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Spring Style 09

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TSWEEKLY POLL

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A Line in the Snow: Factions of Central Oregon's outdoor community oppose a new snow park

User Rating: / 4

Poor Best

Written by Mike Bookey
Wednesday, 04 March 2009

Piled in a binder at the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District office are more than 700 letters and printed e-mails. They come from a range of different folks: snowmobilers, cross country skiers, snowshoers, backcountry ski enthusiasts and others. While the writers' backgrounds vary, the subject matter does not.

Each of these writings is a comment on the proposed Kapka Butte Sno-park, a parking facility that would include 70 spots for trailers and 40 additional slots for other vehicles near the Forest Road 45 cutoff (to Sunriver) from the Cascade Lakes Highway. The intent of the proposed park, which is being built by the U.S. Forest Service, is to create more space for higher-elevation recreation in addition to the Dutchman Flat Sno-park – something that has been in discussion for almost 15 years. Both motorized and non-motorized users, many of whom wrote letters, say that there is a need for more parking in the heavily used recreation, but that the Kapka Butte project, as it currently exists, is not the answer.

Marv Lang, a recreation forester with the Forest Service says that although the public comments period closed in early February, a draft for the \$500,000-plus project isn't likely to hit the streets until September or October. In short, Lang says the driving notion behind the project is one that's common in the arena of public recreation: provide something for everyone. And in this case, "everyone" ranges from snowmobilers to backcountry skiers to snowshoers and many others.

"The one thing that most everybody agrees on is that we need a new snow park and one at a higher elevation than what we have at Wanoga and Swampy or Meissner with better snow conditions," Lang says.

A higher elevation snow park, Lang says, allows for recreation during both the early and late sections of the winter and often means more and better snow throughout the season. Currently, Dutchman is the hotspot for higher elevation recreation, especially snowmobiling, and the heavy use has led to a parking shortage. This leads to parking in chain-up areas on the side of the highway, a practice that in addition to being illegal, is also potentially dangerous, according to local skiers and snowmobilers.

"The goal has always been to do something away from Dutchman to pull that congestion away from there. The truth is that people can do a lot of different things out of Kapka," Lang says.

The groups speaking out most vocally are most easily split into two factions: snowmobilers and those who participate in non-motorized winter sports (backcountry skiers, snowshoers, cross country skiers, etc). But the party lines have been drawn even more specifically within these camps with clubs rallying support for their respective cause. The Bend Backcountry Alliance and the Moon Country Sno-Mobilers don't have much in common, other than that both groups advocated on their websites for people to write the Forest Service arguing that the plan for the construction of Kapka Butte, as it currently exists, should not go forward.

On the surface, the opposition from both of these groups seems counterintuitive. After all, both user groups suffer from the overcrowding at Dutchman. But their respective protests are rooted in a concern over who gets to use what areas with both groups under the impression that Kapka would hurt their interests. In other words, the discussion isn't restricted to the parking lot.

The following was posted on the website for Moon Country Sno-Mobilers, a club with a membership of about 100 families, in the "Legal Action" section: Bottom Line is the Kapka plan is flawed and will only lead to the Back Country Skiers pushing harder for the closure of Dutchman Snow Park. The best passable outcome would be to enlarge Dutchman Snow Park and then ALL USERS would benefit.



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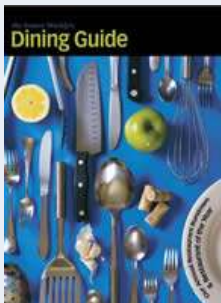
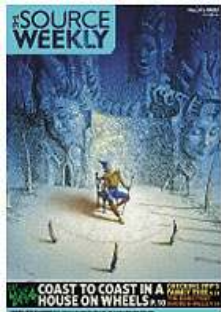
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Over on the Bend Backcountry Alliance blog, there was a similar call to arms: ...we believe that any proposal for increased motorized access in the Century Drive corridor must be balanced by equitable accommodations for non-motorized users. Therefore, we strongly oppose the construction of the Kapka Butte Sno-Park.

Both sites went on to provide talking points for letter writers to include in their comments to the Forest Service. And apparently, if the mountainous stack of comments is any evidence, this method was ultimately successful in encouraging people to submit their concerns to the Forest Service. Erik Johnson of the Bend Backcountry Alliance estimates that the efforts of his group generated some 200 comments.

Johnson says that Kapka and its 110 total proposed parking spots would lead to a significant influx in snowmobiles to the area.

"Accommodations for 70 [trailers] is a lot of snowmobiles and there's nothing to say that those other 40 slots wouldn't also be occupied by snowmobilers. In a nutshell, our view is that you can't add more motorized users without balancing it out with non-motorized opportunities," Johnson says.

Dale Neubauer of Wild Wilderness, a Bend-based organization with a membership of around 1,000, is an admitted fan of the combustion engine ("I eat, drink and breathe horsepower," says the owner of two Harleys) but is a backcountry skier who fears that Kapka, while listed at 70 trailer spaces, could ultimately fit up to 125 trailers. Such an increase in motorized activity in the area makes the idea of "mixed use" less realistic. Neubauer also says that Kapka is presented as a parking solution, and doesn't look as much at what happens once people leave the parking lot.

"[The Forest Service] needs to shift away from the belief that multiple use equates to shared use. Whether it's canoes and jet skis or cross country skiers and snowmobiles, the vast majority of non-motorized users need space and distance from these machines," Neubauer says.

Snowmobilers, or at least those who follow along the lines of Moon Country Sno-Mobilers, feel that an expansion of the existing Dutchman Flat Sno Park is the most effective solution. Ben Hansen is the founder of H2oregon.com, a site that hosts web forums focused mainly on snowmobiling. The site featured the talking points presented by Moon Country and also announced a raffle for a discount certificate to a snowmobiling apparel store for those who had written letters to the Forest Service.

"I would like to see an expanded Dutchman whether you build or don't build anything else," Hansen says.

Hansen, like others who post on his web forums, feels that parking in Kapka would make it more difficult to access the terrain snowmobilers frequent because it would require riders to trek down the road where they could cross under the highway before heading up to Dutchman.

Lang, however, says that a snowmobiler could make it back to Dutchman in 15 minutes, or 10 "on a good day."

One of the underlying issues is an overall increase in winter users along Cascade Lakes Highway. With snowmobiles becoming increasingly popular (not to mention lighter and more powerful) in the past decade, the sport has grown nationally as well as in Central Oregon. In the process the sport has become another cog in the wheels of the local economy. There's also been an increase in non-motorized winter sports. Lang says that snowshoeing in our area has nearly quadrupled in the past five to 10 years.

With snowmobiles and non-motorized users converging on the same areas – as should be expected, considering our region's reputation as a bastion for winter sports – there is bound to be some conflict.

"It's cordial, but it's clear that there's two primary sides to the issue. The motorized vs. non-motorized groups," Lang says.

Larry Riser, president of the Moon Country Sno-Mobilers, says he hasn't seen much conflict out on the trails between the two factions.

"In my 20 some years, I've never had a confrontation with a skier," says the 73-year-old Riser, who cross-country skied in his younger years.

But Hansen says, while he might not see conflict out in the snow, that might not be the case for his non-motorized counterparts.

"It just happens to depend on your definition of 'conflict.' Some people might think that if you hear or see a snowmobile, that's a conflict," Hansen says.

While there remains half a year for the Forest Service to come to a conclusion of what to do at Kapka, Lang remains optimistic about the future of the snow park. But he also seems to zero in on the crux of the problem surrounding Kapka – or at least the one that these two prolific letter-writing factions seem to be focusing on.

"We want to look at a bigger picture to see where is it really appropriate to share and where is it appropriate to segregate? It's a larger issue about allocations," Lang says.

Comments (13) >>

Segregate & Allocate said:

Something that should be considered if it isn't already is an adjustment to the Sno-Park permit system. Currently only vehicles are required to have a Sno-Park permit to park at any designated Sno-Park but not trailers. Given that trailers - some snowmobile trailers are the length of two average-sized vehicles - take up parking space that people occupied vehicles could, it only makes common sense that trailers should also be required to have Sno-Park permits based on their length. This way the folks that use the available parking pay an amount based on their usage. So simple. And this approach would provide funds to build and maintain the Sno-Parks for all users. This idea is such a no-brainer it makes one wonder why the Forest Service hasn't implemented it long ago. (OK, now watch as the snowmobiler

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crowd start whining. Hey, if you can afford one or more snowmobiles, accessories and a trailer to haul your machines you can surely afford to pay for the parking space you use.)

March 05, 2009

Deschutes said:

In some ways this is already indirectly done through trailer registrations. However, I would not have a problem with something like that, IF the money was really used to build/improve Sno-Parks. I don't think you will find many snowmobilers that have a problem with paying fees to support the sport. Experience shows that fees are not always used in the best interest of winter users.

March 05, 2009

Susie said:

Build it and they will come. It does not matter if it is a skier or snowmobiler, our area is a destination area that highly promoted. The ratio of non-motorized to motorized is the same as it was in 1970, but snowmobilers can access areas now that were difficult before. Skiers can utilize Mt. Bachelor parking but I think they need to pay for a spot, which is no different than snowmobilers buying an extra sno-park permit.

March 05, 2009

oregonnative said:

Snowmobilers might be willing to pay extra for trailer parking, but what you didn't point out is that there are sno-parks where snowmobilers are not allowed to park. Non motorized users can park in ANY sno-park in Oregon. However, that right is not shared with snowmobilers. So, before you recommend a solution that involves more cost for access from one user community, be sure you understand that all users are not created equal.

March 05, 2009

Nils Kristiansen said:

On the matter of snow park permits for trailers the extra \$20 per year is not going to hurt that much. That being said I don't know where on my trailer I would put the permit so it would have to be a different color and join the car permit in the window. Charging by the length will be counterproductive and cost more money to document and enforce than it would take in. I pay more for the trailer license than my car and it gets less than 200 miles per year.

On the matter of parking, I think expanding Dutchman is the best plan and I would venture to say would cost less per space than Kapka. Last time I was at Dutchman most of the perpendicular spots were taken up by single cars leaving only a few spots for parallel parking for snowmobile trailers. I think the rule should be the opposite with skier cars parked toward Tumalo mntn and trailer parked diagonally. With the expansion around the butte and drive through spots like at Wanoga everyone would benefit. When I climb with my skins and Tele back down the best terrain is on the West side and drops you down on Duchman with a long trek back to parking. With head in parking for cars like at Meisner and a drive through for snowmobile trailers, it should please every one except those that hate the sound of motors except when they need to be rescued, then the sound of Search and Rescue on their snowmobiles is welcome.

It is a fact that as a group snowmobile riders are not it shape like skiers and a ride to Elk Lake is a nice outing for many. Elk Lake runs a groomer and so does the Snowmobile Clubs. I see skiers taking advantage of the groomed trails and no groaning and moaning from the snowmobiles as the slow down to show courtesy.

March 05, 2009

Nils Kristiansen said:

Expand Dutchman and please everyone. Less wasted time and gas on washboard trails. With cars parking head in and vehicles with trailers parking diagonal like at Wanoga we would all benefit.

March 05, 2009

Dave L said:

I feel this article was done in a fairly balanced fashion. Thank you for that. What I find interesting is that right off the bat someone has to come up with a not so well thought out plan to punish the biggest user group. Guess someone has to pay...wait a minute, we already do pay more.

Last week it was user conflicts between the groups and when the real facts came out a "Conflict" was determined to be "seeing, hearing, or seeing the tracks left behind by a snowmobile". Guess some people just do not like to share. I hope in the near future we can come up with a plan that includes ALL users and expands the existing Dutchman snow park.

March 05, 2009

DOUG said:

SOME OF THE DAY USE PEOPLE WHO PARK IN THE PARKING LOT USED BY ALL, PARK SO POORLY THAT ONE CAR USES ENOUGH SPACE TO PARK MORE TRAILERS, AND I FEEL SOME OF THEM DO IT ON PURPOSE JUST TO BE INCONSIDERATE OR POSSIBLY THEY REALLY CANT FIGURE IT OUT.

March 05, 2009

Dan T. said:

I think that having a non-motorized use are in central oregon is a great idea. I can't believe no one thought of it before...Oh wait they did, it's called wilderness!!! If it bothers people so much to share an area with motorized users then go into the wilderness.

March 05, 2009

ELECTRIC said:

The snowmobile industry is leaning towards all four stroke motors by a year in the future. In addition some companies are now making electric snowmobiles that are silent and make no noise at all.

The big issue is whether or not we can share the great place we live in.

In addition I would like to see some covered parking for those of us that have a sled to keep it locked up at the area where I use it, instead of burning gas to and from Bend.

All skiers should go out and rent sleds for a day, and all snowmobilers should go ski for a day so we can have some harmony in our community and get over the ones that get high on the two stroke exhaust and the ones in nature getting all high on the hippie cabbage and talking about how they want to breath fresh air????? I do not get the point....hike in ten miles for fresh air and then suck in a few bong loads of carcinogenic smoke, deliberately holding it in your lungs for the max effect to stand and cough for two minutes as if you were dying?

So lets all get along. There really is not much difference between the two extreme examples of enjoying the wilderness.

Open up the wilderness areas to both and let the Darwin Awards weed out the ones we both dislike.

March 05, 2009

\$20 for trailers to build..wha said:

you have to be kidding if you think that \$20 fee for trailers would do anything more than pay for a few plow jobs of a parking lot. even if you have 1000 trailers registered and you gave all of that money toward a park, that would create enough money to maybe clear the land and level it out for a small parking lot. where is the other \$100-200k going to come from to actually do the construction??? those concrete bathrooms alone are like 20k+. huh????

March 05, 2009

Jacob said:

Sometimes the best solution is to do nothing. If you want a spot at Dutchman to sled or ski...get up early. Otherwise sleds park at Wanoga and skiers park at Mt B. Start exploring other areas and spread the users out...Quit fighting over the same small area.

March 10, 2009

Blackcloud said:

Your ilk in Bend deserve all it has coming. Folks dieing in war, others loosing their life savings and homes, and Bend, well Bend mental masturbates over a fucking pile of snow. But it is good to know their are constants in the universe. There will always be assholes.

March 10, 2009

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