

To Curt Moore: Teton County Planning Commission

August 26, 2011

Re: Teton Springs Heliport CUP

#### Background:

High Mountain Heli-Skiing (HMH) was established in 1974 and has operated continuously under a Special Use Permit (SUP) from the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) and Caribou-Targhee National Forest (CTNF) since 1976. We were originally granted a vast track of FS land in order to determine what viable heli-ski terrain existed and to allow enough options to make the business viable.

#### History:

Teton Valley Idaho has had a long but “silently under the radar” history of heli-skiing. The west slope of the Teton Range near Grand Targhee was part of our SUP and skied since the late 70’s. Staging areas were Grand Targhee Resort and Teton Teepee on Ski Hill Rd. This terrain was lost to Wilderness designation in 1984.

A second heli-ski business emerged in 1979 and began operating as Palisades Heli-Ski Associates, Inc. They were permitted by the CTNF and began taking skiers into the Idaho side of the Palisades Mountain Range. They used as a staging area the highway 22 roadside pullout at State Line Canyon. The two heli-ski businesses began operating separately and together and were finally merged legally and under one permit in 1986. The staging area at Stateline Canyon and the Oliver peak ski runs were removed from the permit during the 2004 EIS in order to avoid user conflicts. The Idaho Palisades have been skied continuously each year since 1980.

HMH was first contacted by principle owners and GM of Teton Springs in 2002 regarding operations from their heliport. We began operating there on a limited basis beginning early that winter of 02-03. In January of 2004, following a complaint by a Victor resident, we learned that P&Z had some issues with the use of the heliport. That summer we were assured again by principles of Teton Springs that everything had been worked out with the county and we were invited to continue to use the heliport. Operations continued each winter on a limited basis until, following another complaint by the same resident; the issue resurfaced again last winter.

#### Flight paths:

All flights in and out of Teton Springs are from the south, crossing approximately the middle of the southern resort boundary heading out and over FS land in the direction of Thompson Peak or Teton Village. FS mitigation measures of ½ mile horizontal and

vertical from a known eagle nest located in the south west corner of the property are already in place.

Flight path into the Big Hole Range is also to the south, and then following the power line west and crossing highway 31 at the base of Pine Creek pass.

Any flights, if deemed necessary, to the Driggs Airport will proceed directly up valley to the north at an elevation of not less than 2000 feet.

Number of flights and number of days:

The number of roundtrip flights on most days will be 3 in the morning during the hours of 9:30 to 10:30 and 3 in the afternoon, returning at approximately 2:30 to 3:30 pm. Some days may require one mid day refueling run.

The heli-ski operation, because of weather restrictions, is usually only able to operate about 50 days from Christmas to April 1. The use of the Teton Springs heliport will be approximately 50 to 75% of those days.

Fueling, overnight storage, customer pickups:

Fueling takes place on the east side of the cart barn access driveway from a 2000 gallon fuel truck parked at that location. There are no permanent fueling facilities.

Temporary overnight storage is at the same location where the helicopter is covered with its fitted canvas coverings and heated. There are no permanent overnight storage facilities. When the ski season has ended, everything is removed and no sign remains that it ever existed.

All customer pickups are from the open area on the east side of the hotel.

Economic impacts:

HMH has employed at least 6 residents of Teton Valley Idaho as guides and office personnel. During the season of lowest visitation, heli-skiing is driving strong winter business to Teton Springs Lodge and Spa, helping to make it a viable year round resort.

A 2007 study conducted by Heli-Ski US (The US Heli-skiing Association) found that on average, heli-skiers spend roughly 20 times as much during a weeklong ski trip than the average resort skier (on skiing, goods, lodging, and meals). The heli-ski business can help attract hundreds of such high-value guests to the Teton Valley economy each year.

HMH deals with a multitude of businesses, mostly local, including ski shops, travel agencies, food vendors, advertising and marketing business, film industry productions, automobile agencies, gas stations, communications, recreation and even pay the Forest Service 3% of our gross.

Social impacts:

For many years, HMM had under contract the only helicopter in the area during the winter months. On numerous occasions our helicopter was called on to perform Search and Rescue operations for the county. As backcountry skiing increased in the area our services were increasingly being called on for rescue to the point where it became a financial burden on the business. In 2001 the Teton County WY sheriff's office contracted their first helicopter for rescue services during the winter months. The HMM helicopter has served as a backup to that helicopter and has continued to performed rescue services as needed.

We have made our helicopter available for other private uses during non heli-skiing hours and it is the only helicopter available in the area for any such services.

Jonathan Shick and Lud Kroner  
Owners: High Mountain Heli-Skiing

To: Curt Moore, Teton County Planning Department

I am writing not only as an owner of the heli-ski business but also as an owner of two properties in Teton Valley Idaho. Conditions on the ground have totally changed since 2002 when the heliport in question was approved. Teton Valley never turned into the sprawling community that was feared at that time; likewise there will never be helicopters flying in and out non stop. In fact, it is just the opposite, people are leaving, businesses are closing and property values have decreased substantially with few buyers in the market. This heliport and our commercial use of it have now become a necessity and an asset to the resort and the community and can be argued will improve property values.

There are no other heliports in Teton Valley where our neighbor Jackson Hole has four county approved heliports. Teton Springs is exactly where a heliport should be located. It has all the elements needed to be successful with little to no impact on the community at that location. Because of our approach over the mountains to the south, we only impact very few cabins, most of which are rentals. The heli-ski operation, because of weather restrictions, is usually only able to operate on a good year about 50 days from Christmas to April 1. The use of the Teton Springs heliport will be approximately 50% to 75% of those days; 25 to 35 days out of the entire year and during the season of least visitation and occupancy.

There is a lot of precedence for a heli-ski operation and a heliport to be located within a resort community that is surrounded by residences. Those include Teton Village, WY; Snake River Sporting Club, WY; Helicopter Express, Jackson, WY; Teton County Search & Rescue, Jackson, WY; Wasatch Powder Birds in Snowbird, UT and Park City, UT; Telluride Helitrax in Telluride, CO; Sun Valley Heli-Ski Guides in Sun Valley, ID; North Cascades Heli-Ski in Mazama, WA. All are successful businesses and provide positive impacts to their communities.

We also can provide a valuable resource to the community. The only other helicopter in the area is the Teton County Wyoming Search and Rescue helicopter and it is not available for any other use. We are still occasionally used as a backup to their helicopter and continue to provide search and rescue services when called upon. We have made our helicopter available, outside of skiing hours, to those businesses and individuals that have need for one and it is often used for other purposes.

The future success of both of our businesses is tied to this CUP. Teton Springs needs winter business and HMH needs a place to operate from. There are people's jobs and livelihoods at stake and we have shown that we are bringing a significant amount of business to Teton Valley. Many of our staff live in Teton Valley and contribute to the economy and the community. Many of them you all know and they have written letters trying to preserve their jobs and way of life in Teton Valley.

The alternative of operating out of the Driggs Airport is not very desirable and would impact the valley 100 times more than where it is located at Teton Springs. The 12 miles

down valley into the Palisades Mountain Range would cross every residential community in the flight path. That path would still go right over Teton Springs and at a higher elevation it would broadcast any noise effects from a further distance, affecting a broader area. Please don't consider this as a viable alternative as we would prefer to be good neighbors and minimize our impacts as much as possible. We would even go so far as to pinpoint any residents that actually occupy homes in Teton Springs in winter, who might be concerned about our presence, so that we might mitigate any effects on them.

Thank you,

Jon Shick, High Mountain Heli-Skiing