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First name: Mackenzi
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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,

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:

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2. Mackenzi Frederick is the Lead and only Objector for purposes of communication regarding thisObjection.

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 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.

5. 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. These include:
The Final Environmental Assessment (Final EA) does not support a Finding of No Significant Impact.
This absence demands a well-researched and considered Environment Impact Statement (EIS).
Impacted watersheds Lake Fork Creek and Rio Hondo deserve an EIS as Outstanding Natural Resource Waters (ONRW), as do affected, sensitive wetland areas.
A dismissal of any Alternative proposals contradicts NEPA and the principles that TSVI agreed to comply with when they certified as a B-Corporation. The Forest Service has a duty as a public agency to respond to the community and the ecosystem that it serves.
The Gondola project undermines access to Wilderness and does not mitigate vehicular traffic.
Replacement of the Whistlestop to utilize the same footprint and do not construct a new facility at Chair 7.

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.

Objection: The tally of the adverse and beneficial short and long-term impacts from the Final EA indicates a disproportionate adverse impact on 60% of Resources (Environmental Assessment, Table D-1). This is a Finding of Significant Impact that leaves long-term adverse effects unclear, necessitating an EIS.

In addition, the Soil and Watershed Report (Table 1. Project Element Disturbance Areas) describes the disturbance - both temporary and permanent - to be significant, especially related to the proposed Gondola, which is estimated to be 41% of the overall disturbed acreage. This is an impact that warrants further investigation.

Solution: Create an Environmental Impact Statement. Propose Alternatives that eliminate the construction of a Gondola.

Objection: The research backing the approval of the Final EA is narrow in scope, outdated and does not demonstrate current research about the environmental impacts related to watershed and wetland in an era of uncertain climate change, see Soil and Watershed Report, References.

Solution: Environmental Impact Statement with current, extensive research, especially regarding the impacts of the proposed Gondola on area watershed and wetland. Further action from the Draft Decision Notice must be based on the objective findings of an EIS.

Objection: The ONRW status of the impacted watersheds Lake Fork Creek and Rio Hondo mandate an EIS.

Solution: Any further action from the Draft Decision Notice be based on the objective findings of an EIS. Propose Alternatives that eliminate the construction of a Gondola.

The lack of Alternatives dismisses the objections from a number of stakeholders within the community and contradicts NEPA. TSVI's status as a certified B-Corporation and the Forest Service's role as a public agency mandates their service to both ecosystem and to " the quality of the human environment considering the potentially affected environment and the degree of effect." (Environmental Assessment, page 261).

Solution: Propose Alternatives to the project that consider all stakeholders - not just TSVI Corporation - and implement an Environmental Impact Statement.

The restriction of Gondola access to ticket and passholders is intended to limit access to Kachina Basin. This undermines Wilderness Act protections to access Wheeler Peak Wilderness. It also negates the intention to limit vehicular traffic. Its most apparent function is to serve TSVI and private property owners. This also strikes a discordant tone when considering legislation and Executive Orders in the Environmental Assessment (Appendix D), in particular issues around environmental and social justice.
Solution: Propose Alternatives to the project that consider all stakeholders - not just TSVI Corporation - and implement an Environmental Impact Statement.

Relocating the Whistlestop exponentially increases its footprint and disturbance. A new restaurant at Chair 7 disregards the fact that there is the Phoenix facility, which largely sits unused, in the nearby Kachina Basin (less than 1 mile distant).
Solution: Rebuild the Whistlestop in the same location. Use the Phoenix facility as a restaurant.