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First name: Bob

Last name: Rowen

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Mt. Rose Ski Resort has acted as a positive member of the community in its approach to this expansion, including through proactively seeking input from the local community several years ago. As a result of that active community participation, the proposals include important provisions - specifically with regard to continued nonmotorized public access to the Atoma area - that should result in the expansion being a net positive, allowing the resort the ability to meet its perceived needs while not foreclosing the public from continued use of public lands.

Critically important to the public approval of this project are the provisions allowing continued nonmotorized public access to the Atoma lands, including free parking and access, including to skiers with dogs. I have often skied in the lands covered by this expansion, as well as traversed them to access lands higher up the Galena creek drainage. These lands provide important winter recreation opportunity for a couple of reasons.

First, when storms render the higher areas off the Mt. Rose highway inhospitable or dangerous, these areas remain accessible and relatively safe. The statement (on page 74) that the Atoma terrain is "used mainly to access steeper terrain on NFS land to the north of the Atoma Area" discounts the importance of the area itself and the adjoining last south of Galena Creek. My use of the area has been on the terrain itself, as well as the adjoining terrain south/west of Galena Creek, and that is where I have seen other users.

Second, oddly and inappropriately, winter recreation off the Mt. Rose highway is largely characterized by motorized recreation impacts. For instance, it is hard to escape the noise of snowmobiles when skiing or snowshoeing in the Tahoe meadows. (The highway noise is, in fact, insignificant compared to the snowmobile noise.) The lands east of the highway summit are thus important for nonmotorized winter recreation because they are isolated from this noise. Higher up on this east side (i.e. off Tamarack Peak) the territory is relatively steep and, though well-suited to backcountry skinning, does not provide much opportunity for gentle touring. The relatively gentle lands accessed in the Atoma area and through the Atoma area are, therefore, important to providing a decent mix of recreational opportunity off the Mt Rose highway.

All of the provisions for continued public access should be made explicit conditions for approval and confirmed in writing as irrevocable commitments by Mt. Rose Ski Resort. This will ensure that the provisions continue without argument as circumstances change. There should be no flexibility for Mt. Rose Ski Resort to revisit how to best address the public needs in the future: the provisions for continued public access need to be in writing and firm. (They could always be renegotiated with public comment.) I do not hereby imply any criticism of Mt. Rose Ski Resort, but merely acknowledge that circumstances can change in the future and there is no excuse for not putting in clear writing the assumptions and expectations upon which public approval for the Atoma expansion is provided.

This project does remove from public use the hundred or so acres that will be devoted to use by ticketed customers during the ski season. That is a material loss of public terrain. On the other hand, snowmaking and grooming (snow compaction) of ski resort runs can benefit nonticketed individuals who also access these areas. Accordingly, approval of this project should also be conditioned on Mt. Rose Ski Resort continuing to allow public access to all terrain leased from the Forest Service, on terms where such access does not impact the safety of resort operations (and resort operations do not impact the safety of such use.) Mt. Rose Ski Resort has proven to be a good member of the community in not trying to prohibit such use when it does not impact resort operations. Such continued access should be made explicit in all Forest Service ski area operating permits and should also be an explicit condition to approval of this project.

A few further comments:

The DEIS inadequately characterizes the nature of this land when it says (on page 72) "A GIS evaluation of the IRA for ROS classification determined that 1 percent of the IRA is Primitive and 76 percent is Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized. As a result, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the Atoma Area are limited." The ROS classifications refer to summer characteristics. In winter, they do not apply. In particular with the high snows in the Sierra, most forest roads cease to exist and areas that are accessible become highly inaccessible. Adults die in winter in circumstances and locations where a lost child would be in little danger in summer. In winter, portions of the Atoma area are primitive.

I fully support the Forest Plan amendment to preclude (further) commercial development on the 3,446 acres acquired through the 1994 Galena Resort Land Exchange.

The choice between alternative 2 and 3 (one lift or two lifts) does not appear to impact these concerns. Whichever alternative allows for a larger corridor for continued public access is preferable in this respect.

Lastly, I wish to express some concern that the resort's customer base and the community might be better -- and more profitably -- served by, instead, adding groomed Nordic track in this Atoma area. Such a use would have far less cost and would largely be reversible, and so there seems to be a lot of merit to the resort and the Forest Service fully exploring such alternative before committing to the current planned development. There have been many substantial changes to the sport of Nordic skiing and its public appreciation since the demise of the former Atoma Nordic area. This is especially true with respect to the sport of skate skiing, which barely existed at that time. There is adequate space to create an attractive skate skiing track in the Atoma area, and there is local demand for such an area, especially considering the more reliable snow at the resort with "Tahoe's highest base." I hope the Resort and the Forest Service have fully explored this alternative...especially the Resort, which has a significant financial stake in this matter.