



File Code: 2720

Date: January 14, 2014

Dear Interested Party:

The Hahns Peak- Bears Ears Ranger District of the Routt National Forest (HPBE) is initiating an outfitter-guide needs assessment to determine the public and agency need for additional authorized outfitting or guiding activities across the district and by specific sub-sets or compartments. A compartment map has been developed to help agency permit administrators and the public focus on specific geographic areas of interest and character (see web site, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/mbr/passes-permits/event-commercial>).

In 2008, the Forest Service released directives to more effectively manage the outfitter-guide program. We are following the 2008 policy which includes completing this needs assessment. We see this as an opportunity to improve management of the outfitter-guide program to better meet the needs of the public while protecting the forest/grassland resources.

The 2008 outfitter-guide policy is specified in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 2709.11) and states that an outfitter-guide permit may be issued when there is a demonstrated need for the proposed activity. Need can be assessed using varied information and criteria such as size and character of the area, market demand for specific services, existing outfitter-guide use, visitor demographics, safety and risk concerns, economic benefit, user experience (or lack thereof), user cost to become established in a specific activity or sensitivity of the area. The outcome of a needs assessment is generally an identification or recommendation of certain commercial recreation outfitter-guide opportunities that exist in specific geographic areas.

HPBE is currently in the process of drafting a needs assessment that will consist of:

- Validating existing outfitter-guide use (location and amount).
- Identifying locations where outfitter-guides are not appropriate due to existing conditions, legislation, Forest Plan direction, or other regulations.
- Gathering input from outfitter-guides, outdoor retailers, recreationists, interested public and agency personnel about the public and agency need for additional commercial recreation activities by geographic area.
- Evaluating existing and potential new outfitter-guide activities based on objectives and developed criteria.

HPBE often receives requests for new outfitter-guide permits and is interested in developing this standardized way of evaluating public need for existing and new guided opportunities. The primary focus is to assess if there are additional needs for commercial guided services on the HPBE.

However, we are also interested in public feedback regarding the scope of the existing program. We anticipate the majority of authorized use to be maintained at existing levels and will ultimately rely on the results of the assessment to determine what changes might occur in any given



management area. We'll be looking at how to manage use by activity, location, timing and season to provide quality recreation opportunities for all.

After determining the potential need for commercial guided services we will analyze compartment areas to determine the resource, social, and managerial capacity to host these activities. Determining there is a need for an activity does not necessarily mean that there is room within the HPBE to accommodate the commercial activity. Additional considerations such as the balance between public and commercial use; resource, social, and infrastructure capacities; and land management planning play a role in determining what activities can be hosted on the district. These considerations will be analyzed in a subsequent capacity analysis (Spring 2014). After determining need and capacity the district will entertain outfitter-guide proposals and, when there is competitive interest, initiate a prospectus process. All new outfitter-guide permits will be subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and require environmental analysis before any permit is approved.

Please use the following questions as prompts for providing feedback to help inform this process:

- What principle recreation activity(s) do you participate in on the HPBE? What activities do you feel need outfitter-guide services and why?
- Have you used an outfitter-guide for these or other recreation activities? If yes, how did having an outfitter-guide affect your trip?
- What are some of your "special places" on the HPBE? What guided activities do you believe are suitable in these places and why?
- Are there places that should not have any kind of outfitter-guide led activities? If so which locations and why?
- Recreationists are often looking for new and different ways to enjoy the outdoors. What trends do you anticipate?
- What future role(s) might outfitter-guides have?
- Do you have any other comments you would like to share to help us determine the public need for additional outfitters and guides on the HPBE?

Please attend an open house which will provide information about this process and a period for questions and answers on Wednesday January 29th, at 5pm. This will be held at the Forest Service office located at 925 Weiss Drive, Steamboat Springs, CO—next to the Shell gas station on the south end of town. Information can also be found on the web (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/mbr/passes-permits/event-commercial>).

To submit comments, send an email with your remarks (subject line: OG NA) to edickerman@fs.fed.us. Alternatively, mail your typed comments to: Outfitter-Guide Needs Assessment, Erica Dickerman, 925 Weiss Drive, Steamboat Springs, CO 80487.

Sincerely,



Kent Foster
Acting District Ranger

