



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mt. Hood
National Forest

Hood River Ranger District
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File Code: 1950/2720

Date: April 7, 2008

To All Parties Interested in Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Area Management

Hello:

I am writing you this scoping letter to solicit your thoughts and comments on a proposed development by Mt. Hood Meadows.

Mt Hood Meadows and Forest Service personnel have determined that the existing delivery system for avalanche control explosives is inadequate. The Ski Patrol has been operating at great risk of injury delivering hand charges to the area. The avalauncher currently in use has a short range, is inaccurate in adverse weather conditions, and has a high dud rate. Backcountry skiers and lift skiers who violate closures are at risk from avalanches that can travel many thousands of feet down the canyon. Mt. Hood Meadows and Forest Service experts have determined the best way to improve employee and public safety is to use a 105mm M101 howitzer for avalanche control in those areas where current methods are ineffective or place employees at risk. The howitzers are acquired on loan from the US Army. Mt Hood Meadows would fund the reconditioning of the howitzer as well as a replacement unit. Avalanche control including the use of explosives is a current ongoing activity that was included as part of the environmental analysis for the ski area's current Master Plan. The Master Plan requires Mt. Hood Meadows to include avalanche prevention and control measures as part of their annual Operations Plan which looks at what best provides for public and employee safety.

The howitzer would require a building to provide munitions storage in the first floor magazine and a garage on the second floor where the howitzer would be stored and operated. The decision on where to locate and how to construct this building is subject to environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The environmental analysis for these construction activities will be undertaken by an interdisciplinary team and documented in a project file. If it is determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist (as defined in the Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook, FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30), the proposed project may be documented in a Decision Memo.

The proposal from Mt Hood Meadows is to construct a building approximately 30 feet by 30 feet in size, with potential disturbed area of 50 feet by 50 feet to house new avalanche control equipment. The proposed location of the building is on Shooting Star Ridge 1,130 feet from the top of the lift. Access to the site would be provided by a 600 foot long temporary road during construction. During construction Mt Hood Meadows would install sediment fence and vegetation protection barriers, excavate for footings, place gravel sub grade, pour concrete, erect the building and then decommission the temporary road. Electricity for lighting would be



supplied by batteries charged by a solar panel, with a generator backup, to avoid the need to install a power line.

A loader, excavator, dozer, compactor, fork lift, and concrete truck would be used during construction. Erosion control would be accomplished using jute matting and silt fencing. Revegetation would be from native seed and plugs from the surrounding area. A capillary bed may be used to preserve small plants that would be removed from the construction site for later replanting around the building. Several small saplings and shrubs would be removed within the construction site, possibly including 2-3 small white bark pine saplings within the footprint of the building.

The project is approximately 1,510 feet from the Timberline trail, 7,000 feet from Gnarl Ridge and 6750 feet from the Umbrella Falls trail. The proposed building could be seen from the Timberline trail by hikers in the summer, but as proposed would meet or exceed the visual quality objective of Modification as prescribed in the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan (as amended).

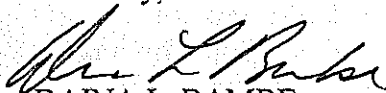
Approximately 8,000 square feet of total disturbance would occur with the project, including the temporary road. Some of this area has been previously disturbed during ski run construction and boundary post installation.

No specific concerns associated with wildlife habitat, aquatic resources, botanical species and cultural resources were noted for the proposed project area in the Mt Hood Meadows Landscape Analysis and Design completed in 1998 with the participation of an interdisciplinary team.

Based on the lack of extraordinary circumstances, I anticipate that this decision will be documented as a categorical exclusion [category 31.2 (3)] To ensure that public and ski area employee safety can be improved in the 2008/09 ski season the building would need to be designed and installed this summer. So that the public may be more involved in the process I will have a draft decision memo and project analysis available for review and comment by those who have expressed interest in the project. I anticipate that my final decision will be issued in mid June 2008. **I would like to have any comments or thoughts you have about this proposed building by April 30, 2008.**

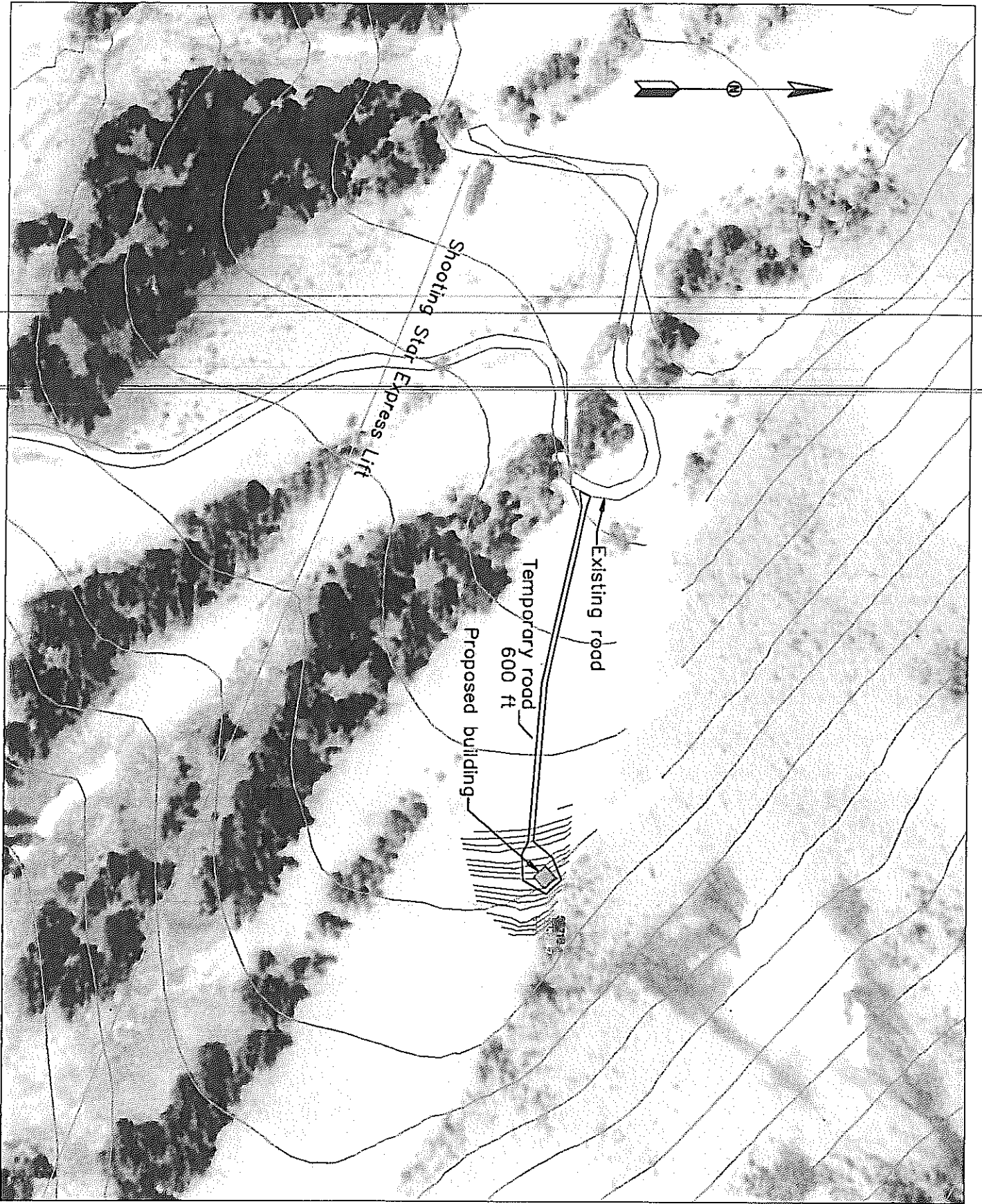
Please direct your comments to Recreation Manager Kevin Slagle at this office or via comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood-hoodriver@fs.fed.us in a format such as an email message, or a plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or a word document (.doc). For more information contact Kevin at 541-352-6002x605 or kslagle@fs.fed.us. You certainly can contact him prior to April 30th if you have any questions about the project.

Sincerely,



DAINA L. BAMBE

District Ranger



Mt Hood Meadows Howitzer Building 1" = 200' 04/06/08