

W2487



ASPEN SKIING COMPANY

January 21, 2000

Martha Kettle  
Supervisor  
White River National Forest  
PO Box 948  
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

Dear Martha:

I am writing on behalf of Aspen Skiing Company (ASC) to provide formal comments on the pending White River National Forest (WRNF) Plan revisions. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft Plan, as the proper management of the White River National Forest is critical to our business success. The protection of the natural environment is critical to our concept of sustainable tourism and we know that ultimately, it is the spectacular character of our landscape and mountains that bring visitors to Aspen, year in and year out.

**Aspen Mtn.,  
Snowmass  
Criteria 1**

We are supportive of your efforts to better manage critical public lands and we recognize the difficult task which you are undertaking. While we support the general policy directive of your preferred alternative, we do have some concerns relative to specific elements of the Plan. Most of our comments focus specifically on our ski area operations, but we are also commenting on several broader aspects of the plan.

We exist within a community that has embraced a philosophy of carefully managed growth and we continue to participate in planning efforts. In accord with long range comprehensive planning for Aspen and Pitkin County we support the withdrawal of several areas from potential lift-served skiing, including Little Annie Basin, the Owl Creek area and Maroon Bowl. We believe that we are likely to be the only skiing operator in the White River National Forest to support reclassification of lands from 1B to a less intensive classification.

Our requests for amendments to the skiing section of the plan are particularly modest when viewed in the broader context of our support for the wholesale reclassification of public lands adjacent to our mountains.

Since submitting our comments to the Forest Service in March 1998, Aspen Skiing Company has remained involved in the process of revising the Forest Plan. Several of our business objectives have since been addressed through the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Snowmass Ski Area and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Aspen Highlands Ski Area.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS TO PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

SKIING

**Snowmass 1** Amendments to Ski Area Permits and Activities

We request that the WRNF Planning Team amend the Forest Plan in the following areas that pertain to our ski area permits. These are:

1. Amend the Ski Area Permit Boundary and 8.25 designation on Burnt Mountain to permit the East Burnt Mountain Traverse, which will allow skiers on East Burnt Mountain to return to the Two Creeks base area.
2. Allow further study for a proposed aerial connection between the Snowmass and Buttermilk Ski Areas;
3. Expand the 8.25 prescription on Aspen Mountain to include the area around Loushin Lake, for possible expansion of lift-served skiing into Pandora's.
4. Amend the 8.25 prescription for the Buttermilk Ski Area to include the previously approved (1994 EA) new ski trail between Teaser and Jacob's Ladder.

**Snowmass/  
Buttermilk 1**

*Proposed Aerial Connection between Snowmass and Buttermilk*

What the Forest Plan DEIS says about aerial transportation corridors:

**Aspen 1**

The DEIS devotes a fair amount of text to the concept of aerial connections between ski resorts. It discusses the potential benefit of such connections in reducing impacts to ground-based transportation systems and air quality. For example, page 3-328 of the DEIS reads "When designing the alternatives, the Forest Service also considered alternative methods for transporting people to, from, between and within resort communities. *Several alternatives identify opportunities to abate transportation congestion, air pollution, and resource impacts by allowing aerial transportation corridors on NFS lands. Aerial transportation systems could provide alternative methods to move people between resorts, parking lots, intermodal transportation portals, or communities.* Special use permits to operate these facilities could be issued to state, federal, or county agencies, local transportation authorities, resort towns, private groups, or ski area operators. A portion of these lands could be managed as either 8.25 or 8.31 areas."

**Buttermilk 1**

The DEIS acknowledges the impact that transportation congestion will have on the Forest and adjacent resorts and communities. Page 3-349 states: "The effect of regional traffic volumes on ski-based resorts is a significant issue. As regional growth increases, existing ground-based transportation systems linking primary use areas and mountain access portals will become more of a problem. The lack of parking and traffic congestion near mountain access portals lowers visitors' experiences and are major use inhibitors. *Alternatives that allow new transportation systems, mountain access portals, intermodal transportation centers, and aerial transportation*