

THE ASPEN TIMES

Looking for equal treatment

April 4, 2006

(This letter was originally addressed to Bill Westbrook of the Aspen Ranger District.)

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is an application by PowdertothePeople.org, a nonprofit educational outreach organization recognized by the state of Colorado, for motorized access to over snow roads on public lands on Richmond Ridge above Aspen.

This is the third time in a little over a year that we have applied for a noncommercial (institutional) special use permit for motorized use on all snow access roads in the 7.1 Intermix Area, an area of our forest designated for multiple public uses. Previous applications by PowdertothePeople.org were denied on the grounds that we do not fit Forest Service criteria as an educational outreach institution. Take a look at our website and you will find that your grounds for denial are pure fiction.

We have done our research and find that the current set of administrative rules, when applied fairly, should allow PowdertothePeople.org full and equal access to the Richmond Ridge/7.1 intermix area in question. As such, we hereby request that you once again review our application for equal public access to the public lands in question.

Currently only the Aspen Skiing Co. has been granted a permit for motorized access to the area. That permit is for nonexclusive use. It is an extremely unusual precedent to award a commercial permit and deny institutional use where noncritical public lands are concerned. Moreover, the Aspen Skiing Co.'s Powder Tours pay only \$150 per year (about 9 cents per guest) for what amounts to exclusive use of our public lands. This hardly seems like equitable compensation given infrastructure needs so great that Congress is considering selling off public lands in order to balance the Forest Service budget. With all due respect, we feel our public deserves to enjoy and be treated equally to the Aspen Skiing Co. when it comes to access and enjoyment of our public lands.

In addition to review of our institutional permit request, PowdertothePeople.org is requesting your assistance with an important backcountry safety education initiative. PowdertothePeople.org is seeking a location with sustained winter snowpack on which to install a solar-powered avalanche beacon training facility similar to those found at Snowbird and Jackson Hole. Ideally, this facility would be located at the top of Aspen Mountain near access to backcountry terrain. PowdertothePeople.org may be able to finance this venture through donations and members contributions. We just need a place to put it. Your assistance in fulfilling our mission for backcountry access, safety and etiquette is greatly appreciated.

We look forward to your favorable response. Please contact me with any questions.

Mike Sladdin
President, PowdertothePeople.org
Aspen

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