


United States
Department
of Agriculture
Forest Service
Northern Region
Flathead National
Forest



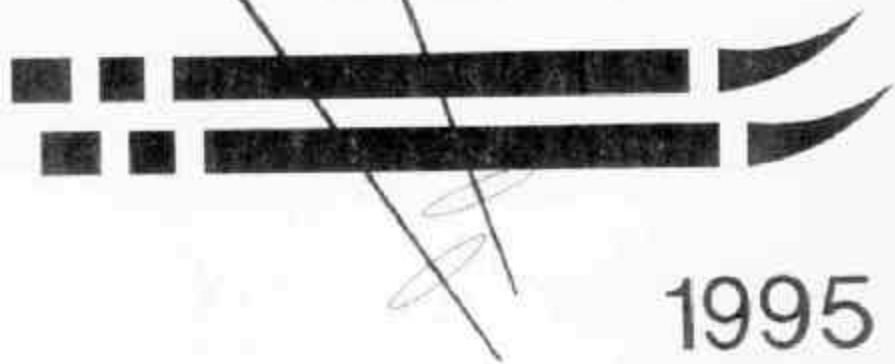
1985



BIG MOUNTAIN Ski & Summer Resort



FINAL
Environmental
Impact
Statement



1995

Big Mountain 5

Changing Boundary Policy: The ski area boundary policy would continue to be basically an *open policy*; i.e., skiers would be allowed to ski outside the ski area permit boundary (Figure 4-1). However, a partial change in the boundary policy would prohibit lift-based skiers from exiting or re-entering the ski area in the Chair 8 area and Hellroaring drainage during the period of April 1 to closing. This proposed policy change would create a somewhat restrictive atmosphere. The burden of enforcement would fall on WSI ski patrol.

Construction of Ski Pods – Chair 8, T-Bar 2, Southside Ski Runs and Upper Hellroaring: Alternative F (Modified) proposes 144 acres of ski run development on north and south slopes. Of these, a total of 82 acres would be added to the existing 82 acres of north slope ski terrain. This development represents a 100% increase in acres for north slope skiing, which improves the quality of early and late season skiing. Snow depths average 45% deeper, and effects of solar radiation are minimized on north-facing slopes. At total buildout, approximately 28% of the development would be on north slopes. WSI's 1983 Master Plan contains comparative snow depths from a study conducted on the north and south slopes of The Big Mountain during the 1981-1982 ski season. The studies indicated that north slope snow depths averaged 45% deeper than south slopes from January-March. In addition, north slopes do not go through the same melt/freeze cycles that frequently occur on south slopes. A melt/freeze cycle causes the skier to encounter ice during the morning with a quick transition to very soft, slushy snow in the afternoon.

The area currently being used by WSI for snowcat skiing would be eliminated with the construction of Chair 8. Because no plans exist to accommodate this activity in a different area, it is one less winter opportunity that would be available. Alternative F (Modified) would provide an additional egress route directly from the summit area. This would be a groomed route and for upper level skiers (advanced intermediate to expert). Therefore, this alternative would offer one more route off the summit for advanced intermediate skiers and help relieve congestion on the mountaintop egress routes during high visitation days.

Out-of-Bounds Skiing: Alternative F (Modified) would convert some out-of-bounds ski areas to developed areas within the operations boundary. Approximately 300 acres would be developed. The FAA Peak area (including the upper Hellroaring basin) that currently receives an estimated 90% of the lift-based out-of-bounds would be developed with one groomed route, gliding and a T-bar.

Snowmaking on South Slopes: The proposed water reservoir and well would be located near the upper terminal of Chair 2. Reservoir and well development would expand the capabilities for snowmaking by approximately 83 acres. Currently, approximately 60 acres are served and the proposed activities would increase snowmaking capabilities by 138%. The proposed system would serve all of the Chair 2 ski runs, the entire Big Ravine ski run, and the lower portions of Inspiration ski run up to Easy Street and Bad Rock. This additional snowmaking would increase early and late season skiing opportunities. Skier visits during the early and late seasons could increase and help to create a more sustained visitation. Night skiing could start earlier in the season and continue later in the spring.

Warming/ Snack Hut Near Chair 2: This 2,000-square foot facility would provide a convenient "on-the-mountain" food service. The proposed building would be located at an elevation of approximately 1,200' above the base area. This location has scenic views of the Flathead Valley.

Snowmobiles: Alternative F includes the Taylor Creek Road as an additional route for snowmobilers to access the summit. The additional route would add approximately 10 miles to the existing snowmobile system. The Whitefish Lake, Canyon Creek, and Olney trailheads would connect. As proposed, the new trail segment would provide a safer route to the summit because it would not contain any known areas that regularly avalanche. Rerouting of the current snowmobile trail in order to avoid ski area development on the north slope of The Big Mountain is required to provide some separation of skiers and snowmobiles. The new Taylor Creek snowmobile route would significantly reduce the travel time for snowmobilers traveling to the Summit House. Snowmobile "play areas" are converted to developed skiing under this alternative. The number of acres converted is approximately 300. Snowmobile parking would remain at its present location approximately