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Comments: I would like to share some thoughts on the proposed expansion of the Mt Rose ski area across highway 431 to the old Atoma cross country ski area. As an avid skier myself, and I find value in both downhill lift-served skiing, as well as cross-country and backcountry skiing opportunities. Reading over the draft Mt Rose expansion plan, I am impressed with the limited scope of the plan, and specifically the allowance of cross country skiing and other non-motorized users without buying a lift ticket.

However I do have several concerns, especially in consideration of the long-term trends and potential impacts for other recreation in this area. First, I am not convinced that Mt. Rose needs this expansion to complement their existing terrain. Mt Rose currently possesses some of the best beginner/novice terrain in the Tahoe area. I feel that their claim of a lack of 'low intermediate' terrain is somewhat exaggerated. While it is a bit of a jump from the Galena chair up to Lakeview, there are good intermediate trails down such as Kit Carson, Ramsey's and Around the World. As a ski instructor myself I have led students across this transition off the novice slopes and I can attest that it is a reasonable progression that is similar to most other ski resorts in the Tahoe area. Additionally, the realignment of the Wizard chairlift a few years ago has virtually eliminated any potential conflict between novice skiers and more expert skiers returning to the base from the upper mountain.

Second, there are obvious issues with constructing both a skier bridge and chairlift across a major highway. The potential for disruption to traffic includes items dropped on the roadway from the chairlift, potential height restrictions due to the clearance of the bridge and of course disruptions to traffic during the construction of both. For these reasons, I would lean towards supporting the '2-lift' alternative in the plan. I will note that while there are a few examples of skier bridges and lifts crossing roads in the US, none involve a major state highway, and such an action would be unprecedented and untested.

Finally, while these issues could probably be overcome, I feel the project is in opposition to the current trends of the ski industry in general and the Mt. Rose area specifically. As the population ages, the weather gets more unpredictable and downhill skiing gets more and more expensive, a greater number of people have turned toward cross-country and backcountry experiences for their snowsport excursions. This trend has been accelerating in recent years, with sales of cross country equipment rising while sales of downhill gear has been flat. The Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report shows that cross country skiing is the second fastest growing outdoor activity in the country, right behind stand up paddle boarding with a 13% annual growth over the last three years. https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-Topline-Report_FINAL.pdf These trends should clearly not be ignored when making long term plans for recreation management.

The Atoma area used to be a fine cross-country ski area before it was put out of business by the explosion of downhill skiing in the 70's and 80's. As the popularity of resort skiing has waned, downhill ski areas are now struggling to put people on the mountain. With plans to reinstate a cross country ski area and lodge at Incline Lake, the Atoma area could quite conceivably be incorporated into a longer-term vision for an expanded cross-country destination for the Mt. Rose area. However expansion of the Mt Rose downhill area would be permanent and probably irreversible. Why should we proceed with propping up a dying downhill sport when soon people might be clamoring for more cross-country skiing opportunities?

Human-powered recreation should take priority over other commercial enterprises on National Forest lands. It is less impactful to the environment, and many users report it more rewarding to be in the quiet woods on a self-powered adventure. In recognition of the trends of skiing and snow sports in this country I vote 'NO' on the Mt. Rose expansion plan.