

**Overview of the Public Hearing on the Proposed New Birkie Start,  
Held on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Compiled by Zach Larson of Cable**

According to the Bayfield County Forestry and Parks Department's press release, "The American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation has proposed moving the start of the race from the Telemark Lodge to an area located approximately 3 miles south of Cable along Highway 63." On January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, nearly 100 people gathered in a standing-room-only public hearing to discuss the implications of this proposal.

There were several revelations that came out during the testimony, and I will provide an accounting of some of them here. Oyvind Solvang, Board President of Central Cross Country Skiing (CXC) was one of the first to speak. His testimony received raucous applause, so I will include the majority of it here. Mr. Solvang said,

"(CXC) is a non-profit which is 100% dedicated to growing the sport of cross country skiing in the Midwest. I'm also a long-term Birkie racer so I feel I'm quite tuned in to the Birkie situation. I'm quite sure I speak for a lot of Birkie skiers in terms of where they would like to have the start. I'm very passionate about the Birkie and Telemark Lodge... The Birkie has been at Telemark for 38 years and is as much a part of the branding of Telemark as the name 'Telemark' itself. To remake and bring back Telemark Resort is not an easy undertaking, so it needs everybody's support and I know the town of Cable is behind it. Announcing the possibility of a new Birkie start and the press announcing 'new Birkie start' as if its already decided is a huge blow to Telemark and can be detrimental to the success of the Resort. If the Birkie, after 38 years, votes with its feet and goes to the other start, why should anyone else believe in Telemark? There were valid reasons for the Birkie Board to seek alternatives due to miscommunication. The Birkie felt that easement through Telemark land was uncertain and they felt that access through the Telemark land was threatened.

"Based on meetings in the last 24 hours, Telemark has offered a 99-year, year-round easement for \$1 to start the Birkie at Telemark Lodge, circumvent the airport issue, circumvent the other lands by shifting the trail somewhat so that other land owners are not posing a risk. We feel that this was the problem and the problem is solved. We're very excited about this new approach. There were many things that came out of the discussion, such as a new start area that is right next to the lodge. Busses can turn around; the whole logistics are improved... I urge the members of the Bayfield County Forestry Department to show your support for Telemark so that we can change the press coverage, announcing that another start location is not an option and that the Birkie and Telemark are now on the same team."

Dick Short, a principal owner of Telemark, later noted, "This is bigger than the Birkie and this is bigger than Telemark. The Birkie needs to have the foundation where Tony Wise started it. That's the history of it... We've had positive meetings the last few days and we're trying to make it so the Birkie has permanent access not matter if the Lodge gets torn down or foreclosed or whatever happens"

Steve Kaufman, owner of Telemark Lodge, said,

“The Birkie has been at Telemark for 38 years. As Ned said, the event has grown each and every year. Why fix something that’s not broken?...For 38 years, they’ve never yet had a problem with gaining access to the trails with many different owners at Telemark. The event’s always happened. It would be like the PGA going to Pebble Beach after 100 years and saying, ‘Well, Pebble Beach might not let us come back, we better build our own golf course’ or the Indianapolis 500 to say ‘The Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which is privately owned might not let us use it, so we better build our own track.’ It would just be ludicrous for myself or any other owner to not want to embrace the American Birkebeiner.”

Yuri Gusev, Executive Director of CXC, noted,

“Our main mission at CXC is to grow the sport of Nordic skiing. Telemark and the Birkie are huge assets for the growth of the sport and of this community. In 10 days, we’ll see 170 athletes and coaches from around the world for the Paralympics coming to Telemark. Bringing this prestigious event here to Cable shows what can happen when we all work together.”

Brett Rondeau, Bayfield County Board Member, said

“Telemark is the birthplace of the American Birkebeiner. When Bill Papayak bought Telemark (in the early 1980’s), he owned the rights to the Birkie. When he sold those rights to the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation, there was one caveat that he put in there—that it will end in Telemark or start in Telemark. That was the deal. The Birkie was born here and it should stay here.”

After the hearing, one senior Board member noted, “based on what we heard tonight and the negative impact on this area where the Birkie started, my decision if we were to vote tonight would be to deny the request.” Three other Board members said they would also vote to deny it. Another Board Member said,

“I don’t feel it’s in the best interest of Bayfield County, Cable or Telemark to create a new trailhead to the south. I’d like to see both parties negotiate in good faith to come to an agreement. The people of Telemark want to keep it there, so I hope that you can come together and come up with a solution that serves the Birkie, the town of Cable and Telemark.”

You can find the documents related to the Birkie Foundation’s proposal at:

[www.telemarkerchallenge.us/Birkie\\_new\\_start.pdf](http://www.telemarkerchallenge.us/Birkie_new_start.pdf)

To express your views to the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation on this issue, call 715.634.5025 or write to [birkie@birkie.com](mailto:birkie@birkie.com).