



Hundred-plus comments sent on Ski Valley impact statement

By Matthew van Buren

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Carson National Forest received more than 100 responses to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement regarding proposed developments at Taos Ski Valley.

The comments received were largely supportive of “Alternative 2,” the preferred alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Phase 1 projects would include new gladed areas, a mountain bike trail, changes to the parking lot and traffic flow, a snow tubing facility, lift upgrades and lifts to the West Basin Ridge and Kachina Peak. The 2010 Master Development Plan also includes an “adventure center” at the Ski Valley.

Many commenters were generally supportive of the plan but opposed adding lifts — especially the Main Street Lift, which would take skiers and boarders to Kachina Peak.

Commenter Daniel Greenwald wrote that his main disagreement with Alternative 2 is the proposed Main Street Lift, which he feels would harm the wilderness experience. He wrote that lift apparatus would be visible from the Wheeler Peak Wilderness and would be a “horrible eyesore.” He also wrote that the “peak experience” would be “destroyed” if Kachina Peak were lift-served.

Other commenters, including the nonprofit Wild Earth Guardians, expressed concern about environmental impacts, including to water quality and wildlife habitat.

Fernando Martinez, president of the Acequia Madre del Llano, wrote that the acequia association is opposed to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement in its entirety. He wrote that he is concerned about an increase in future recreational uses and the effects it could have on water quality and quantity.

The Arroyo Hondo Community Association wrote that it is “opposed to every aspect of Taos Ski Valley’s (DEIS).”

“The time has long passed for the U.S. Forest Service to stop the protracted exploitation of a delicate watershed and start preserving it for its historic beneficiaries, namely those who precede the mining interests, the Forest Service and the ensuing ski business(es),” the association’s letter states.

Skiers from Taos to New York wrote to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

“My husband and I are writers who live in Manhattan and love Taos Ski Valley just as it is,” Carol Weston wrote. “We relish its nourishing magnificence and look forward to summer hiking and winter skiing each year, and we find that our days and weeks in New Mexico sustain us and nourish us all year long. We were alarmed to hear of some of the changes getting discussed and we hope you will think long and hard before okaying any legislation that would jeopardize the paradise you are currently protecting and supporting.”

Ivan Locke, of Taos, wrote that upgrading existing lifts and facilities is understandable, but that adding more lifts would be detrimental to the area. “Please be aware that this proposal is an egregious insult to all skiers and outdoor enthusiasts who for many years have cherished the unique characteristics that have made Taos Ski Valley such a special place and a world-class ski area,” he wrote, going on to add, “Of course this proposal espouses the corporate hunger for more profit, masqueraded as the need to provide ‘a quality recreational experience’ (as if it lacked that!).”

Most of the letters Carson National Forest received were supportive of the plan, however, citing the minimal environmental impacts in the DEIS, the enhanced guest experience it would provide and the economic benefits it would bring.

James Day, of Ranchos de Taos, wrote that some glading projects are “critical,” and changes to parking and traffic flow are “long overdue.” He wrote that the addition of lift-served terrain would have “very little environmental effect, while adding greatly to what TSV can offer to its visitors.”

“While some may object to the loss of areas exclusively enjoyed by hikers, I have found that much of that objection seems based on a nostalgia that is rapidly disappearing as the older (my) generation passes from the ski scene,” he wrote.

The Village of Taos Ski Valley, Holy Cross Hospital and New Mexico Tourism Secretary Monique Jacobson also wrote in support, specifically citing the economic benefits it could have. According to Jacobson’s letter, the 2009-10 ski season brought \$541 million to the state’s economy, and ski resorts employ 2,500 New Mexicans.

Jean Mayer, Taos Ski Valley ski school’s technical director and owner of Hotel St. Bernard, wrote he has been in residence in TSV since 1958 and supports Alternative 2. “Taos Ski Valley has fallen behind many ski resorts in the Rockies and across the United States,” he wrote. “This was not the case when I first came here and laid out the plans for a lift up Kachina Peak as long ago as 1959.”

Mayer wrote TSV must keep up with guests’ wants and expectations. He also wrote that some of his friends oppose the Main Street Lift. “I respect their feelings when they talk about not wanting to see bumps on the run coming down from the Peak,” he wrote, continuing, “I don’t mind saying that I feel it is quite selfish to want to keep the top of Kachina Peak only for those who are willing or able to hike it!”

Mayer wrote many guests to Taos come from lower elevations and have trouble hiking at high altitudes.

The content of the comments will be analyzed; the Forest Service will decide whether to modify the EIS from that point. A decision is anticipated in May or June.