



Feb. 27 deadline to comment on impact of Ski Valley plan for long-term development

Staff Report

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Next week is the deadline for public comments on Carson National Forest's Environmental Impact Statement for the long-term development plan of Taos Ski Valley.

The ski area's preferred alternative under the EIS would include two new low-capacity lifts.

One lift would run from near the top of Lift 4 to just below the top of Kachina Peak, serving mostly intermediate slopes. The very top of the peak would still only be accessible on foot. This lift would be built by helicopter, to avoid road construction. The proposed Kachina Peak lift is separated from Taos Pueblo lands by a high ridge and a deep valley. The other lift would serve the ridge to the west of West Basin, in the Thunderbird Trees run. This would serve a handful of super-expert runs, plus the less-steep Wild West trees.

Today's hike-to-only areas of West Basin Ridge and Highline would continue to be accessible only on foot, closed off by gates and ropes. Almost half of the present hike-to terrain would remain off limits to people riding the lifts. Both new lifts would be low capacity.

Also in this development proposal are plans to replace lifts 4, 5 and 7, with high-speed lifts.

Two areas now covered with dense forest would be gladed, meaning trees would be thinned: the Minnesotas below Lift 7, and Wild West Glade which would be accessible by the West Basin Lift.

Plans call for a lift-accessible tubing area, near the Hondo River at the base of Lift 3. Of all the projects, this would require most earth moving, but would allow non-skiers and nonboarders recreation opportunities. A 3.6-mile, 8-percent grade, mountain bike trail, served by Lift 1, is part of the proposal. New snowshoeing trails south of the river would require only minimal tree removal.

A new entrance road between current parking lots is planned, as well as a change in the dropoff area to a location north of the R'o Hondo on Thunderbird Road.

The EIS contains three alternatives: first, leave things as they are; second, approve TSV's development requests; third, approve all development but the new lifts, new traffic plan and tubing area.

Deadline for receiving comments is Feb. 27 at commentssouthwestern- carson@fs.fed.us or by writing Kendall Clark, forest supervisor, Carson National Forest, 208 Cruz Alta Road, Taos, N.M. 87571.

The draft EIS can be viewed in its entirety at a123. g.akamai.net/7/123/11558/abc123/forestservic.download.akamai.com/11558/www/nepa/74063_FSPLT2_074282.pdf.