

March 5, 2014

SEABA Request to Add Areas
to the Heliski Map

Mayor Scott
Assembly Members
Haines Borough

SEABA's latest request to open previously rejected areas 1, 2, 8, 9 and 21 as additions to the 2014 heliski map should be denied. The interim manager has recommended that the request for areas 8 and 9 be rejected, but that areas 1, 2 and 21 be approved for the requested time, between March 21st and April 21st, 2014.

It should be pointed out that while the interim manager's letter, and SEABA's request, refer to these areas as "previously open," these areas have in fact NEVER been approved by the borough for heliskiing. It is only accurate to refer to them as "previously open" if one is referring to the time, a decade ago, that heliskiing was not regulated. In that sense, the entire borough was "previously open."

To put this request in perspective, SEABA's on-line information claims that they have access to 1,200 square miles for skiing. <http://seaba-heli.com/about/> Assuming their calculation is accurate, that is about the size of Rhode Island, or half the size of Delaware. And it is fully half of the Haines Borough (2,344 square miles). That's 768,000 acres. They are now requesting an additional 4,000 acres.

The purported rationale for this attempt to overturn the Borough Assembly's action on the map last summer is that they want to have a photography contest. They are trying to squeeze this scheme into a provision in code designed for a one or two day event, like the Red Bull competition. And the basis for their request is that they are looking for an economic boost. According to them, the lack of snow is causing potential clients to look elsewhere. To me, this is nothing more than a blatant attempt to circumvent the code provisions for amending the map. It is a request to have the Borough dedicate yet more public resources to a private company.

Madam Mayor and Assembly Members, my bookings are down, too. What can you do for me? I have a small guest cottage (coincidentally, directly across the Chilkat River from areas 1 and 2), and the summer months are normally booked solid by now. Guests who come from the lower 48, from Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Australia generally book long in advance of travel. However, right now, I don't have a single reservation between May 25th and July 11th. I am wondering whether the assembly would please limit the number of business licenses for vacation rentals in the borough, so that I have less competition. Or grant my clients exclusive use of the Chilkat Beaches.

These requests are, of course, silly. The borough has no duty to prop up my business, especially at the expense of other businesses in town, or other residents of the borough. But SEABA's request IS to the detriment of others. Almost every one of my guests at River House remarks on the peace and quiet found there; this request

threatens that quiet. Recreational skiers often carry their skis up to Haska (area2) or the top of the Pyramid Valley (area1) to ski. (Imagine carrying your skis to the top of a mountain, only to have a helicopter full of skiers land next to you.) How many of my tax dollars go to paying for borough employees to deal with heliskiing? My business pays a special tax; commercial skiing does not. How many hours have you, members of the assembly, spent on this issue?

I submit that it is time to let SEABA make a go of it using the incredible public resources that are already granted to them. We all have a bad year now and then. Please deny their request to ski commercially in full view of my home, and my business.

I have not mentioned the wonderful wildlife resources in these areas. Others will no doubt speak to the bears that den there, and the goats and wolves that frequent the area. Let's not stress these animals any more than the winter has already done.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this issue.

Deborah Vogt