

December 7, 1993

Wyo. Game and Fish Dept.
P.O. Box 67
Jackson, WY. 83001

Walt Rogers, District Ranger
Greys River Ranger District
P.O. Box 339
Afton, WY. 83110

Dear Walt,

Thank you for meeting with biologist Gary Fralick recently regarding the proposal by the City of Afton and local snowmobile club to sponsor a snowmobile hillclimb south of Dry Creek on National Forest land. It is always helpful to sit down together and discuss items of interest.

The area in question is designated as crucial winter range for mule deer and elk. Each winter several hundred mule deer, some elk and an occasional moose, use these south-facing slopes near Wickiup Knoll for foraging, thermal and security cover. Because of the lack of extensive wintering areas along the Star Valley Front, habitat types that are similar in nature to the Wickiup Knoll area are absolutely crucial to the over-winter survival of this deer population. I believe that the proposed snowmobile hillclimb in February, a period of highest physiological stress, will result in undesirable disturbance and could cause a segment of the deer population to abandon this winter range and/or possibly lead to the direct loss of deer. I feel strongly that this crucial wintering area on National Forest land should be protected from motorized use when big game animals are most vulnerable to human-caused disturbance. I believe the big-game winter range standard outlined in the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (p. 124) restricts human activity on crucial big game winter ranges from November 15-April 30. I cannot support this proposal for a snowmobile hillclimb on crucial wildlife ranges in Star Valley. At several meetings in the past two years my staff has identified the conflicts with unrestricted snowmobile use on crucial big game winter range in this area. John Newcom, Benton Smith, and Steve Vanlerberghe concurred that a problem exists and should be addressed.

A snowmobile hillclimb on this crucial winter range would, in my view, render this winter range ineffective for a significant period in late winter since the activity will continue before and after the event is staged. If your agency were to approve this hillclimb, the resulting message to the public in Star Valley could be that snowmobile use on crucial wildlife winter ranges is an activity that is approved by federal land management agencies. I am requesting that the NEPA process be implemented by the Forest Service in this issue because a significant impact is likely to occur to the wildlife resource. A thorough analysis of the alternatives and potential impacts that may occur to the wildlife and other resources on National Forest land should be conducted. The Department should be given at least 30 days, as per our Memorandum of Understanding with the Forest Service to review and respond to the issues and alternatives that your personnel have identified in the scoping process.

Best regards,



Tom Toman, Supervisor