



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office
Wenatchee Office
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JAN 25 2002

Glenn Hoffman
District Ranger
Lake Wenatchee and Leavenworth Ranger Districts
600 Sherbourne
Leavenworth, WA 98826

**COPY FOR YOUR
INFORMATION**

FWS Reference: 1-3-02-I-0466
X-reference: 1-3-96-I-0262
Hydrologic Unit Code: 17-02-00 (Upper Columbia River Tributaries)

Dear Mr. Hoffman:

This responds to your request for informal consultation on the proposed Mission Ridge Master Plan (Project), located on the Lake Wenatchee and Leavenworth Ranger Districts, Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests, in Chelan County, Washington. Your cover letter and Biological Assessment (BA) were dated December 12, 2001, and received in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office on December 26. The Project completed the section 7 streamlining process on December 12, 2001.

The U.S. Forest Service has requested FWS concurrence with the determinations of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), and northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) (spotted owl); and "no effect" to designated critical habitat for the spotted owl; in accordance with section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). The Project area is outside the known range of the marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus marmoratus*) and does not include habitat for listed plants or aquatic species including the Columbia River distinct population segment of bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

The Project area is located within the Squilchuck Creek watershed, a non-key watershed, and Administratively Withdrawn, Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) (RW-129, Swauk), and Riparian Reserve land allocations described in the *Record of Decision on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (ROD), dated April 1994. In addition, the Project area also includes designated critical habitat unit WA-12 (Swauk) for the spotted owl. Based on the information provided in the BA, implementation of future activities guided by the Master Plan appears to be consistent with the standards and guidelines of the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the ROD, and will not prevent or retard attainment of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy. No management is proposed in designated critical habitat unit WA-12 nor the Swauk LSR.

Proposed is the adoption of a Master Plan guiding the management and development within the existing 2,080-acre Mission Ridge permit area. The Mission Ridge Ski Area operates under special use permits issued by the Forest Service and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, allowing the use of 1,000 and 1,080 acres of the agencies' trust resource land, respectively. The preferred alternative (alternative 2) of the environmental assessment for the Master Plan identifies design criteria guiding future development of the Mission Ridge Ski Area. Future management and development at the Mission Ridge Ski Area will be consistent with guidance including the

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may constitute a loss of potential perch and roost trees but sufficient numbers will remain across the landscape. Further, these remaining perch and roost trees are unlikely to be used due to the low probability of use by the bald eagle. Nonetheless, disturbance to the bald eagle and its prey will be minimized by timing Project activities outside critical use periods as applicable.

The Project area consists mainly of subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*) and grand fir (*A. grandis*), providing very marginal, high elevation, suitable (nesting, roosting, and foraging) and dispersal habitat for the spotted owl. The last known occupied activity center within the 1.8 mile radii median home range was in 1998 (Stemilt, SO-772) but has not been relocated despite protocol surveys in 1999 and 2000. Future management will not remove suitable or dispersal habitat essential for the conservation of the spotted owl. Seasonal timing restrictions will be applied as applicable to minimize disturbance effects. No activities are proposed within designated critical habitat for the spotted owl (WA-12, Swauk) nor the Swauk LSR. Critical habitat in the Project area is part of a ski area "wildlife leave area" and is to be managed for connectivity of forest-related species. The constituent elements of designated critical habitat for the spotted owl (nesting, roosting, foraging, and dispersal habitat) will not be affected nor prevented from developing.

The FWS concurs with your determinations of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" the Canada lynx, grizzly bear, gray wolf, bald eagle, and spotted owl; and "no effect" to designated critical habitat for the spotted owl, based on the information included in the BA. This concludes informal consultation pursuant to the regulations implementing the Endangered Species Act, 50 C.F.R. § 402.13. This Project should be re-analyzed if new information reveals effects of the action that may affect listed or proposed species or designated or proposed critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not considered in this consultation; if the action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to a listed or proposed species or designated or proposed critical habitat that was not considered in this consultation; and/or, if a new species is listed or critical habitat is designated that may be affected by this Project.

To better achieve the intent of the ROD, Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and an ecosystem approach to management, the FWS provides the following recommendations:

1. Map and monitor the existing amount of snow-compacting activities by LAU, across all administrative boundaries, consolidating the information at a single location. Although the type and amount of snow-compacting activities may be known at each ranger district, some LAU's span multiple districts and land ownerships. The FWS is concerned that without a coordinated effort between districts, the amount of snow-compacting activities may be underestimated.
2. Monitor the effectiveness of road closures. Benefits to listed species and the habitats in which they depend will only be realized if these road closures are effective.

If you have any questions regarding FWS comments or your responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act, please contact Jeff Krupka at (509) 665-3504 or Jodi Bush at (509) 665-3507 of the Wenatchee Office.

Sincerely,



 Ken S. Berg, Manager
Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office

cc: USFWS, Western Washington Fish & Wildlife Office (P.Repp, K.Berg)
USFS, Lake Wenatchee and Leavenworth RD (B. Stoehr, H. Murphy)
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WDFW, Region 3