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To: James Duran, Forest Supervisor May 12, 2023

Carson National Forest

208 Cruz Alta Rd Taos, NM 87571

Concerning the expansion of Taos Ski Valley.

Mr. Duran,

I have been a parciente on the Atalaya Acequia in Arroyo Hondo NM for the past forty Five Years. I depend on our irrigation water for my garden and fruit trees.

I am stunned! Considering the continuing drought present in the Southwest, the recent catastrophic wildfires and the effects we all are feeling from Global Warming that the decisions and actions of the Taos Ski Valley and the Carson National Forest are not focused on a conscious conservation of water resources but to support a proposal for an increase of water usage and sewage impact that directly affect the health and well being of those families who have their homes, gardens and wells, many for generations, down stream from the Ski Valley.

**• WATER:**

My well is 160 feet deep it is in the perched water level, and is dependent on run off and recharging each year by irrigation. This has supplied my home with water for household use for more than 40 years. At $75 per foot, I can’t have a new well drilled down to 450 feet to reach the deep volcanic aquifer. I protest the ever increasing drain on our springs at the headwaters of the Rio Hondo as the mega drought continues.

In 2018 we had no runoff. None. Nevertheless, that summer TSV sprayed their newly-seeded beginners’ slope in broad daylight while downstream users struggled to share shallow irrigation water. In December of 2021 TSV had a severe blowdown in the watershed. At least 3,000 downed mature pines were harvested and driven off to lumber mills. The more the trees are cleared for construction, the sooner the snow melts off or blows away and will not be available for irrigation. The proposed gondola itself requires over mile of removal of trees, eight acres which provided shade and habitat for a delicate mountain ecosystem which is slowly drying up.

•. What would happen if a fire broke out in the Village of Taos Ski Valley or the Rio Hondo watershed while TSV-VTSV water infrastructure was shut down for several days? I believe it is very reckless to continue to develop on the mountain while the water system is unable to support that development.

* VTSV claims the projects won't increase **water usage**, but

They will need to fill and maintain water in the 5,000,000 Gallon water tank

They plan to increase snowmaking (2021 MDP)

New year-round resort activities will require water

• The Forest Service claims "A water sufficiency report has been performed, finding a sufficient supply"

but **they won’t release that report.** You know that ground water levels have been dropping in Taos County for the last twenty years. Sufficient for today will not be “sufficient’ for the next ten years of megadrought.

•The Draft EA does not propose any solutions to **concerns about water quality or water availability**. It raises these issues but dismisses them as not likely to happen . "There are no long-term impacts to water quality anticipated." (P. 32 of the Draft EA. The impact of VTSV’s 300,000 visitors during the ski season has already had a disastrous impact on the village as well as the waste water and sewage plant and the Rio Hondo when broken pipes spilled 2 million gallons down the road into the river, carrying debris and toxic chemicals, issuing a “boil Water” warning and shutting down the whole water system for days. Bad decisions by the U.S. Forest Service ignoring climate change have already cost the Las Vegas and Mora and other communities too much. And have resulted in law suits. It doesn’t have to be that way.

• We need to engage in planning a different kind of future for the watershed because the future of the watershed that's planned by Taos Ski Valley is inconsistent with the long term survival and respect for the integrated riparian ecosystem sustained by downstream communities. The NEPA process should consider the whole ecosystem from the headwaters to the

Rio Grande.. And the people here are saying: “What kind of future do we want for that watershed? And who should be deciding? A hedge fund billionaire who's driven by nothing but profit? Or the people who have been part of that watershed for hundreds of years? And who are now struggling to hold on?”

• **WATER QUALITY**

The [“SOIL](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UuPAdtaiXXqjaAlNeXqIkhILERYV45Cm/view?usp=share_link) [AND](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UuPAdtaiXXqjaAlNeXqIkhILERYV45Cm/view?usp=share_link) [WATERSHED](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UuPAdtaiXXqjaAlNeXqIkhILERYV45Cm/view?usp=share_link) [SPECIALIST](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UuPAdtaiXXqjaAlNeXqIkhILERYV45Cm/view?usp=share_link) [REPORT](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UuPAdtaiXXqjaAlNeXqIkhILERYV45Cm/view?usp=share_link)” appended to the Draft EA only concerns water in the Canyon. The NM Environment Department and the Forest Service have both found **the Rio Hondo below the Canyon** to be compromised. Further development will only make the water quality worse.

* Taos Soil and Water now has funding to **monitor water at several locations in the Rio Hondo**. This project will hopefully begin this summer. It would be prudent to wait until that information is available before approving any work that could FURTHER impact water quality
* The Village of Taos Ski Valley’s **water and wastewater systems are vulnerable to already malfunctioning** **when stressed by overloading.** The Draft EA does not mention those issues
* New **year-round activities** will further stress the watershed and increase pollutants in the Rio Hondo system.

New Restaurants on the mountain, an upgraded parking lot and **year-round activities** will further stress the watershed and increase pollutants in the Rio Hondo system. The building of a 5 million gallon storage tank, more appropriate in a municipality than on a mountain slope, will require a vast amount of materials, personnel, traffic and trucking on a high mountain road close to the Rio Hondo

* There is no identified solution for handling **sewage and wastewater** from new facilities on the mountain.
* The TSVI and VTSV do not participate in community-based water management (**Repartimiento**). How are we to work together for the betterment of our environment and water availability if TSVI and VTSV do not come to the table?

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**SKI VALLEY VISITOR IMPACT**

Back in the day when the Blakes owned the resort, they stuck to a skier limitation of 4800/day. Now Taos Ski Valley wants a gondola that will transport 1800 people per hour up the mountain where there were once big horned sheep, martens, the Goshawk, the Boral Owl and other endangered species. Back in the 1980s, Ernie Blake, having made his profits during the ski season, gave the valley and wildlife a rest in the summer and relaxed into a quiet village life.

There are limits to growth. When the infrastructure breaks down, as it has twice at Village of VTSV and TSV, Inc. in the past six months, it is clear that Taos Ski Valley has reached the limits of healthy growth. Expanding within their constrained boundaries means more and more construction as the village, the parking lot and the trails—especially to William's Lake—become more jammed and polluted by human traffic. And now they are rebuilding the St. Bernard without any guarantee of where the water will come from.

**How does the Ski Valley Expansion benefit the local population?**

Citizens from the Town and county of Taos Have skied on Taos Mountain for generations.

Today, ordinary Taosenos, can no longer afford the cost of a days lift ticket.

Its now a destination for well heeled out of towners, the locals are working in the service industries cleaning, cooking, snow removal, etc.

**the question of sharing the river**. Now, do the adjudicated water rights at Taos Ski Valley take priority? And the priority dates they have striven to transfer upstream—does that mean they would make a priority call in times of shortage? They do not participate in the water-sharing agreement that was forged with great difficulty by the downstream communities? These are questions that have not been properly addressed.

But the bottom line we are dealing with is an environmental and a social justice issue. The trajectory that has been planned out by the ski valley is not consistent, in the long term, with the well being of the people living downstream given the relentless development that is taking place. To work out a compromise, let's go back to the drawing board, stop developing, let's work together and create a whole alternative, environmentally realistic. sustainable picture the future for the watershed that includes the downstream communities.

**A CALL FOR A MORATORIUM**:

I and my Atalaya Acequia association call for a suspension of new construction and development at the head of the Rio Hondo watershed in Taos Ski Valley until they fix their water infrastructure issues and stop all cumulative pollution of the Rio Hondo caused by TSV Inc., the Village of Taos Ski Valley, Amizette, and other non-point sources associated with the resort. And request that they provide basic services necessary to maintain a stable and sustainable mountain community.

Sincerely,

Gail Russell