



June 1, 2020

Joshua Hall
Ecosystem Staff Officer
11 Forest Lane
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Joshua,

On behalf of Sandia Peak Ski Area, we would like to provide the following comments on the *Northern New Mexico Riparian, Aquatic, and Wetland Restoration Project*. We understand that the proposed action includes restoration activities that could occur on the Cibola National Forest. As a permittee of the Cibola National Forest, operating on lands designated by the Forest Plan as *Management Area 2 – Sandia Ranger District*, we feel it is pertinent to be involved in the environmental review process.

Overall, we support improvements to riparian health and are interested in extending our partnership to these projects when it is possible and appropriate. With that being said, we feel that restoration projects should not supersede the emphasis of *Management Area 2*, which is on, “providing opportunities for a variety of year round recreational experiences consistent with guidelines established for maintaining viable wildlife populations and ecosystem health.” We believe that the EA supports this point as page 12 of the EA states, “Proposed riparian, wetland, and associated upland and aquatic restoration described below would be consistent with the forest plans.” We understand this to mean that the direction to provide recreation within our Management Area would not be superseded by restoration activities that may not be able to coexist with existing ski area infrastructure and operations.

Further, the flexible toolbox approach outlined on page 17 of the EA document seems to suggest that there is an opportunity to modify project design as warranted by site specific conditions. Just as projects would be modified to address listed species habitat, we request that developed recreation resources within our permit area be considered in a similar manner. In-depth studies of lands within the SUP area that have been completed over the years could provide an excellent resource to identify and inform the consideration of areas for treatment. We are interested in supporting implementation of these projects in conjunction with ski area development projects where they can coexist.

Lastly, we request that the analysis of recreation resources acknowledge ski areas. This could occur within the *Recreation and Congressionally Designated Areas* section of *Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences*, which describes different forms of developed recreation. Page 81 of the EA states, “Recreation opportunities on the Cibola National Forest include nonmotorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation.” Despite the mention of developed recreation, we note that no specific examples of these recreational activities are provided. We feel that specific examples of these activities, including ski areas and downhill skiing, should be included in the EA as is similar to the descriptions of recreation on the other National Forests involved in the EA. Based on the effects to recreation resources, described on page 93 of the EA, we hope that a collaborative partnership would allow us to minimize impacts to our operation. Specifically, this could include taking on projects during off-seasons, reducing the need for closures outside of normal construction seasons, and avoid implementing projects that would hinder future ski area projects and operations as described in our Master Development Plan and annual operating plans.

We are grateful for our partnership with the Cibola National Forest and hope that you will consider these comments as part of your environmental review of the *Northern New Mexico Riparian, Aquatic, and Wetland Restoration Project*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Abruzzo', is written over a white background.

Ben Abruzzo, General Manager
Sandia Peak Ski Area