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Sent: Thursday, July 2, 2020 18:08

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Subject: Special Use Permits in the North Fork

Hello all,

Thank you for all the letters, emails, and phone calls concerning the proposed special uses in the North Fork. I have read every comment that came in and I have to say as an overall statement, your comments reflect 2 very strong points and common themes; Residents of the North Fork are:

1. Very passionate about preserving the unique lifestyle and the remote / primitive setting of the North
2. Passionate about protecting the remarkable natural resources of the area.

I felt there was some misunderstanding about the Forest Service process as I read some of your comments. Several of you made statements of disappointment, that we were going forward with all these activities and you needed to know about this sooner. I admit our process is sometimes challenging to understand so I want to try and clarify the basic steps that got us to this point.

- a. The public comes to us with a large number of proposals and wide variety of activities such as temporary guiding and recreation events. These proposals normally trickle in throughout the years but this year they needed to be submitted in an open season (January through February). This "open season" is a new process for the Flathead National Forest.
- b. In March 2020 (after the winter North Fork Inter-local meeting). Proposals for summer activities were looked at and reviewed (many proposals came in at the last minute).
- c. The initial review process was with internal resource specialist in a coarse screening process to see if the proposed activities violated any laws or posed risks for resource impacts and were compatible with our Forest Plan. This was not a thorough analysis but just a coarse screening.
- d. Next we conducted public scoping with the proposals we thought might be reasonable.... This scoping and the news articles was the point that many of you 1st heard about these activities. During the scoping we were asking the public what they thought and what were their concerns.
- e. Next we reviewed and considered public comments, and resource specialists conducted their analysis.
- f. The final stage is reaching a Decision, (documenting the decisions through NEPA, National Environmental Policy Act requirements) and then draft the special use permits and operating plans. These permits are basically agreements (sort of like contracts) with the proponents of the activity and the Forest Service.

So right now we are at step e. getting close to step f.

I am communicating the results of step e., now, a little ahead of decisions and issuance of special use permits.

NW Adventures, ATV Guiding, I have decided to not issue a permit in the North Fork based on comments received during scoping. This company will still be permitted and operate on the West side of the Whitefish divide with one exception, they will be allowed to take clients to Red Meadow Lake and depart back to the West. They will not be allowed to travel beyond Red Meadow Lake and they will not be able to take clients to Red Meadow Lake on weekends or Holidays. Due to the COVID situation they are not expected to have as many clients as they were hoping for in their proposal.

Whitefish Shuttles. Van tours and livery service to several trail heads, short hikes and bike tour in the North Fork will be permitted. They expect much reduced numbers of clients and trips due to the COVID situation.

Cycling House, Bicycling tours cancelled due to COVID.

Adventure Cycling, Bicycle tours, cancelled due to COVID.

Spotted Dog Cycles: Bicycle tours cancelled due to COVID.

Two of the five permits that were proposed in The North Fork will be issued this year, and they are only valid for 1 season. The proponents would have to reapply if they wish to operate next year.

Thanks to all who commented. Your input has been extremely helpful and I look forward to continuing the dialog.

Rob