



File Code: 2300

Date: November 28, 2017

Arthur Pope
Executive Director, Wilderness Report
33190 Bloomberg Road
Eugene, OR
97405

Dear Mr. Pope:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding spring ski access via Three Creek Road on the Deschutes National Forest. We appreciate your interest in protecting wilderness values and equal access to public lands. Please know that the Deschutes National Forest is committed to providing equal access to the public to all of our facilities, activities, and public lands.

I can confirm that Forest Service (FS) Road 16 is closed to motor vehicle access by the public beyond the snow gate during the winter season. The general public does have access on FS Road 16 above the gate by other means, such as snowmobile, skis, or snowshoes.

In answer to your first question: "Why do drivers of these vehicles have access to this closed area?" Without a description of the vehicles that you encountered, it is difficult to determine who the owner(s) are. It is possible that these vehicles belonged to members of the public. There is an ancillary FS Road in the vicinity that connects back to FS Road 16 above the gate. This road is closed to passenger vehicles while covered in snow. However, it is generally melted out in the spring, which allows for motor vehicle passage into the areas above the snow gate. While this is not preferred by the Forest Service, it does happen on occasion and there are currently no prohibitions for doing so.

In answer to your second question "Is this access available to other users? If so, by what process?" There is currently one authorized Outfitter and Guide (O&G) that operates winter ski huts and yurts at Three Creek Lake and along Forest Service Road 370. The main access to their facilities is along FS Road 16. The operators typically access their facilities by snowmobile, as any member of the public can do. When conditions allow, the operators are approved for limited motor vehicle access beyond the snow gate to perform essential functions of their permitted operations. Motor vehicle access beyond the gate by the O&G operators is only necessary when snow levels prohibit the use of snowmobiles, and the number of vehicles used does not typically exceed two. Rental of the O&G operated facilities and services is open to the public. However, clients of this O&G are not given motor vehicle access beyond the gate.

It is important to remember that many people access this area for many different reasons, skiing in the wilderness may be one, but others may include: general snow play, snowshoeing, front-country skiing, sledding, nature photography, or general nature exploration.



We appreciate you reporting this situation to us, and encourage you to obtain more detailed descriptions, license plate number(s), or photos, if possible, should you encounter a situation like this again. That will allow us to follow-up on the situation. This information can be sent to the Sisters Ranger District, C/o the Special Use Permit Administrator, Sommer Moyer. Sommer can also be reached at 541-549-7706 or at sommerlmoyer@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



JOHN ALLEN
Forest Supervisor

cc: Amy Tinderholt, Sommer Moyer