

Sno-park priorities need to change
By Rick Sironen / Bulletin guest columnist
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The Forest Service needs to stop its wasteful spending and start to listen to the users.

Just a little history on the Dutchman and Kapka sno-parks.

In the beginning, around 2004, the Forest Service had meetings for two days to brainstorm solutions for dealing with the growing winter crowds. A group of people worked hard to develop a plan for what they felt was best for snowmobiling at the time, creating a new sno-park. In 2006, the Forest Service came up with the plan to build the new Kapka Sno-park and started the process to build it. The lack of funding for the studies, as well as controversy over the proposal, brought things to a snail's pace. It was soon discovered that the overwhelming majority of snowmobilers that looked at all the issues involved felt it was best to go another direction. This opinion was ignored and the idea of the new Kapka Sno-park was to proceed.

In 2008, the Forest Service decided again to go ahead with the new Kapka Sno-park. Many users at this time felt that Dutchman Sno-park should be expanded instead of creating new sno-park. A small group of backcountry skiers were pushing for Kapka and the closing of Dutchman to all motorized users. This group talks of conflict with motorized users, which they define as being able to see a motorized user, or see evidence that a motorized user had been there at any time, yet commercial activity is just across the street.

We feel that Dutchman Sno-park needs to be expanded for all users. The building of Kapka is a waste of public funds. This is a project that almost no one wants. To date we have over 800 signatures all from outdoor users, motorized and nonmotorized, on a petition to expand Dutchman before anything is done on Kapka. We have had meetings with the Forest Service and their opinion is that Kapka will get built and we will learn to love it.

Some of the groups that have said that Kapka will not benefit them are: The dog people, 4-wheelers, snowmobilers, backcountry skiers, and the list goes on.

The following are some more reasons to expand Dutchman Sno-Park:

1. Expansion of Dutchman will serve the most users.

2. Dutchman is a hub area already and will best serve to disperse all users into the direction they want to go.

3. Access to the high country has to go through "Lambert Crossing," which has a southern exposure that turns to dirt early and late in the season or on low snow years, which will make Kapka unusable.

4. Expand Dutchman will be the best use of public funds for all.

5. We have gathered hundreds of signatures showing support for this drive.

6. Almost 50% of the signatures are from nonmotorized users.

7. In the last five years, we have seen quite an increase in backcountry users using snowmobiles to get to the backcountry. Dutchman will serve this group better.

8. We have the backing of SAWS (Snowmobile Alliance of Western States), Elk Lake resort and many other local businesses.

9. You only need to look at the current parking problems at Dutchman to see the overcrowding. Kapka will not solve this problem; people want access to the high country.

10. Expansion of Dutchman parking will allow more users to enjoy Elk Lake Resort. Elk Lake Resort is the reason many people come to Central Oregon in the winter to enjoy the outdoors. This in turn will increase revenue for the resort, which will in turn bring more money in to the Forest Service. Remember, we are trying to help small businesses, not kill them.

11. Kapka will only be used in the winter, but an expanded Dutchman could be in use all year round by many.

Bend continually advertises itself as a winter paradise in its tourism promotions, yet high-country access is severely limited because of the small size of Dutchman Sno-park.

To read some comments we've received, go to www.ipetitions.com/petition/expanddutchman/ and click on signatures.

Kapka was born years ago, along with Ryan Ranch and other projects when no one questioned spending. You can see where this spending has taken us now. The Forest Service needs to stop this wasteful spending.

The Environmental Impact Statement on Kapka is due out sometime in April. At that time we will need your comments to stop this wasteful project, and direct their efforts to expand Dutchman Sno-park.

Dutchman Sno-park is still stuck in the '70s, when Elk Lake Resort and the local snowmobile club built it to access the resort. With 40 years of growth, you'd think we'd have an expansion, the way Mt. Bachelor did, to meet the needs of our tourism industry.

Rick Sironen lives in Bend.