

Tamarack Backcountry Skiing Proposal DN & FONSI Supplemental Information Report (SIR)

1.1 Introduction

The Tamarack Backcountry Skiing Proposal is located roughly 10 miles northwest of Cascade, Idaho on lands administered by the Boise National Forest directly to the north and south of state land currently leased by Tamarack Resort (Figure 1). The project area includes an estimated 6,989 acres of National Forest System lands (Figure 2). The effects of the project were analyzed in the fall and winter of 2005 and the results of that analysis documented in an EA.

On December 16, 2005, Richard A. Smith, Boise National Forest Supervisor, signed the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impacts (DN & FONSI) for the project. The selected alternative (**Alternative C, Response to Snowmobile Opportunities with Modifications**) included granting a five-year special use permit, authorizing the activities associated with that permit, design features, a Forest Plan amendment, and modifications of Alternative C as described in the EA.

Three appeals of the decision were received, one of which was eventually withdrawn. In early February of 2006 the Appeal Deciding Officer affirmed the Forest Supervisor on all appeal points.

2.1 Purpose of this Supplemental Information Report (SIR)

CEQ NEPA requirements (40 CFR 1502.9(c)) and Forest Service NEPA implementing procedures (FSH 1909.15, Section 18) address review and documentation of new information or changed circumstances received after a decision has been made. Specifically, FSH 1909.15, Section 18.1 states *"If new information or changed circumstances relating to the environmental impacts of a proposed action come to the attention of the responsible official after a decision has been made and prior to completion of the approved program or project, the responsible official must review the information carefully to determine its importance. If, after an interdisciplinary review and consideration of new information within the context of the overall program or project, the responsible official determines that a correction, supplement, or revision to an environmental document is not necessary, implementation should continue. Document the results of the interdisciplinary review in the appropriate program or project file."*

Relative to projects that have been documented in an EA and Finding of No Significant Impacts, Section 18.4 states *"Revise an EA if the interdisciplinary review of new information or changed circumstances indicates that changes in the EA are needed to address environmental concerns that have a bearing on the action or its impacts."*

In the spring of 2006, prior to implementation of the decision, Tamarack Resort requested an extension of the permitted operating season. Specifically, the proponent requested that Design Feature #7 on page 5 of the DN & FONSI, which prohibits guided skiing, snowboarding, and/or snowshoeing trips outside of the period of December 1 to March 30 be modified to read: *"7) Grooming of the alternate snowmobile route will not be allowed outside of the period of December 1 to March 30. In addition, snowmobile use of the alternate snowmobile route will not be allowed after March 30. Guided skiing, snowboarding, and/or snowshoeing trips will not be allowed outside of the period of December 1 to May 31."*

In addition, Tamarack Resort has requested permission to extend the approved snow cat route leading into the Lone Tree East Glades roughly 0.5 miles to the east, thereby connecting this snow cat route to the #436C road (Figure 3).

Given the purpose and need for the original project and the new information/changed circumstances, this Supplemental Information Report (SIR) has been prepared to determine:

- 1) Would extending the permitted operating season and extending the approved snow cat route result in meaningfully different effects than identified in the original analysis, and;
- 2) Would the associated effects represent significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and would they have a bearing on decisions made in the December 16th, 2005 DN & FONSI?

3.1 New Information/Changed Circumstances

As discussed above, the changed circumstances being addressed in this analysis consist of extension of the permitted operating season for guided skiing, snowboarding, and/or snowshoeing trips from March 30 to the later date of May 31, and extending the approved snow cat route leading into the Lone Tree East Glades roughly 0.5 miles to the east to the #436C road. All other aspects of the decision stipulated in the December 16th 2005 DN & FONSI would remain unchanged.

4.1 Environmental Effects Resulting from Changed Circumstances

This section of the document summarizes the effects of the December 16th 2005 decision on the various resources, and discloses what, if any, additional effects would be expected if the operating season were extended to May 31, and if the snow cat route were extended 0.5 miles to the #436C road.

4.1.1 Comparison of Environmental Effects

4.1.1.1 Vegetation – Extending the operating season for guided skiing, snowboarding, and/or snowshoeing trips from March 30 to May 31 would not result in effects on vegetation different from those portrayed in the EA. Nor would extending the snow cat route to the #436C road result in effects on vegetation different from those portrayed in the EA. These changed circumstances would have no measurable effect on the quantity, quality, or distribution of vegetation in the project area.

4.1.1.2 Roadless Resource – Extension of the operating season and extension of the snow cat route would not result in development of any portion of the Poison Creek IRA. This IRA, in its entirety, would remain suitable for wilderness designation by Congress. In comparison to the effects of the decision, overall opportunities for solitude during the winter months would continue to be slightly enhanced for a five-year period with the reduction of snowmobile use in the IRA, while opportunities for remoteness and primitive recreation during this five-year period would continue to be diminished with the existence and use of snow cat routes in the interior of the IRA. In summary, the changed circumstances would not result in effects measurably different from those disclosed in the EA.

4.1.1.3 Recreation – Given the nature and timing of proposed activities (i.e. over-snow), extending the operating season and extension of the snow cat route would not have any direct or indirect effects on recreational uses or opportunities during the snow-free season. Extending the operating season and extending the snow cat route to the #436C road would provide more opportunities for guided backcountry skiing, snowboarding, and snowshoeing within the 5,054 acre special use area and may in fact increase the total number of annual visitors. However, based on the number of clients reported by Tamarack Resort for the period of December 2006 through February of 2007, the total number of annual visitors would not be expected to exceed that projected in the EA. Relative to the undesirable impacts on snowmobilers, these changed circumstances would not result in any restrictions or impacts beyond those already disclosed in the EA.

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