

Northern Group, Sierra Club  
1807 2<sup>nd</sup> St., Suite 45  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

May 6, 2022

James Duran, Forest Supervisor  
Carson National Forest  
PO Box 110  
Questa, NM 87556

Attn: Paul Schilke, paul.schilke@usda.gov

Re: Taos Ski Valley and other improvements, project 61390

Mr. Duran and Mr. Schilke,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on planned upgrades to Taos Ski Valley (TSV).

The Northern Group of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club has about 1,600 members in Northern NM and 400 in the Taos area. The Rio Grande Chapter has about 9,000 members in NM and West Texas. Our members make a lot of use of outdoor recreational opportunities, and the protection of the wildlife and water is essential to a high-quality experience.

We support the plans to put in a gondola between the ski area base and the Kachina basin. We concur with the concerns related to the amount of traffic going up to the Kachina basin. One of the most persistent problems affecting water quality in the Rio Hondo is the disturbance of the road resulting in sediment and erosion. A gondola would assist in minimizing the amount of traffic on the road.

We also support the plan to upgrade the Whistlestop café and modernize it. This location is already very central to operations of TSV and proximal to many lifts.

However, we are concerned about the planned restaurant near the summit of lift 7. Before the construction of lift 7, this entire area was one of the few intermediate 'ski the trees' areas on the mountain. Putting a restaurant in this location will further disturb the wildlife in this area. Expansion of the size and scope of the private homes during the last several decades in the Rio Hondo Valley above the TSV base area has already put a lot of pressure on wildlife. There are now many small homes that have turned into large chalets occupied a large part of the year, which was not previously the case. The steadily increasing disturbance of wildlife, especially during the summer, is of concern.

We appreciate that you are providing more recreational opportunities for mountain biking, XC skiing, and snowshoeing. As your proposal has not gone into much detail on these upgrades,

we have concern that without careful design, there is considerable potential for increased erosion, particularly with mountain bike usage.

We do not see in this plan any mention of the status of connecting up the septic systems that were common in the early days of TSV. We realize that the private property owners, the Village of Taos, and County regulations all play into this situation. However, historical degradation of the Rio Hondo is of concern, and we would be pleased if TSV would continue to improve the water quality flowing in the Rio Hondo. It should be a premier cold water fishing stream providing a recreational opportunity for the public.

In your document you note that TSV has a 200 acre-foot per year diversionary right to water. Given that this right is the highest in the Rio Hondo watershed, use of this right has the potential to be a substantial negative impact on downstream users and the aquifer. An assessment of how climate change is impacting the availability of water in the Rio Hondo, and how TSV is impacting surface flow and aquifer recharge, would be a valuable benefit to the community, and possibly be used in the plans of TSV to reduce the use of this right in times of reduced flow of the Rio Hondo.

We would appreciate some clarification of the status of the 2021 Master Development Plan (MDP) as it relates to this project. Most of the projects mentioned in the MDP appear to be in this proposal #61390, however, the MDP may well continue for a decade or more.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

Sincerely,

John R. Buchser  
Chair, Northern Group