

June 14, 2024

## **Winter Park Resort Project 2025 EA #66200 – Public Comment**

My name is James G. Johnson, Registered Architect in the State of Colorado since 1981. Permanent address is 2 Silver Fox Drive, Greenwood Village, CO 80121. And a second home at 51 Van Anderson Drive in Winter Park, CO since 1970. Over a 50-year career in Architecture and Landscape Architecture, I designed multiple public buildings throughout the Colorado mountains and significant historic adaptive reuse / preservation projects in over a dozen states. In the mid 1970's while at CDOT, I worked synergistically with the USFS on rock cut sculpturing and other landscape special effects for the creation of I-70 over Vail Pass for its contextual and environmental suitability, and as a precursor to the renowned design of I-70 in Glenwood Canyon.

I attended the USFS public meeting (open house) at the Winter Park Balcony House on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The following comments are respectfully submitted for the project of concern: Winter Park Resort Project 2025 EA #66200.

My responses are based on the understanding that the USFS process for reviewing and approving this project will consist first of providing an approved draft Winter Park Resort Master Development Plan, then a subsequent Environmental Analysis of that Proposed Action. That EA will analyze the impacts of the proposed development plan and offer another opportunity for public input.

### **Winter Park Resort 2022 Master Development Plan / Area of Potential Effect**

Together with the Grand County Historical Association (GCHA), our research shows that there are two versions of the Winter Park 2022 Master Development Plan (MDP), one dated January 28, 2022 and the other dated June 2022. Please clarify which version of the MDP takes precedence to help facilitate for our more focused commentary. In addition, at the USFS May 29, 2024 public meeting, illustration boards in the room showed two existing, on-mountain buildings to be renovated, Snoasis on the lower Cranmer slope and the Lodge at Sunspot at the top of the existing Gondola / top of Cranmer slope. Please clarify whether renovation of these two buildings is within the scope of the proposed 2025 project.

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) should not be limited to USFS property or boundaries, in particular at the base of Winter Park Ski Area on land owned both by either Alterra Mountain Company or the Winter Park Recreational Association, Agent of the City and County of Denver. These adjoining lands and buildings will undoubtedly be impacted by the proposed project that includes significantly increased skier / rider capacities with new lifts by at least 4,140 people per hour or 31,050 people on a typical day of operation, according to the USFS brief distributed at the May 29 public meeting.

Significantly increased Pre and Apre-ski activities at base area buildings including the historic Balcony House (identified by Colorado Preservation Inc. in 2021 as one of Colorado's most Endangered Places) will be impacted by the 2025 proposed plans. Affected portions of the base area, at least within 250 feet of the proposed Gemini Gondola, should be within the scope of the USFS Environmental analysis. This is further exemplified by the proposed base location of new 10-passenger Gondola, not located on USFS land, with an additional capacity of 3,600 people per hour (27,000 people per day), less the capacity of the existing Gemini Express lift, which is not listed in the USFS brief. A more wide-reaching and comprehensive APE is necessary for a proper analysis of the impacts of this proposed expansion on adjacent lands and historic resources.

## **Environmental Impacts**

The described scope of the 2022 Winter Park MDP has significant environmental, historical resource, and socio-economic impacts that must be addressed and rectified before any approvals by the USFS. What are the climate change considerations and long-term sustainability of adding over 130 acres of snow making infrastructure?

What is the source of proposed additional electricity?

Considerable additional electrical energy consumption will be needed for proposed new lifts, snowmaking and renovated and new buildings. Please identify the sources of this new power and whether its production is by coal-fired power plant, natural gas or alternative energy sources of wind and solar power. To our knowledge, there are no significant sources of wind and power in the Grand County area, therefore please quantify the carbon footprint of proposed additional electrical power requirements from production sources.

There is no better place than Winter Park in 2025 for Alterra Mountain Company to implement its 2030 commitments to reduce carbon emissions by more than 50%, use 100% renewable energy and achieve carbon neutrality.

## **Historical Resources**

Winter Park's early development in the 1930's precedes nearly all of the subsequent ski area development (except for Breckenridge) along the I-70 corridor. Although the Vail Valley is the darling of Ski Country USA media attention due to its origin by the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division in the late 1960's, Winter Park was more than a generation ahead of the game.

Winter Park, the City of Denver's first Mountain Park, was dedicated on January 28, 1940. The dedication was attended by Colorado Governor Carr, Denver Mayor Ben Stapleton and George Cranmer, who thanked the many who had participated in making his dream of a Mountain Park come true.

At the base of Winter Park, guests are greeted at the Balcony House, which has been in continual use for over 60 years, serving as the primary meeting place, ticketing area and ancillary functions. The Balcony House vividly represents the early history and pioneering evolution of the City of Denver's first Mountain Park. It also hosts essential roles in peripheral snow sports and summer activities, enhancing the overall experience, especially for "non-skiers and sight seers" as the marketing phrase boasted for years.

The Balcony House was built in 1955 with the cafeteria addition in 1958. Its historic significance was recognized by Colorado Preservation Inc. List of Endangered Places in 2021. The buildings were designed by Stephen Bradley, an early pioneer of Winter Park. As the "Father of Slope Grooming" the Bradley Packer would revolutionize the burgeoning ski industry in the United States. He contributed to the design of the Snoasis mid-mountain lodge at Winter Park. The buildings are eligible for the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties and the National Register of Historic Places.

With his distinguished education in Fine Arts and fondness of skiing, Stephen Bradley contributed extensively to the Winter Park experience, including the famous ski run named Bradley's Bash. He attended Dartmouth College where he became a four-way specialist in slalom, downhill, jumping and cross-country skiing between 1937 and 1939. In 1950, he began his services as Executive Director of the Winter Park Recreational Association, where he brought Winter Park from a four rope-tow, three T-bar ski area to 770 acres, served by 13 chair lifts.

The National Center for the Disabled (NSCD) has its identity rooted at the Balcony House since its inception in 1970. The NSCD is recognized around the world as a premier therapeutic recreation organization, providing leadership and expertise in adaptive sports. NSCD activities, including the annual Wells Fargo Race, all originate from the Balcony House.

The Balcony House is the remaining gem of this rich history at the Winter Park base area. The Balcony House has always served as a haven for skier & rider dining, ranging from the self-serve cafeteria addition in 1958 to a sack lunch spot and the Coffee and Tea Market, a local's hangout formerly featuring a wall of Winter Park history. George Cranmer, Stephen Bradley, Bob Wood and other biographies were, up until very recently, featured on this wall of history, as well as an historic schedule for The Ski Train, connecting Denver Union Station and Winter Park Base Area via the historic Moffat Tunnel. The Ski Train provides this historic link between the two historic buildings, Denver Union Station and The Balcony house, a unique continuity seldomly found worldwide.

It is our considered opinion that plans for the preservation and adaptive re-use of The Balcony House be strongly incorporated as part of this USFS EA #66200, based on the proper Area of Potential Effect for your Environmental Analysis.

### **On- Mountain Buildings**

Design and construction for renovation of existing buildings and new buildings contemplated by Winter Park Resort on Forest Service land must comply with strict standards for architectural excellence and environmental performance. Snoasis and The Lodge at Sunspot were both identified as “to be renovated” in the illustration boards shown at the May 29, 2024 Public Meeting.

Snoasis' architecture complements The Balcony House as a set of two buildings representing Mid-Century Modern architecture designed/ influenced by Stephen Bradley. Functional improvements to the interior of Snoasis are long overdue yet the exterior design is historically intact. Renovation plans should include more inviting and accessible circulation to entry level, lower restrooms and upper loft floor. All components of the building must meet other requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including elevators serving all levels. Exterior renovations, including enhanced thermal protection (weather proofing, insulation and glass) must meet 2024 or better Federal Standards for Energy Efficiency. In fact, the renovation improvements in composite for Snoasis must meet LEED Gold or better certification. The original Bradley Packer, currently located in an obscure location over the Snoasis bar should be relocated to a reimagined Balcony House due to its history that revolutionized snow sports all over the world. Its significance cannot be overstated.

The Lodge at Sunspot is a jewel of mountain architecture in Colorado. Designed by Internationally renowned Zehren & Associates Architects. The building and its interiors are reminiscent of early ski lodges with a warm and inviting interior ambience that evokes fond memories of snow sports 'good old days' of roaring hearths and warm camaraderie. The building, including its 270-person exterior BBQ deck, feature architectural design that is sacred. Any renovations to this building and the BBQ deck should be reviewed and approved if not designed by Zehren & Associates in order to respect its design intent and its excellence.

The quality level for architectural design of the new Vasquez Ridge Restaurant should echo that of The Lodge at Sunspot. The contextual design should be carefully fit to its setting with scale, proportions, massing, materials and details. The building should be LEED Certified as Gold or better.

To ensure that quality of architecture for all renovated and new buildings, we request that USFS engage in a Design Review process with review by award-winning architects and interior designers to ensure design quality at the highest level, reminiscent of great National Parks buildings of the past.

### **Socioeconomic and Cultural Considerations**

Winter Park was first and foremost Denver's Mountain Park. Its stewardship must honor its founder's intent to be a place for all people. The original resort featured both Alpine and Nordic skiing, with the largest jumping hill in Colorado on Forest Service land, which has irresponsibly been removed in recent history. Ice Skating and Sledding Hills were free of charge to a broad cross-section of Front Range residents near a free roaring fire in The Balcony House with a sack lunch and hot chocolate.

Snow sports by nature are a not an inclusive activity. Less than 6% of Americans ski. Affordability is a large factor in this demographic partitioning. The costs of family and individual snow sports have skyrocketed since Denver's first Mountain Park was opened, excluding many who cannot afford to visit.

For 94% of Americans, where is the Public Benefit in the 2025 Winter Park Masterplan on United States Forest Service Land? There are plenty of opportunities.

Alterra Mountain Company "honors each destination's unique character and authenticity and celebrates the legendary adventures and enduring memories they bring to everyone". The Town of Winter Park, with Planning and Zoning and Town Council jurisdiction over the Winter Park Resort "is a welcoming year-round community that values sustainable growth while preserving our heritage, adventurous soul and alpine environment". These two partners must employ their collective ethos to execute the 2025 Master Plan for Winter Park Resort in a way that makes the Forest Service and its public profoundly proud of the outcome.

Respectfully submitted, and I look forward to further collaboration with US Forest Service, Grand County Historical Association, Winter Park Resort and the Town of Winter Park.

James G. Johnson

Architect, Resident, Winter Park skier