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Haines Borough Assembly
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June 27, 2016

Re: Resolution 16-06-681, SEABA Request to Amend the Heli-Ski Map

Dear Haines Borough Assembly, Mayor and Administration,

The Haines Borough Approved Heliski Area has been expanded exponentially since the State of Alaska's proposed allowable area in 2000. The original area was selected based on impacts to mountain goats, residents and non-motorized backcountry users. The current allowable area now comprises approximately 135,410 acres, more than enough terrain for the businesses that are using it. ADF&G has requested that no additional terrain be added to the map.

The Heli-Skiing businesses have had the opportunity to fully participate in the planning process since it's inception. One company will never be satisfied with boundaries and regulations. They have chosen to ignore them over the years and flaunt the regulations. It's time for all to focus on compliance and safety within the current boundaries, not expansion.

I propose that the map committee idea be discarded and that the Borough Assembly conduct a full review of the industry every five years. It will always be a struggle to find equitable representation of all stakeholders for the map committee makeup. The State and BLM have agreed to work with the Borough regarding their land interests. Manager Sosa's interpretation of case law regarding BLM lands was not a legal opinion and cannot be used to justify non-compliance.

This SEABA request came at the 11th hour and was actually received by the Borough after the due date of 5/31. The proposed Resolution does not comply with code, as the dates for the committee selection and recommendations cannot be met. The TAB board will be taking public comment and looking at Title 5 changes to the Heli-Skiing regulations over the next several months. Any changes to the map, oversight, compliance and data collection should wait until the Borough has fully vetted this process.

Heli-Skiing has consumed a great amount of our time, resources and effort over the past seventeen years. Rather than continue to battle over our differences and create yet another committee to polarize the issue, why not just let things be for a while. The industry needs to show that they can comply with the existing regulations and hopefully curtail their mounting abysmal safety record that is creating bad press.

Sincerely,
Thom Ely