

## **Group Disappointed, not Surprised by FTBT Marathon Special Use Permit Decision**

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Kalispell, MT - A Flathead area conservation group said it was disappointed but not surprised by the July 22 decision by the Flathead National Forest to issue a Special Use Permit to Foys to Blacktail for up to 100 people to run a trail marathon from Lakeside to Kalispell via the Salish Mountains. "In fact," Swan View Coalition Chair Keith Hammer said, "the race web site states that the race was given the official go-ahead on March 15, 2019. The public comment period was a sham and the decision was predetermined." (See <https://www.ftbtraces.com/marathon>).

Nonetheless, Hammer said the public comment period did spur public debate over the issue of the Flathead endorsing commercial special use permits for activities the Flathead Forest and other agencies recommend against due to the increased risk of surprise encounters between people and bears. "Our conscience is clear," Hammer said. "We're not saying people can't trail run and ride mountain bikes on the Flathead, but we don't think the Flathead should be commercially promoting races that negate the warnings that such activities increase risk and can have grave consequences."

Hammer noted that, while MT Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks did not formally oppose the FTBT race, it did caution that "Even during planned events with numerous participants, negative bear encounters including fatalities, can and have occurred." (See [http://www.swanview.org/reports/MDFWP\\_on\\_FTBT\\_Marathon.pdf](http://www.swanview.org/reports/MDFWP_on_FTBT_Marathon.pdf)).

"We do wish the groups and businesses sponsoring these events would listen to the bear experts and not support the issuing of these race permits," Hammer said. "There are less risky ways to recognize their work and raise money without encouraging irresponsible behavior that has led to injury and death to both people and bears. The Flathead is not providing good leadership here."

"Risks and consequences are not created equal," Hammer said. "If someone drowns while whitewater rafting, the government doesn't drain the river. If someone tangles with a bear, however, too often the government kills the bear even though it was simply defending itself or its cubs."

Hammer concluded "the long-term commercial exploitation of trail running and mountain bike racing will most certainly result in more risky behavior and more bad encounters. The Forest Supervisor has made it known he intends to fully promote recreation, so we can only assume there will be permits issued for trail running and mountain bike racing in areas other than Big Mountain and Foys to Blacktail. These two recent permits sets a bad precedent for what is sure to follow."

For more background: [http://www.swanview.org/articles/whats-new/bear\\_expert\\_opposes\\_trail\\_running\\_permits/268](http://www.swanview.org/articles/whats-new/bear_expert_opposes_trail_running_permits/268)

The Foys to Blacktail Marathon Permit Decision is at [https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/111674\\_FSPLT3\\_4667532.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/111674_FSPLT3_4667532.pdf)