Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/12/2024 7:57:07 PM
First name: Emily
Last name: Sadow
Organization:
Title:
Comments: USDA Forest Service
Attn: Michiko Martin, Regional Forester, Objection Reviewing Officer
333 Broadway Blvd SE
Albuquerque, NM, 87102

Submitted via https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public//CommentInput?Project=61390

Re: Objection regarding Taos Ski Valley, Gondola And Other Improvements Projects

Objection Reviewing Officer,

The following objection is submitted on behalf of Emily Sadow - Friends of the Wheeler Peak Wilderness

This Objection is filed pursuant to, and in compliance with, 36 C.F.R. Part 218, Subparts A and B. I have previously filed timely, specific and substantive written comments in accordance with 36 C.F.R. 218(a). As required by 36 C.F.R. § 218.8(d), Objector provides the following information:

1. The name and contact information for the Objector is listed below.
Emily Sadow
PO Box 710
Victor, ID 83455
snowmaven@gmail.com

2. Emily Sadow is the Lead and only Objector for purposes of communication regarding this Objection.

3. The project that is subject to this Objection is "Taos Ski Valley, Gondola And Other Improvements Projects". The Responsible Official is James Duran, Forest Supervisor, Carson National Forest. The National Forest on which the Proposed Project will be Implemented is: Carson National Forest, Questa Ranger District.

4. Objector submitted timely, specific, and substantive comments during the Public Comment Period on 3/26/23 and during Draft EA on 5/22/23. All points and issues raised in this objection refer to issues raised in those comments or are related to new information. Attached hereto are prior comments and I incorporate their arguments and information by reference.

6. In the following Statement of Reasons, Objector provides the specific reasons why the decision is being appealed and the specific changes or suggested remedies that are sought, along with the related evidence and rationale on why the decision violates applicable laws and regulations.

OBJECTIONS

Does not comply with NEPA policy. I object to you not following your NEPA policy and conducting an EA when an EIS is implied.
- While it is the sole discretion of the FS to make a decision of whether to conduct an EA vs. an EIS, it is suppose to be based on their determination that the project does/does not meet the NEPA threshold for an EIS

("significantly affect the human environment"). The scope of this project is substantial. Installing a gondola will have huge impacts on soil, erosion, wildlife, flora & fauna, the watershed, and the viewshed, among others, and the comments you received during the scoping period illustrate this need. Not only will the impacts during the construction be consequential, but the cumulative effects are something that are necessary for your study to cover. The threshold for an EIS depends on these increased impacts, and building a new lift and a new restaurant will increase visitation to a sensitive area. For you and your agency to imply that these are not significant impacts is distressing. The EA states that "The combination of a shorter winter season and earlier spring melt will have serious impacts on the water resources, ecosystem, and the economy at TSV". If the USFS agrees that there are serious implications of our changing climate on a local business, it is irresponsible for you to not consider the affects of it on a community as a whole, especially the downstream users who have been there long before the ski area. The purpose and need does not implicate the necessity for these upgrades without responsibly considering their impact on the community vs. the sole business of TSV Inc.

Remedy: The environmental and socioeconomic impacts from this project, including but not limited to: watershed, viewshed, access, soil, and erosion implicate the need for a full Environmental Impact Statement. The Forest Service should be directed to file a Notice of Intent that it will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, following the procedures that Congress adopted when directing agencies to prepare detailed EIS.

2. I object that the EA offers no Alternatives
- Alternatives in an EA are necessary for the public to consider the effects. You received enough comments regarding concerns for certain aspects of this project that you could have included at least 1 alternative, if not more. Including a "no action" alternative, is not really an alternative, it is just doing nothing. Please do the work, take the time to consider parts of this project that might align with the purpose and need without considering it as an all or nothing proposal.

Remedy: The Forest Service should be directed to file a Notice of Intent that it will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, following the procedures that Congress adopted when directing agencies to prepare detailed EIS that includes at least 1 alternative in addition to the "no action" alternative".

3. I object that the Gondola was given proper scrutiny
- One of the objectives in the purpose and need statement is "The identified purpose of the base-to-base gondola is to increase non-vehicular transportation between the Frontside and Kachina Basin base areas…" However, if TSV Inc. is limiting that amenity to patrons of their resort, that does nothing to satisfy this need. The Village of TSV supported the easement on their property for the gondola with the understanding that the gondola would be open to everyone. Now,TSV Inc. has stated that it will only be for paid users, so the village has objected: Taos News: Village of TSV objects to Gondola Passenger Restriction. This is now a social justice issue as this amenity on public lands (partially) will only be open to those who pay for it. Many people who drive to the Kachina Basin are doing so to NOT utilize the ski area, therefore they will still be creating traffic. This does NOT satisfy the purpose and need identified in the Final EA. This also does not set a trustworthy precedent for TSV Inc. as they are already recanting discussions made with stakeholders. If the main purpose of the gondola is for increase non-vehicular transportation and safety and not for real estate development and restriction of access to the public then the gondola needs to be open to all. These concerns were expressed by many commenters and they were not addressed.

Remedy: The Forest Service should be directed to file a Notice of Intent that it will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, following the procedures that Congress adopted when directing agencies to prepare detailed EIS that includes an alternative that does NOT include the Gondola. Alternatively, TSV Inc. needs to sign a development agreement that includes language that keeps the the Gondola a non-discriminatory use and open to all users as they had previously agreed on with the Village of TSV as well as language that maintains access to our Public Lands will not be restricted.