

Jim Levy

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QUESTA RANGER

APR 26 2022

April 21, 2022

James Duran, Forest Supervisor  
c/o Paul Schilke, Winter Sports Coordinator  
P.O. Box 110  
Questa, NM 87556

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Re: Taos Ski Valley Gondola and Other Improvements Project

Dear Mr. Duran:

I have been a resident of Arroyo Hondo since 1969. Throughout my fifty-three years here, I have had occasion, with many of my neighbors, to comment on and in many cases to protest projects that resulted in the expansion of Taos Ski Valley. When Ernie Blake started the ski resort, it was a modest venue for mostly elite skiers to ski in the winter months. It's ambition now is to become a huge year-round luxury resort. It is my impression that the Forest Service, when issuing its initial Special Use Permit, and revising it in later years, has not taken into consideration this radical change in vision.

As I am sure you are aware, the Ski Valley polluted the Rio Hondo for many years, and it was only through the efforts of down stream residents that the river was cleaned up. We find ourselves once again facing major expansion of the resort, without any clear and specific details about how the project will effect the flow and quality of the river.

My major concern is not only with the specifics of the project, but with the overall process of oversight and regulation. Over all these years, there have been numerous projects that have impacted the ecosystem and the river. One year it might be Taos Ski Valley Incorporated that proposes some projects. In another year, it is the village of Taos Ski Valley that does so. In yet other years, it is private land owners and developers. Perhaps the Forest Service itself has added some projects of it's own. Some of these projects has been duly assessed, debated and, in most cases, approved. Others have been implemented without any public input. As far as I know, no agency has assessed the totality of these projects, both in terms of immediate impact and long term impacts? No agency has taken responsibility for that, and it is time for the Forest Service, the entity that allows the Ski Valley to exist, to ask the U.S. Government to do so.

The Gondola, water tank and booster station, Nordic and snowshoe trails, lift 7 restaurant, replacement of Whistlestop Café, and a new hiking trail all include displacement of trees and vegetation to one extent or another, and that displacement directly affects the overall watershed and the banks of the Rio Hondo, as well as the habitats of wild animals. Although the proposal states that the project will not increase the current water intake of 65.2 million gallons a year from the Rio Hondo, it does not mention how the intake is measured, monitored and reported. Furthermore, the project does not address the severe, intermittent


drought that is changing the Southwest in dramatic ways. Water sharing is becoming the paramount process to mitigating the effects of drought, but this current plan does not speak to that issue at all.

The Forest Service letter to interested parties predominantly explains why each component of the project is needed. The letter appears to have been drafted by proponents of the project, with many explanations about the positive results, but there is little mention of the negative consequences of the various components: disruption and harm to the land, watershed, fauna, and flora. Furthermore, there is minimum comment about the effects of the projects might have on Valdez, Des Montes and Arroyo Hondo, as if these down stream land-grant communities do not exist and have no reason to be taken into account.

The Ski Valley, (the company, village and private landowners) does not exist in a vacuum. It is part of an entire alpine ecological and riparian system that the government, with the encouragement of the Forest Service, should assess and protect. To make available recreational opportunities to the public is a valid mission, but it should not be the only one to be considered. The interests of down stream residents and the land and water themselves should be considered as thoroughly as the interests of developers, corporations and others who hope to profit by more development.

In light of the above, I recommend that the project be assessed in relation to all of the previous projects rather than in isolation. For this reason, a moratorium should be placed on this project until a full Environmental Impact Study can be completed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim Levy". The signature is written in black ink and extends across the width of the page with a long horizontal stroke.

Jim Levy