

Michelle Webb

From: Sell, Stephanie K (DFG) [stephanie.sell@alaska.gov]
Sent: Thursday, March 06, 2014 1:00 PM
To: Stephanie Scott
Cc: DG_Assembly; news@khns.org; Michelle Webb; Scott Sundberg; nick@seaba-heli.com; Scott, Ryan (DFG)
Subject: RE: ADFG comments on SEABA heliskiing expansion

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Categories: Agenda Business

Dear Mayor Scott,

Thank you for your response to my comments I'll try to address your additional comments/questions the best I can.

I did not personally participate in all the previous heliski map committee meetings last summer so I can not address whether ADFG was involved in all of them, however I believe Ryan Scott participated in the discussions and sometimes called in on his cell phone. I talked to him about the areas of consideration and he said he recalls talking about Four Winds and the Kelsall area, but does not recall much about Haska Creek and Pyramid Harbor. He recalls mentioning that we had marked goats in the Four Winds area but that we did not have any survey information prior to September of 2013, which I have provided that data to the Assembly in my comments.

We do not feel that anyone disregarded our comments about wildlife, we are simply sharing the information we obtained about goats in the fall of 2013; information we did not have in previous heliski map committee meetings. As we've stated before, we would like to see the research project completed before much expansion occurs in the skiing areas. If the Assembly moves to authorize the areas proposed we felt it was important to provide the information we had to help inform interested parties.

To address your technical questions there was only one survey conducted in the Four Winds area and that was the data from September of 2013, which was provided. We can try to get the Haska Creek/Pyramid Valley data from a survey conducted in 2011, however it is not likely we can get that data before the assembly meeting due to field schedules, state office moves, etc. We do not think this winter is necessarily severe, however the current snowfall received in the Haines area as of last month is higher than the total snow fall in the winter of 2012. Similarly, December 2013's snowfall (92") was the highest December snowfall on record for more than 10 years; more than doubling the amount of snow we had in each of the last 4 Decembers. That being said, heavy snowfall within short periods of time can negatively impact mountain goat and other wildlife. Additionally, while we might think this winter weather has been fairly mild we are not done with our winter and we do not know what March and April might bring.

Neither Ryan nor I have approached any heliskiing operators about sharing GPS data, however we need to keep in mind that we do not have the GPS data back or analyzed for goats with collars. Ryan had a conversation with George Campbell recently to discuss a lot of the topics we are talking about now. We conducted a telemetry survey last week or so, which we told George once the data is analyzed it will provide an opportunity to share information on a small scale. We will know after analysis where the goats are hanging out this winter, and if we have skiing and landing data we can compare them and see if there is any overlap with the industry and mountain goats. In the long term we hope that there will be opportunities to review both mountain goat and heliskiing location information, and that this data will be used in the heliskiing map decision process.

We think moving the date back to April 1st is an excellent idea and was also a suggestion made by George and we fully support it. Any buffer provided to goats during this stressful period is beneficial, and we appreciate the suggestion.

I hope this provides answers to some of your questions you had. Unfortunately, I will be out of the office starting mid-afternoon today until next Wednesday at which time Ryan should be available to provide further assistance if needed. I have cc'd him on this email.

Cheers

Stephanie K. Sell

Wildlife Biologist II

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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From: Stephanie Scott [mailto:sscott@haines.ak.us]

Sent: Thursday, March 06, 2014 8:09 AM

To: Sell, Stephanie K (DFG)

Cc: DG_Assembly; news@khns.org; Michelle Webb; Scott Sundberg; nick@seaba-heli.com

Subject: ADFG comments on SEABA heliskiing expansion

Dear Stephanie,

Thank you for the comment on the application for a special permit to open certain areas in the Haines Borough to heliskiing for a competition. The areas are Pyramid Harbor, Haska Bowl, Four Winds, and Takin Ridge - none of which are included in the present 2014 map of areas open to heliskiing.

I am a little confused because I do not recall that ADF&G raised any objection to the inclusion of Haska Bowl, Pyramid Harbor, and Four Winds during the 2013 heliski map committee meetings. ADF&G was fully involved in all the meetings the committee held last summer to determine the map. I attended every single session and I will attest to the fact that ADF&G was included as a constant participant, if not formal ex officio member. Please feel free to correct me if you believe that my recall is inaccurate.

The Assembly removed Haska Creek and Pyramid Harbor during the hearing for the approval of the 2013 map committee's recommendations because 2 residents stated that they were disproportionately impacted by the noise from the helicopters. One resident complained of the noise in the North Winds area and that area was withdrawn as well by the Assembly. Wildlife was never discussed. Takin Ridge area depended upon approval by the Chilkat Indian Village Council. Approval was sought; approval was denied and the area remained off-limits. The Village cited wildlife concerns and cultural concerns.

I understand that ADF&G is saying clearly now that Pyramid Harbor, Haska Bowl, and Four Winds should not have been included in the original map, not just for noise considerations as attested to by residents during the hearing by the Assembly, but for critical wildlife considerations as well. I want to emphasize that the 2013 Map Committee had no intention of disregarding wildlife concerns in its recommendation regarding Pyramid Harbor, Haska Bowl, and Four Winds; none were raised at the time by ADF&G.

I do have some technical questions with respect to your comment. You cite numbers of goats seen in your September 2013 aerial surveys. Is there any data you can provide that would help us know if the numbers (22 and 68 respectively for areas 1,2; and 21) are up or down? Also, you say that severe winters stress the goats. Certainly this would be true. Does this winter qualify as "severe"? Also, have you by any chance communicated with SEABA or Alaska Heliskiing regarding the runs they intend to use compared to the locations of the goats you observed? Is there any possibility of

avoiding the goats? You say that the nannies may be in the last term of pregnancy and thus stressed by that biological event as well. Would it be acceptable to conduct the competition from March 21 to April 1?

Thanks.

S

Stephanie Scott
Mayor, Haines Borough
907-766-2231 ext.30

Begin forwarded message:

From: Michelle Webb <mwebb@haines.ak.us>
Date: March 4, 2014, 9:54:30 AM AKST
To: DG_Assembly <DG_Assembly@haines.ak.us>
Cc: Stephanie Scott <sscott@haines.ak.us>, Julie Cozzi <jcozzi@haines.ak.us>
Subject: FW: ADFG comments on SEABA heliskiing expansion

Good morning,
Please see the attached comments for the State of Alaska Fish and Game. They will be included in the 3/11/14 packet.

Thank you.

Michelle L. Webb

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From: Sell, Stephanie K (DFG) [<mailto:stephanie.sell@alaska.gov>]
Sent: Tuesday, March 04, 2014 9:08 AM
To: Michelle Webb
Cc: tim mcdonough; Scott, Ryan (DFG)
Subject: ADFG comments on SEABA heliskiing expansion

Hi Michelle,

Please find attached comments from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Wildlife Management regarding SEABA's proposed expansion in areas 1,2,8,9, and 21 on the heli-skiing map. I would appreciate these comments being included in the packet for the upcoming assembly meeting.

Cheers

Stephanie K. Sell

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