

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/7/2017 2:29:54 AM

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Title:

Comments: To the White River National Forest Service and Everyone else attending this meeting, I wish I could be here this evening but I have volunteered to participate in a USSA fund raiser beginning this afternoon in Yellowstone, so I am writing this letter hoping you will have time to hear my thoughts, despite my absence.

I have read the arguments against this Golden Peak expansion. I must say I tend to be one of the more nostalgic people I know. People have always called me an old soul, and I'm a person who prefers to stop time because in my life, as the hours, days and years seem to be flying by in front of my eyes, moving too fast and changes are happening too often, everywhere, and especially in my home of the Vail Valley. It's like a don't have a moment to catch my breath before something else significant changes in my life; yet despite that, when I heard about this expansion project, I said "FINALLY," someone in our premier U.S. Ski resort, with what should and could be the premier ski club in the U.S., is making a much needed improvement, for the local, and even national alpine community.

I learned how to ski at Golden Peak and have great memories of the old Chair 12. 95% of my ski days from 2 through 8 years old, at which time we had to move to N.H. for my dad's job, were skiing at Golden Peak. My brother did the same through age 10. We skied the same trail over and over and over and hardly went anywhere else on the mountain. Golden Peak was our playground and it was the same for most of the kids we knew at that time. We free skied there, trained there, raced there and when I think of Vail Resorts, I mostly remember my days training and racing with my friends at Golden Peak.

When we moved East and my brother and I ended up joining the Burke ski program in VT. My parents, brother and I could not believe how phenomenal the set up there was compared to what we had seen before. The dedicated training hill and surface lift that serviced exactly that trail, allowed us to get the maximal amount of training we possibly could out of a 2 hour session. It was so incredibly efficient that we could attend school, and still get immeasurably more training in than probably anywhere else in the country, besides the famous Buck Hill Ski resort, which besides BMA at the time, had a similarly efficient training venue and was also spitting out most of the athletes to the US tech team. I have never been to Buck Hill, but with it's similar layout, I have heard it's also perfect for producing world class tech skiers with the minimal amount of time required by the athletes to be out on the hill.

Presently at most ski areas, including even Golden Peak, I figure in a 2 1/2 hr training session, I spend about 7 mins actually training. Some ski areas it's more like 3-4 mins training in a 2 1/2 hr session. GP is more efficient for GS training but for SL training, with that long turn around in order to even get to a short SL course, which takes up only about 1/4 to 1/3 of the training hill it's really not efficient at all. And even for GS, the first half of the entire course is too flat and some of it is uphill, so it's really not great for GS training either. Thus I'm forced to go elsewhere for better GS training as I need more of a challenge much of the time. At Burke Mtn. - we got off the lift, skied a few feet and started running the course. I could fit 12-16 runs in 1 training session and since performance is directly related to time on snow and time in gates, you can imagine what a huge advantage that was to me during key developmental years. People wonder why I started my first World Cup race at only 15 years old, and already have won the overall WC title at 22, well now you have a key part of the answer. The quality of the training (and I must admit, the coaching I received growing up, especially Kirk's, and the use of the hill space), with a set up like the one BMA has, with the perfect length trail, surface lift to accommodate it and focused environment was essential to my development and success. It's no secret and it's not rocket science. That little training arena was so far superior in efficiency to what I have experienced anywhere else in this country or internationally for tech training, that I was bound to have the best and most productive experience per hour on the hill and bound to end up on the World Cup at such a young age. That really is it. That trail was our gym and

we made the best use of it that we possibly could.

With this expansion, you are looking at providing the local kids with a very similar experience. This new trail would be their gym. While I grew up loving Golden Peak, this new terrain would be the best development this ski community has seen in a long time for our local alpine kids, and I for one would for sure be seen there training every day that I am home. If I had to say the two most important things that the U.S. needs to in order to produce more and better skiers at the World Cup level; they would be- better coaching and a more focused and efficient training venue with MUCH much much less wasted time just trying to get TO the course itself. I also believe better coaching would be supported and facilitated by a better venue.

This little swatch of training would get kids off the main trails where we have always gotten in trouble for skiing too fast- in fact just last month I was pulled over for skiing too fast down Ruder's Run and I didn't even think I was skiing too fast, but with the Burton Open taking up so much of the training hill space, I needed someplace to free ski.

SSCV has evolved to catering to so many different disciplines for our winter sports community which is appropriate for all of the local families. They all need time on the limited space at Golden Peak. And while I think it's great that there is now a winter sports option for every personality in our schools, the alpine skiers have really been getting squeezed into an often inadequate section of the hill. While I think our ski community needs to cater to all of the disciplines, I do get angry when I look at my childhood playground and there is so little area left for the alpine skiers to train on. This new trail would resolve so much conflict over that space and provide a place for alpine skiers to train better and more efficiently and allow the other disciplines to get their training in as well.

With Colorado having the best skiing in the world with a healthy population of fantastic athletes, there is no reason that we shouldn't be producing the bulk of the World Class skiers on our USST, especially given that this new trail would provide the best and most affordable training of any ski community in the U.S. You never know where the next Bode Miller will come from but we would be grooming and giving a phenomenal opportunity to a whole new generation of great athletes who would otherwise probably just get frustrated as so many others have, with the chaos and traffic on Golden Peak, and switch to another sport.

I know many people are not in favor of change or development or removing trees or needing more parking. But if it hadn't been for the vision the Vail founders had in the first place, and their willingness to take a brilliant and courageous chance on this forest service land in 1962, then none of us would be here at all. My parents have said that aside from upgrades in the lodges and lifts, and a few minor changes to the Golden Peak trails they don't remember any development happening in the Golden Peak area for the 30 years they have been skiing there.

You all take so much pride in this community, and developing the retail districts, the residential areas, the biking trails, etc. and doing the best you can to provide a great childhood experience for your children within this community but many of the children spend day in and day out skiing on Golden Peak just like I did as a kid so isn't it time to think about upgrading that experience? And by doing so where's the harm in producing a world renowned training facility for Alpine skiers.

I urge you all to put aside the "Not in my backyard" mentality and think about the MANY MANY wonderful changes that HAVE been made in our Vail Valley over the years, which had nothing to do with enhancing our training venue or benefitting winter sports families at SSCV then ask yourselves if it isn't time to provide a better gym for athletes and children in our community and the world of alpine skiing in general.

Thanks so much for listening to me.

Mikaela Shiffrin