

## **Bitterroot Star (MT)**

<http://www.bitterrootstar.com/2012/08/28/fs-officials-dont-understand-gordon-reese-cabin-use/>

# **FS officials don't understand Gordon Reese Cabin use**

Posted on August 28, 2012 in [Guest comment](#)

**By Tonia Bloom, Hamilton**

I have been following with great interest the controversy over the management of the Chief Joseph Pass cross-country ski area. For decades my family and I have regularly skied the well-maintained trails at Chief Joseph and have eaten our lunch and warmed ourselves in the Gordon Reese Cabin. We always do so with a feeling of gratitude towards the volunteers who contribute to our enjoyment by spending countless hours maintaining and grooming trails, providing helpful and accurate signage, shoveling paths to the outhouses and making sure they are clean and supplied with toilet paper, keeping the cabin immaculately clean and tidy, and stoking the fire and melting snow for water. If we had any doubt about it, a single night several years ago as the guests of friends who were serving as cabin hosts made clear the multiple tasks that are performed for the public by those who reserve the cabin overnight.

We try to express our gratitude by making a small financial contribution to the Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club, which provides the equipment and volunteer manpower to make this winter recreational opportunity possible for us and for the public in general. Our small donation technically qualifies us as members of this non-exclusive "club". However, we have never attended a meeting, nor have we ever tried to reserve a night stay at the cabin for ourselves. Like the vast majority of the users of the Chief Joseph facilities, our busy lives don't easily lend themselves to that extra time commitment. However, we can say without hesitation that our enjoyment of winter would be greatly diminished without the trails and the cabin.

A number of letters to the editor and editorials have touched on the public service performed by Bitterroot Cross-Country Club in creating and maintaining these facilities for free use by the public. Many have focused on the perceived lack of faith on the part of the Forest Service in proposing to change the rules of the game after so many years and after so many volunteer resources have been expended. A few have also mentioned the undeniable winter economic benefit of Chief Joseph to communities from Missoula to Dillon to Salmon. However, as the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge Forest belatedly proposes to convert the Gordon Reese Cabin into an ordinary Forest Service cabin rental, I believe they are failing to recognize a major distinction between this particular cabin and other Forest Service rental properties.

Over the years, with friends or family, I have rented and stayed at several facilities that are part of the rental program, including the Magruder Ranger House, McCart Lookout, and the Hogback Cabin and have also skied or snowshoed to the cabin on May Creek and to Hogan Cabin as a day excursion. At the rentals we had reserved and paid for, my party had an expectation of exclusive use while there. We certainly expected to clean up before we left, but we did not expect and would not have been happy to have scores of members of the public traipsing through our rental. When arriving at or passing by a rental that I had not reserved and paid for, I would not expect to enter or be invited in. Whether the facility was occupied or empty and locked I would have no expectation of being able to go inside to warm up or get out of the weather.

At the Gordon Reese Cabin at Chief Joseph the expectations are fundamentally different for both those who have reserved the facility and for the public. People who have reserved the cabin are really not so much guests as hosts. The public (at times in great numbers) comes and goes throughout the day. While those who have signed up to spend the night may have the cabin to themselves after dark, during daylight hours they share the space with dozens of skiers of all ages stopping for lunch, taking a break from single-digit temperatures, dropping off slower members of their party for an hour or more while they ski some of the harder trails, tooling up their equipment, etc., etc. On a busy day the cabin bustles with activity.

Perhaps, the officials who are proposing to so drastically change its management need to actually spend a little time at the cabin observing how the public uses the facility. Perhaps then, they would understand that the members of the public whom they are proposing to charge for spending the night are, in fact, hosts, performing a variety of tasks and sharing the space with anyone who happens by. Perhaps the Forest Service officials would understand that what they are doing is analogous to charging campground hosts for their services or volunteers for the privilege of doing trail work on the forest. Perhaps, they would understand that they are proposing to “fix” something that is decidedly not broken.