

---

## DECISION MEMO

### Snowbird Ski Trail Improvement

USDA – Forest Service  
Uinta National Forest  
Utah County, Utah

#### BACKGROUND

The Uinta National Forest received a proposal from Snowbird Ski and Summer Resort to realign a segment of the Path to Paradise ski trail to address skier circulation and safety concerns associated with the steep grade leading to the ski slope. The existing ski trail is located on private land and provides access to ski terrain on private land in Mineral Basin.

While the current ski trail alignment avoids impacts to National Forest System land, it has resulted in safety issues because of the excessively steep grade. Heavy skier traffic, combined with a mix of skier abilities, has resulted in dangerous skiing conditions.

The project area is located in Utah County, Section 17, Township 2 South, Range 2 East, Salt Lake Meridian.

#### DECISION

It is my decision to approve the realignment of the Path to Paradise ski trail to address public safety concerns.

The ski trail will be realigned to about 8-10 percent grade, and a winch anchor will be installed at the end of the trail to facilitate grooming operations in the bowl. The last 330 feet of the trail and the winch anchor will be on National Forest System land. The section of trail on National Forest System land will be built as a full-bench excavation. Excavated material will be hauled off the trail to minimize potential effects to vegetation, visuals and other resources. The disturbed area on public land will be 24 to 80 feet wide by 330 feet long or about 0.4 acres.

The project will also include the following mitigation and conservation measures, as well as other applicable Uinta National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan standards and guidelines:

- Salvage topsoil from the hill slope on the new trail prism
- Restore approximate original contour on the old trail prism
- Minimize erosion utilizing best management practices
- Implement the project outside of the nesting season for migratory birds (e.g., May 1 to August 1) or have Forest Service wildlife biologist conduct a survey of the project area prior to implementation to determine the presence of nesting black rosy-finches; if any are detected within or adjacent to the project area, delay ground-disturbing activities within a minimum 200-foot radius of the nest site until after August 1.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

On May 16, 2005, a scoping letter was sent to 75 potential interests for this project proposal. In addition, a request for comments on the proposed action was published in the *Provo Daily Herald* on May 19, 2005. A second opportunity for comment was published in the *Provo Daily Herald* on October 19, 2005. An announcement of this project was also published in the Summer and Autumn 2005 Uinta National Forest *Schedule of Proposed Actions*. The proposed project was also announced in a scoping letter distributed by the Wasatch-Cache National Forest Salt Lake Ranger District dated May 17, 2005.

In response to the solicitation and outreach, five comments letters were received. Substantive issues identified during development of the proposed action and from public responses to scoping are addressed in the following section:

1. This action warrants a Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive species survey. *Ivesia urahensis*, a North Utah endemic, has been found in this area.

*The project area was surveyed for rare plants. No Ivesia urahensis, a rare plant not federally listed or on the US Forest Service sensitive species list, was found in the project area; however, suitable habitat was found. The trail realignment construction may impact individuals or habitat but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the species.*

2. This proposed action is one part of a larger two-Forest action proposed by Snowbird that involves other new facilities inside their permit area that involves revision of the Master Development Plan.

*Since the decision for the Master Development Plan was made, experience has shown that skier access from the ski trail on private land is unsafe because of the steep grade. Because skier safety was a primary consideration in the Mineral Basin expansion, the extension of the ski trail onto National Forest System land to improve skier safety is consistent with the 1999 Record of Decision and does not require revision of the Master Development Plan.*

3. This action may result in direct, indirect and cumulative impacts to soils, water quality downstream from erosion and changed hydrology, TES and MIS plants, animals and their potential habitats in the American Fork watershed and Snowbird Master Development Plan affected area.

*An analysis was completed for all resources potentially affected by this proposed project. No impacts were considered significant or would warrant further analysis. Results of the analysis are discussed under extraordinary circumstance section and are documented in the project file. A cumulative effects analysis was completed as part of the environmental analysis for the Peruvian Gulch Lift Removal and New Lift System Construction for the Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The proposed ski trail realignment was considered as part of the cumulative effects analysis. It was determined, based on that analysis, that cumulative actions included in the analysis would not result in significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects.*

4. An Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement needs to be prepared for the Snowbird MDP revision and the connected action, such as this Snowbird Ski Trail improvement proposed action.

*The proposed action is listed as one of the Forest Service Chief's categories for categorical exclusion (FSH 1909.15, Section 31.2, No. 3). The project effects analysis and cumulative effects analysis (described above) determined that cumulative actions of this project and others would not result in significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects. Documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement is not warranted.*

## **CONSISTENCY WITH LAW, FOREST SERVICE POLICY AND DIRECTION, AND THE UINTA NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Snowbird Ski Trail Improvement project is consistent with the 2003 Uinta National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2003 Forest Plan). The project area lies within the American Fork Management Area as identified in the Forest Plan. The management prescription for the project area is 4.5 Developed Recreation (Forest Plan, page 5-23). The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum designation for the area is Roaded Modified (Forest Plan, page 5-24) and the Visual Quality Objective is Retention (Forest Plan, page 5-25).

On December 10, 1999, Forest Supervisors for the Wasatch-Cache and Uinta National Forest approved a Record of Decision for the Snowbird Master Development Plan. That decision approved the addition of 75 acres of National Forest System land in Mineral Basin for avalanche control and skiing on natural, undeveloped terrain. The intent of the decision was to “make expansion as safe as possible and was considered a strong contribution to the ski area’s overall recreation offering” (1999 Record of Decision, p. 4). Since that decision was made, experience has shown that skier access from the ski trail on private land is unsafe because of the steep grade. Because skier safety was a primary consideration in the Mineral Basin expansion, the extension of the ski trail onto National Forest System land to improve skier safety is consistent with the 1999 Record of Decision.

No adverse impacts on birds are anticipated, and this decision is consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

A complete cultural resources inventory of the proposed ski trail was conducted. No cultural resources of any kind were identified. No known American Indian plant collection or traditional use areas occur within the project area. As a result, no historic properties (national register eligible sites) will be affected by the trail improvement. The decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

In accordance with Executive Order 12898, this action will not result in any disproportionate impact to minority or low-income populations.

Implementation of this proposal is consistent with other Federal, State, and local laws for the protection of the environment.

## CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THIS PROJECT

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are listed within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in significant individual or cumulative environmental effects.

The proposed action is listed as one of the Forest Service Chief's categories for categorical exclusion (FSH 1909.15, Section 31.2, No. 3):

*Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land.*

Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 30.3 lists the following as "extraordinary circumstances":

**A. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species**

– The potential effects of the proposed action on species or critical habitat listed under the Endangered Species Act were reviewed and documented by a botanist, fisheries biologist, and wildlife biologist. It was determined that the proposed action would have "No Effect" on the following species classified under the Endangered Species Act or their critical habitat: Ute ladies' -tresses (Threatened), Deseret milkvetch (Threatened), clay phacelia (Endangered), Utah valvata snail (Endangered), June sucker (Endangered), bald eagle (Threatened), Western yellow-billed cuckoo (Candidate) and Canada lynx (Threatened).

Potential effects also were reviewed and documented for Forest Service sensitive species. It was determined that the proposed action would have "No Impact" on the following species classified as sensitive by the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service (some species are also Management Indicator Species [MIS] for the Uinta National Forest): Barneby woody aster, dainty moonwort, Wasatch jamesia, Columbia spotted frog, northern goshawk (MIS), peregrine falcon, greater sage grouse, flammulated owl, American three-toed woodpecker (MIS), spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, fisher, Bonneville cutthroat trout (MIS), Colorado River cutthroat trout (MIS). It was determined that the proposed action "May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but Will Not Likely Contribute to a Trend Toward Federal Listing or Loss of Viability to the Population or Species" for the following species: slender moonwort, Garrett bladderpod and rockcress draba. The project area lacks aquatic habitat for the American beaver (MIS).

**B. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – The Forest Service has determined that this project will not adversely affect floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds. The project area does not include any floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.

**C. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas** – The project area does not reside in, and the project will not have

any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on, wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

**D. Inventoried roadless areas (IRAs)** – The project area occurs in the northeast corner of the Twin Peaks Roadless Area (#0418040). In the Snowbird Master Development Plan, 75 acres of the 1,700-acre roadless area are under special-use permit to Snowbird for avalanche control and skier use. The ski trail improvement will occur within that portion of the roadless area under special-use permit. An analysis of potential effects to the roadless area was completed. The project will result in minor modifications to the scenery in an area surrounded by modification from existing ski area facilities. Other construction effects will be minor and/or of short duration. Disturbance from ski resort activities will continue.

**E. Research natural areas** – The project area does not reside in, and the project will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any research natural areas.

**F. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites** – A complete cultural resources inventory of the proposed ski trail was conducted. No cultural resources of any kind were identified. No known American Indian plant collection or traditional use areas occur within the project area. As a result, no historic properties (national register eligible sites) will be affected by the trail improvement. The decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

**G. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas** -- A complete cultural resources inventory of the proposed ski trail was conducted. No cultural resources of any kind were identified.

For projects that are categorically excluded, there is no need to repeat a detailed analysis of effects to all resources. In promulgating the categories, the Forest Service has concluded that projects that fit those categories do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. Thus, once the analysis establishes that this project has no extraordinary circumstances and fits into a category, the responsible official can reach the conclusion that there will be no significant effects to the environment without further analysis.

The proposed action will be of limited context and intensity and capable of producing little or no significant environmental effects (**40 CFR 1508.4**) individually or cumulatively on the quality of the human environment; is within a category listed in FSH 1909.15; and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action.

## **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This decision may be implemented immediately.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Pursuant to 36 CFR 2155.12(f) and *Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, No. CIV F-03-386 JKS (E.D. Cal., October 19, 2005), this decision is not subject to appeal.

## **CONTACT PERSON**

For further information about this decision or project, please contact Larry Velarde, Natural Resource Staff, Pleasant Grove District, at 390 North 100 East, Pleasant Grove, Utah 84062, or by phone at (801) 785-3563.

*/s/ Peter W. Karp*  
Peter W. Karp  
Forest Supervisor  
Uinta National Forest

*December 28, 2005*  
Date

---

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.