

March 30, 2021
Crystal Powell
Sandia District Ranger
Attn: Bryan West
Cibola National Forest
11776 Highway 337
Tijeras, NM 87059

Re: Sandia Peak Ski Area Mountain Coaster Scoping

Dear Ms. Powell:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Sandia Peak Ski Area Mountain Coaster (coaster). I am writing to voice my strong opposition to this development. I also call on the Cibola National Forest to make no further decision regarding this project pending a full analysis of its impacts through an Environmental Impact Statement. The following details a few of my concerns.

The adjacent Sandia Mountain Wilderness would be irrevocably damaged by this development. A few examples include:

- Opportunities for solitude, wildlife viewing, and quiet hiking will be significantly and negatively impacted by the construction of the “coaster” and the increased traffic and noise after the project is complete.
- Wildlife will suffer the effects of increased noise and traffic, both from the construction and operation of the “coaster.”
- Vegetation will be degraded and provide the opportunity for invasive species to colonize the ski area, which could then spread to the adjoining wilderness.

The notion that an “amusement park” could be constructed on national forest land surrounded by wilderness, without doing a full Environmental Impact Study is baffling to me. This is especially true for the Sandias, which are already under pressure from their proximity to the large urban area of Albuquerque.

My understanding of the relevant issues concerning the Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act, which allows expansion of activities at ski areas on National Forest, is that any expansion of activity must harmonize with the natural environment. That is certainly not the case here: a Disney-Land like development in the heart of the Sandia Mountain Wilderness is anathema to the natural environment. Moreover, the Act expressly prohibits the use of ski areas on Forest Service land for amusement parks. I also question whether this project would be beyond the scope of the existing Special Use Permit.

As we’ve seen in the last few years, climate change has negatively impacted skiing opportunities in the Sandias. Projections are that conditions will worsen in the coming years. This implies that the future viability profitability of the ski area is itself in question. The Cibola National Forest must conduct an analysis of the long-term viability of the ski area before approving construction of this coaster. If skiing in the Sandias will diminish as winters get shorter and snow more, and the coaster becomes the primary recreational purpose, the project cannot be approved.

Finally, both the construction and operation of a “coaster” will have serious short-term and permanent impacts on traffic on State Road 536. Construction materials and apparatus will need to be brought to Sandia Peak, presumably through the use of heavy trucks on New Mexico State Road 536. State Road 536 is a mountain road, with many switchbacks and blind curves, and presents a challenge that must be addressed. Cibola National Forest should analyze the full impacts of this traffic and present the results for public comment. Without such analysis, the public is not well enough informed to seriously comment on the proposal.

In summary, numerous important issues will be overlooked if the Cibola National Forest approves this project absent a full Environmental Impact Statement. I strongly urge that you not proceed without one.

Sincerely,

Arian Pregenzer
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