

Decision Notice
&
Finding of No Significant Impact

Mt. Rose-Ski Tahoe Trail and Lift
Improvement Projects

Environmental Assessment
December, 2008

USDA Forest Service
Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Washoe County, Nevada

DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Background

An Environmental Assessment (EA) summarizing the analysis of proposed improvements at Mt. Rose-Ski Tahoe has been completed and distributed for review. The EA document is available for public review at the Carson Ranger District in Carson City, Nevada and at the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (HTNF) Forest Supervisor's Office in Sparks, Nevada. This decision notice documents my rationale for approval of the projects intended to improve the recreational experience at the Mt. Rose Resort. In addition, the included Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents why the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and for which an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

The Forest Service and Mt. Rose cooperatively identified the need to improve trail conditions on the Slide Mountain side of the resort and to upgrade the Ponderosa and Galena chairlifts on the Mt. Rose (private) side of the resort.

The EA documents the analysis of two alternatives – Alternative 1 No Action and Alternative 2 the Proposed Action.

Decision

Based on my review of the alternatives, I have decided to select Alternative 2, the Proposed Action with an additional requirement for the preparation of a site analysis and engineering evaluation of the approved Ponderosa/Galena lift upgrade and extension onto National Forest System (NFS) lands. Prior to final construction authorization, the Forest Service will be provided with a comparative analysis contrasting the development of the top terminal of the upgraded lift in the current location (on Mt. Rose private property) with the placement of the top terminal on NFS land. This review will detail existing and proposed ground profiles, the extent of necessary vegetation clearing and overall ground

disturbance, and existing and planned skier circulation/flow patterns. This information will be evaluated by Forest engineers and considered in the final engineering design of the lift equipment. Under this decision the terminus of the new chairlift could be located on private land with minor disturbance, to accommodate the off-load area on NFS lands.

The selected alternative includes two elements: 1) improving the trail conditions on the Slide Mountain Side of the resort on the following trails: Slide Bowl, Sunrise Bowl, Lower Bruce's Trail, Washoe Zephyr Trail, and Outlaw Trail to provide access during early season and low snow conditions, and (2) upgrading the Ponderosa and Galena fixed grip chair lifts with one high-speed, detachable chair lift on the Mt. Rose side of the resort to improve skier access and circulation on existing beginner and lower intermediate terrain served by the Ponderosa and Galena lifts. The Slide side trail improvements include 23.9 acres of spot grading on Slide Bowl, Sunrise Bowl, Lower Bruce's Trail, and Washoe Zephyr Trail; 3 acres of rock blasting on Outlaw Trail, and snowmaking installation on Sunrise Bowl. More specific details about the Slide Side trail improvement projects can be found in Chapter 2 of the EA. The lift upgrade on the Mt. Rose Side involves extending the top terminal 300 feet uphill of the existing top terminal. This moves the lift onto NFS lands within the permit area and requires approximately 1.5 acres of tree removal and associated ground disturbance for the unloading area and appropriate connections to existing trail facilities including the snowmaking network. More details about the lift upgrade on the Mt. Rose Side can be found in Chapter 2 of the EA (see Figures 8 and 9).

The selected alternative incorporates all projects analyzed in Alternative 2. The selected alternative incorporates all mitigation measures identified in Table 2 of the EA. These measures evolved from *Appendix G of 2001 Mt. Rose/Slide Mountain Facilities Improvements Proposal Environmental Assessment Volume II, April, 2003*. These measures include spot grading strategies that were developed at the resort during 2006.

The selected alternative is the logical progression of Slide Mountain ski trail improvements and Mt. Rose Side lift facility improvements. The improvements are needed to enhance the recreational experience at the resort to improve the distribution of skiers across the resort, especially during times of marginal snow conditions. Figures 2 through 9 of Chapter 2 in the EA detail the selected alternative. The projects will improve utilization of the newly proposed Slide Lodge facility and lead to a more effective and even distribution of skiers throughout the resort. Implementation of the Selective Alternative will thereby enhance the recreation experience.

My decision is based on the analysis in the EA (and associated materials) as well as input from Forest Service and resource specialists that have been involved in the analysis. The analysis is tiering the *2003 Mt. Rose-Ski Tahoe Approved Master Development Plan and Environmental Assessment for Facilities Improvements* (2003 EA). The 2003 EA analysis for certain resources is incorporated by reference due to redundancy and negligible change of the expected effects of the selected alternative. These resources include:

- Air Quality
- Geotechnical Resources
- Social and Economic Resources
- Traffic and Parking
- Wetlands and Riparian Areas

Resources analyzed for the selected alternative in Chapter III of the 2008 EA include:

- Cultural Resources
- Resort Facilities and Infrastructure
- Recreational Opportunities and Experiences
- Vegetation
- Visual Resources
- Water and Soils
- Wildlife and Fisheries

The 2003 EA also identified Tahoe Star Draba (*Draba asterophora var. asterophora*) as a species that could be impacted with the associated improvement projects at the resort. All of the projects within the selected alternative are located outside of Tahoe Star Draba habitat. A Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation for the selected alternative is provided in Appendix A.

My decision follows direction provided in the Toiyabe Forest Plan, as amended. The noxious weed management strategy, the erosion control plan, and the sensitive species habitat monitoring meet the direction of the Forest Plan.

I have determined that my decision is consistent with the Forest Plan. In addition, I have considered the following relevant acts and executive orders:

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990
- Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1978
- Clean Air Act of 1955, as amended
- Clean Water Act of 1848, as amended
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended
- Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934, as amended
- Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974
- Knudsen-Vandenburg (KV) Act of 1930, as amended
- Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended
- National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976
- National Ski Area Permit Act of 1986, as amended
- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended
- Organic Administration Act of 1897

- Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, as amended
- Protection of Wetlands Executive Order 11990

My decision, with the required mitigation measures and design criteria defined in the EA, meets all applicable laws, regulations and policies. It is also consistent with the purposes for which the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest was established and is being administered; the authorized project elements are in the public's interest.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN THE EA AND CONSIDERED IN THIS DN

In deciding which elements to implement in the selected alternative, two alternatives were considered, the No Action alternative and the Proposed Action. A summary of each alternative is presented below. A detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in Chapter II of the EA.

Alternative 1 No Action

The No Action Alternative reflects a continuation of existing management practices without changes, additions, or upgrades to the portions of the ski area operating on NFS lands. Given that no new facilities or trail improvements would occur on NFS lands under the No Action Alternative, this alternative provides a baseline for comparing the effects of the action alternative.

Alternative 2 The Proposed Action

Please see the description of the selected alternative above.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Approximately 120 Notices of Proposed Action were mailed on May 27, 2008. Interested or potentially affected members of the public, as well as local state and federal government agencies were included in the mailing.

A legal notice, published in the Reno Gazette Journal on May 22, 2008 announced the initiation of the scoping process and invited public participation and comments. Three comment letters were received in response. Two comments strongly supported the project. The other letter focused on items beyond the scope of this analysis.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After reviewing the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that implementation of the selected alternative (with all the mitigation measures outlined in Chapter 2 and Appendix A of the EA) will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The provisions of 40CFR 1508.27 (b) indicate that project significance must be judged in terms of both *context* and *intensity*. Based on a review of these

provisions, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. The rationale for not preparing an EIS includes:

Context

Context means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), in the affected region, the affected interests and the locality. The effects of implementing the selected alternative are localized, with implications only for the vicinity of the ski area. Cumulative effects of past management, combined with the current proposal and reasonably foreseeable future actions are displayed and analyzed in the EA for each resource. The cumulative effects of implementing the selected alternative are displayed in the EA as Alternative 2. The selected alternative is consistent with the management direction, standards and guidelines of the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Intensity

Intensity refers to the severity of the impact.

1. Consideration of both beneficial and adverse impacts

I have considered both the beneficial and adverse impacts associated with the alternatives as presented in the EA. The selected alternative will produce recreational benefits to users of the HTNF and will improve safety on NFS lands with minimal adverse resource impacts. Chapter III documents both of these. None of these impacts are considered significant.

2. Consideration of the effects on public health and safety

The selected alternative will not adversely impact public health and/or safety (see EA chapter 2 page 4 and Chapter 3 page 5).

3. Consideration of the unique characteristics of the geographic area

The selected alternative will not impact any unique geographic areas, historic features, park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

4. Consideration of the degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be considered controversial

All three comments submitted during the scoping process were reviewed by the interdisciplinary team. The review resulted in a determination that the effects of the proposal is not extraordinarily controversial (see Chapter 1 page 5).

5. Consideration of the degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

Implementation of the approved projects will involve common ski industry construction and operation practices that have been employed numerous times on NFS lands. There are no unique or unusual characteristics about the permit area that would indicate an unknown risk to the human environment. Based on the results of past actions and professional and technical insight and experience, I have determined that there are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve a unique risk as a result of implementing this decision.

6. Consideration of the degree to which this action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or that it represents a decision in principle about future considerations

I have determined that this decision does not establish precedence for future actions with unknown risks to the environment. The selected alternative does not include, or set precedence for any other action on the HTNF. From review of the analysis, overall design, and project file documentation, it is evident that these types of actions have been accepted and have occurred on the HTNF.

7. Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts

Cumulative effects of the selected alternative and other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future activities are not expected to be significant. By virtue of its scale, the selected alternative will have minimal specific effects, as well as minimal cumulative impacts. Refer to the cumulative effects discussions associated with each resource section in Chapter III of the EA.

8. Consideration of the degree to which the action may affect listed or eligible historic places

Cultural resource surveys within areas proposed for disturbance have been completed in accordance with HTNF guidelines. The selected alternative will have no effect on any significant cultural resource properties. Therefore, this action is consistent with Forest Plan direction and Section 106 of the NHPA and no impacts to cultural resources are anticipated (see Chapter 3 page 3).

9. Consideration of the degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or their critical habitat

A biological evaluation (BE) was prepared in conjunction with the EA to determine potential effects on endangered or threatened species that may result from implementation of any of the alternatives. With implementation of required mitigation and monitoring, the BE concludes that the selected alternative will not affect any Federally listed species.

10. Consideration of whether the action violates federal, state, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment

Based on the documentation I have reviewed in the EA, the BA/BE, and the project file, I have determined that no federal, state, or local laws, regulations or requirements for protection of the environment will be violated with implementation of the selected alternative.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and related regulations require specific findings when implementing the Forest Plan (16 USC 1604(i)). I have reviewed the selected alternative for consistency with the Forest-wide and Management Area 2 (Carson Front) standards and guidelines goals and objectives. No inconsistencies with Forest-wide or Management Area 2 direction were identified.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If there is no appeal, the selected alternative may be implemented 50 days after the date of legal notice of the Decision in the Reno Gazette-Journal. Prior to construction of any of the approved projects Mt. Rose is required to prepare and submit, for Forest Service approval. The following documents:

- Project construction and grading plans
- Pre-construction erosion control/drainage management plans
- Post-construction erosion control plans
- Post-construction revegetation plans
- Site-specific sensitive species monitoring plan
- Noxious weed risk assessment

These plans will incorporate the mitigation measures discussed below. Annual Summer Operating Plans will include strategies for monitoring compliance with required mitigation measures and their effectiveness. Failure to comply with mitigation required in any of the above mentioned plans or that required by the Decision Notice would constitute a breach of the project approval and could temporarily suspend implementation of approved projects.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, "Content of Notice of Appeal" and it must be received within 45 days of the publication of the Notice of Decision in the Reno Gazette Journal. The written Notice of Appeal must be sent to:

Appeal Deciding Officer
Region 4 Intermountain Region
USDA Forest Service
234 25th Street
Ogden UT 84401

Appeals arriving late will not be considered. Evidence of timely filing will be based on the U. S. Postal Service postmark on a mailed appeal or the time and date imprinted on a facsimile appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.13C

CONTACT

For information concerning this decision, or the Forest Service appeal process, contact:
District Ranger, Carson Ranger District, 1536 South Carson Street, Carson City, NV
89701; fax: 775-884-8199.

/s/ Edward C. Monnig
Edward C. Monnig
Forest Supervisor
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Feb 3, 2009
Date