails within the Hogsback, Skyline, and Daisy Lift areas

with a system of beginner, intermediate, and advanced trails (Map 2 Mountain Bike Trails and Attachment 1 Trail Features).

- Develop associated mountain biking facilities (multi-skill trails, skills park, etc.) (Maps 3, 4 and 5 Skills Parks and Attachment 2 Trail Descriptions).
- Develop natural and man-made "features" approximately every 100 yards on the intermediate and advanced trails. Examples of small, medium and large features are shown on Attachment 2, Trail Descriptions.
- Develop a "skills park" in the immediate base area as shown on Maps 3, 4 and 5, Skills Parks. Possible ground disturbance would be a maximum of 1.5 acres. This would involve temporary, removable wooden structures. Structures would be built with hand tools on-site and removed for winter operations. These structure would consist of elevated ladder systems, teeter totters, etc. Examples are shown on Attachment 2, Trail Descriptions.
- Utilize existing base area facilities and infrastructure to service the mountain biking operation. (Food and beverage, retail, tickets, patrol, rentals, etc.) (Maps 3, 4 and 5, Skills Parks).

The trail system would consist of hand and machine-built downhill mountain bike trails (approximately five total miles at 5-8 ft width) and downhill single-track mountain bike trails (approximately two total miles at 1-3 ft width). The wider downhill mountain bike trails would be graded, and would include designated features such as elevated wood sections, berms, and jumps designed for the free ride/downhill mountain bike user. These trails would incorporate storm water drainage into their design. Mini-excavators would be used for the construction of these graded trails. The single track mountain bike trails would be designed for free ride and downhill users. Hand tools would be used for the construction of single-track trails.

The Hogsback Express Chairlift would be the uphill conveyance for mountain bikers, with an estimated capacity of approximately 1,200 mountain bikers per day. Three graded, machine-built downhill trails would be built from the top of Hogsback (beginner, intermediate and advanced). These trails would generally be located within similarly sloped terrain (8% to 25% avg.). The trails themselves would average between 10% to 15% grade. The difference in skill class ratings would largely result from the degree of difficulty, the number of jumps and stunts and the technical trail features found on each trail. Complementing this would be a series of similarly rated downhill single-track trails developed in sections, accessed from the machine-built trails. Hikers and other users would be prevented from using these trails due to safety and flow issues.

The Mountain Bike Park would operate approximately 60 days a year from mid-June through October depending on spring snowmelt. It is anticipated the area would initially accommodate 7,500 users a year in the first few seasons of operation, with that number growing dependent upon the growth and popularity of the sport in the region.

The following preliminary standard best management practices (BMP's) and mitigation measures have been identified for incorporation into the proposed trail design and construction.

These BMP's and mitigation will be refined and additional requirements and mitigation will be added as identified through the environmental analysis process:

- Forest clearing in the proposed trail corridors would be reduced to the extent practical through careful trail layout during construction. The area of soil compaction would be reduced by limiting construction equipment access.
- All trails would be designed to avoid the unnecessary removal of trees with a diameter at breast height (DBH) greater than 6 inches. Any trees greater than 6 inches DBH that might potentially need to be removed, would be assessed by the SUP Administrator after consultation with the Forest Botanist (as necessary). Trees that would need to be cut would be felled and left in place, unless used for bridge stringer or other structures.
- The groundcover (generally huckleberry) on much of the mountain is EXTREMELY thick. The path through the huckleberry might be significantly wider than the actual trail tread in order to avoid having to trim branches.
- All equipment would be cleaned before entering National Forest System lands, including undercarriages, radiators, tires and wheels to minimize the chances of propagating noxious weeds.
- Forest Service approved certified weed free borrow pits (small quarries where dirt can be "borrowed" from and subsequently filled with rock and clear brush) would be necessary in order to "cap" areas of trail requiring dirt. Screening (sifting) material, either with a specially built excavator bucket or fixed screen, should be considered if enough quality material cannot be easily found.
- All work would be done with mechanical equipment initially and finished with handwork. Clearing would be done by hand crews. Brush and trees would be lopped and scattered outside of the clearing limits. In some areas, near existing disturbed terrain (i.e., ski runs), a full size excavator might be necessary to place/move larger rocks and boulders.
- Trails would need to be built with "flow" in mind. The actual line of the flagging tape should not be followed to the inch but rather as a guide. Grade reversals, rolls, and smooth sweeping turns should be built into the trail in harmony with the natural topography. Jumps and other trail features (step-ups and step-downs for example) are often built to overcome obstacles (immovable rocks) and their exact location is virtually impossible to determine before work on the ground begins.
- In graded areas, topsoil would be carefully removed and stockpiled for placement onto the graded area. During construction, topsoil would be carefully stored using approved erosion and sediment control methods, as described in the construction plan in order to avoid erosion. Soil would be covered to prevent erosion during inclement weather.
- All trails would be routed around or spanned across wetlands using bridges. A wetland biologist trained in identification and delineation of wetlands would identify wetland boundaries to be staked in the field. Wet and/or boggy areas would be crossed using a combination of raised mineral soil causeways, ditching, and raised wooden boardwalks.

- Stream course crossings (and wetlands) would require wood bridge structures. These crossings would be addressed using USFS approved bridge building techniques. Bridges would be built with a combination of treated and untreated wood. Local material for the bridge would be utilized where possible. Cribbing material would also be built with locally accessed rock. Galvanized fasteners would be used throughout. Below bridge clearance would consider maximum possible water flow. Best management practices would be implemented that require bank stabilization measures. No dredging or filling of wetlands is planned.
- In water courses where seasonal flow is expected, but permanent water is not present, culvert (minimum 12 inches) or bridges (site specific) would be used. In any areas where water is not expected but possible, culverts (minimum 6 inches) would be used.
- Project-specific Stormwater Pollution Control Plans would included additional erosion protection (such as two row silt fence, straw bales and /or more permanent structure such as logs) to be provided between streams and construction areas close to stream channels.
- A spill prevention and response plan would be developed and included in a stormwater pollution control plan as part of the construction documents. Petroleum would not be discharged into drainages or bodies of water. No fuels or construction machinery would be stored within Riparian Reserves.
- Vegetation removal in wetlands and riparian vegetation zones would be conducted by hand/chainsaw. No ground-based heavy equipment would operate in wetlands. Trees may be felled away from wetland areas and removed by heavy equipment operating from uplands, provided that no disturbance to wetland or riparian soils occurs. The shrub layer, where present, would be maintained at a height of 3 feet above ground to provide thermal shading.

Project 2 Water Treatment System Upgrade

The water treatment system upgrade includes removing the old system and building a new larger treatment facility higher up on the mountain. The proposed location is near the edge of the Promenade Run, a short distance down-slope from the Tye Creek Reservoir, the system's raw water source (Maps 6 Proposed Water Treatment and Storage Improvements Plan). The proposed site is outside the skier/snowboarder traffic flow, located between the run and the dense forest of the mountain side. The proposal includes:

- The installation of an approximately 232,000 gallon[1] treated water storage tank with an estimated footprint of 50-foot diameter and 25 feet tall. It may be partially buried into the ground with approximately 10 feet exposed on the uphill side and 15 to 20 feet exposed on the downhill side. The total estimated disturbance area would be 7,300 square feet. The minimum base elevation would need to be 4,300 feet.

[1] Stevens Pass has stated that they have no interest, desire or intent to supply water to the existing Yodelin subdivision (June 3, 2008 Letter), however they believe it would be prudent to account for that capacity at this time. Further, if it were ever proposed to connect Yodelin to the Stevens Pass water system, that proposal would be a new project, subject to the appropriate analysis under NEPA.

- The construction of a 1,350 square foot (30'x 45') raw water treatment facility located adjacent to the tank with an estimated disturbance area of 6,600 square feet. The elevation would need to be 4,284 feet (required for 20 psi fire flow from Tye Creek Reservoir).

- New pipeline would be buried between the new storage tank and the existing treatment plant located in the Big Chief Chairlift lower terminal. The width of disturbance is estimated to be 40 to 50 feet, including the trench lines and piled material. The length of disturbance would be approximately 1,800 feet (trench length).

- The old, existing treatment facility and tank would be removed and revegetated.

- The area south and upslope of the existing tank would be revegetated and effectively managed to improve revegetation success. A single existing road would be improved to minimize erosion, and it would be extended by 211 feet providing access to the SPAC building. An existing and longer road (475 feet), adjacent to the improved road also accesses the SPAC building as well as the yurt further up the slope. This road, which approximately follows the proposed alignment of the water treatment plant pipes would be decommissioned and revegetated after pipe installation (Map 6 Proposed Water Treatment and Storage Improvements Plan). Maintaining vehicle access to the yurt is not necessary.

To accommodate the water pipelines, two parallel trenches would be excavated from the new water treatment plant and storage tank, down the Promenade Run. The Promenade Run is a ski trail that was graded with a dozer in the late 1970s. At present, a buried ductile-iron pipe carries raw water down the Promenade Run from the Tye Creek Reservoir to the existing treatment plant at the Big Chief lower terminal. The new trenches and piping would roughly parallel the older ductile pipe. The new treatment plant would hook up with by a valve on the existing pipe that draws from Tye Creek Reservoir. As the valve is over 100 feet from the reservoir in the middle of the Promenade Run, no work in the area of the Tye Creek Reservoir is proposed.

Decision to be Made:

I will be the Deciding Officer for this project. Upon completion of the environmental analysis, I will decide whether or not to authorize the construction and development of Phase 1 of the 2007 MDP for Stevens Pass.

Request for Comment and Public Involvement:

I am asking for your comments, issues, and/or concerns related to the proposed action. Your input will be considered in the analysis, and may be used to identify alternatives, best management practices and mitigation measures, or to evaluate the environmental consequences of implementation. There will be a 30-day public comment period beginning the date of this scoping letter.

In an effort to reduce paper waste, electronic correspondence and media will be used to the extent possible throughout this project. Please include the following with your comment: 1) a valid email address 2) a valid mailing address and 3) your document format preference (e.g., on-line, CD-ROM or hard copy). The Forest's website will be the primary avenue in which information about this project will be disseminated. The website address is

http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/projects/. However, if you prefer to have hard copies of the attachments and maps, please contact Sean Wetterberg at the phone number or address in the following paragraph.

Electronic comments are preferred and must be submitted in rich text (.rtf) or Word (.doc) format via email to mbs_stevens_ski@fs.fed.us. Written comments should be mailed or dropped off in person, Attention: Sean Wetterberg, Project Leader, at 2930 Wetmore Avenue, Suite 3A, Everett, WA 98201. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the responsible official's office during normal business hours via telephone at (425) 783-6022. Comments may also be faxed to (425) 783-0212. If you have any questions regarding the proposed project please contact the project leader, Sean Wetterberg by phone at (425) 783-6022.

A public open house is scheduled for Wednesday, June 25, 2008 to review the Phase 1 proposal and to provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about the project and the MDP. The meeting will be held at the Snohomish County Surface Water Management Office meeting room #1 from 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm. It is located at 3000 Rockefeller Avenue, Everett, WA 98201. This office can be reached easily by public transportation and parking is also available nearby.

Sincerely,

/s/ Y. Robert Iwamoto
Y. ROBERT IWAMOTO
Forest Supervisor

NOTE: Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 14 days.