

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and  
Gunnison National Forests

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Date: APR 25 1996

EDWARD CALLAWAY  
CBMR  
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Dear Edward:

With this letter I would like to communicate to you three important areas of concern I have regarding the analysis and decision process used by the Forest Service for development proposals at Crested Butte Mountain Resort. These three areas are: 1) the importance of local sentiment in the determination of public interest, and therefore in my eventual decision relating to your proposals, 2) the current local sentiment I am hearing regarding development of Snodgrass, and 3) the decisions to be made through this analysis. I will address each in turn, here.

1). The first question I wish to address is, "How does the sentiment of the local community weigh in my decision making?"

We have been asked this question several times throughout the process. Our answer consistently has been, and still is, that there is no formula. We are directed by law to provide goods and services (which includes downhill skiing opportunities) to the American public in a manner that is environmentally and socially acceptable and in a manner which best serves the public interest. I am delegated considerable discretion to determine appropriate uses of National Forest lands in accordance with these objectives. Finding the decision that truly does serve the best public interest is my greatest challenge. I must fairly weigh the value to a broader National public interest along with the effects that development on Snodgrass would have locally. The will of the people who live in Gunnison County will be a very important factor in making these decisions. Support from local elected officials will be one very important measure of this community will.

I know that you are well aware of the desire of the Forest Service to make decisions that are consistent with the visions that local communities have for themselves. This was a theme of the Forest Service sponsored workshop entitled "Boom in Mountain Living" at Keystone last year. This was also a theme of the Forest Service "Ski NEPA" session you attended in Denver. Part of our message at public meetings has been to strongly encourage the community and the ski company work together to develop a common vision for the future, including an appropriate level of development for the ski area.

2) The second concern is my understanding of the local sentiment relating to Snodgrass proposals. I know you are aware that there has been vocal objection to the concept of developing Snodgrass. This has been observed in our own scoping, in the County's public involvement process, by the High Country Citizen's Alliance and by others in the local press. Much of the opposition to Snodgrass is heart felt and sincere, reflecting real peoples valid concerns for the quality of their lives. These are things that I must take very seriously as I consider the decisions before me.

I have also been made aware of concerns in the community over the state of the Crested Butte economy. Your ski area has not enjoyed the paid skier use you would like this year or last. Local business, which is driven in large part by skier visitation, is affected. These are serious considerations for the long term viability of the ski area and the community, and consequently for the decisions about what to authorize at the ski area. It seems to me to be in the best interest of both CBMR and the community to find a development package that fills a niche in the ski market that, along with other parts of the local economy, is successful and sustainable, and acceptable to the people who live here.

These are all important considerations in this decision process. It is my hope and my intention that the analysis process we have embarked upon will provide good information upon which to base discussion for everyone concerned.

3) The third subject of discussion is in the area of the actual decisions to be made through this process.

I find now that there are issues which have presented themselves in the early phase of the environmental analysis which are substantial, which require serious study and consideration, and which could in fact lead to partial, or even complete, denial of authorization to develop Snodgrass. These include on-site effects relating to geologic hazard, avalanche hazard, and wetlands. Equally, if not more importantly, are the off site effects on lifestyles, local culture, economy, transportation, and overall growth issues in the County. All of these things fall within the purview of the "environmental analysis" which I am required to consider in reviewing previously made, but not implemented decisions.

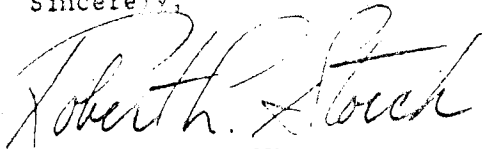
It is my interpretation of the NEPA regulations found at 40 CFR 1500 that I am obligated, if presented with new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns, to reconsider the decision allocating Snodgrass to ski development in light of new information. The potential impacts to the community of Crested Butte, the Upper East River Valley, and Gunnison County that I have mentioned above clearly fall within this category of new circumstances and information. The 1982 EA used to support the decision to allocate Snodgrass to ski development did not adequately address these issues. That document could not have considered these matters in light of current day circumstances, or to the current standards of Federal laws and regulations by which I am guided in deciding the appropriate use for these public lands. The 1982 EA, while sufficient in terms of the requirements and standards in place in 1982, is not an adequate environmental analysis today.

In summary, Edward, I do have a sense of obligation to you as regards your Snodgrass proposals, based on prior approvals, and the broad allocation

decisions made in Plans. However, I have a higher level of obligation and commitment (as directed by law and regulation) to review the decision to allocate Snodgrass to skiing in light of current circumstances, and to seek and serve the highest public interest for the use of the public lands in question. You must be aware that I consider the issues being raised in the community to be valid, and that I will place considerable weight on them at decision time. I do believe that the analysis and NEPA process we have begun offers opportunity to fairly and objectively explore the real effects of developing Snodgrass, and to compare them with the effects of not developing Snodgrass, so that all can have a factual basis for discussion. The dialog that can occur between CBMR and the community over the next year may well lead to a better understanding by the community of all ramifications and a better understanding by myself of the community's concerns. I am listening and will continue to work with both you and the community. I remain committed to conducting a fair and impartial analysis of all effects of development to a level of detail sufficient to support a good and fair decision in the end.

If I can answer any questions for you, or be of assistance as you consider these circumstances, please do not hesitate to call on me.

Sincerely,



ROBERT L. STORCH  
Forest Supervisor

cc:

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200 East Virginia  
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Crested Butte Chronicle and Pilot  
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Crested Butte, CO 81224

Gunnison Country Times  
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