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Title:

Comments: RE: RE: Humboldt Toiyabe DRAFT EIS Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe Expansion

Dear Forest Supervisor Bill Dunkelberger and Forest Service Staff:

While the EIS focuses on ski expansion, one has to view this project as a potential year round recreation expansion including snowboarding, hiking, zip lining, hiking and biking trails, etc. Does this EIS cover these additional recreation activities or will each activity be subject to an EA? This question is relevant because availability of sufficient annual snow fall to provide skiing is becoming problematical forcing ski resorts to focus on other activities. This EIS seems incomplete and even misleading. I would like to see projections on snow fall over the next 30 years.

I see no effort to inventory or recognize natural resources in this EIS. The increase in trails, ski lifts, public use must have an impact on natural resources. I see no effort to recognize those resources or provide mitigation. Clearly this expansion will have an impact on wildlife food resources and harassment of wildlife with increased public use. Are there riparian areas which need to be protected?

What are the policies on acquired lands? Surely they are not purchased with the goal of privatizing the property or limiting public use or wildlife values.

Some thoughts:

1. Acquired lands need to be specifically noted on Forest Service maps. Generally these lands are acquired with public funds and need to be used for public benefits. Those benefits should be recognized in the EIS's and EA's. I would hope that wildlife preservation, scenic values, and watershed protection would be among those values.
2. I support the no action alternative, but it appears this project is too far down the track to seriously consider that option.
3. The ski resort should be responsible for building and maintaining public facilities and signage on adjoining Forest Service land. The expansion will draw many more visitors; the Forest Service lacks the capacity to build and maintain facilities. I assume that the Ski Resort will be promoting the entire recreational area including trails outside the Ski resort.
4. I support protection of the 3,000+ acres in the Atoma area. How will this designation be noted in perpetuity?
5. How much access will the nonpaying public have to the lands within the ski resort area?

PS. I believe this is the second time I have written this letter. Below I have included an article which indicates to me that this EIS is incomplete.

Kathryn Sosbe

Office of Communication, U.S. Forest Service

August 23, 2017 at 3:45pm

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The 122 ski areas that operate all or partially on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service <<https://www.fs.fed.us/>> have long acted as developed gateways to introduce visitors to other recreation activities and benefits, such as hiking, access to cool, clean water or wildlife watching.

Traditionally, most ski areas that operate on Forest Service lands through permits were limited by law and policy to Nordic and downhill skiing. In the off seasons, guests could hike or bike around the areas, but unless permit holders had private land they could not offer zip lines or other warm-weather sports.

Today, five ski areas that use the White River National Forest <<https://www.fs.usda.gov/whiteriver>> - the most visited national forest in the nation - have or will soon offer year-round, natural resource-based fun. Vail in Colorado became the first to offer expanded recreation in 2016 along with Heavenly in California, both Vail Resorts properties. Vail, for example, offers zip lines, adventure courses, a 3,400-foot alpine coaster, and climbing wall, among others, as approved activities under their Forest Service special-use permit. As guests move through the activities, they are exposed through signage and talks by nature interpreters that help connect them more to the 'whys' of federal lands.

Officials at one ski resort that expects to begin summer activities next year estimated they would see an additional 150,000 guests just in the first year.

"Ski areas have a significant investment in facilities and infrastructure, capital investments and organization. They wanted better use of that investment in a more year-round manner," said Jim Bedwell, who recently retired as director of recreation for the agency's Rocky Mountain Region. "We recognized those needs but also see that these ski areas, as with many of our special uses, are a way to connect perhaps nontraditional, diverse audiences with national forests. They provide us within a small area the opportunity to reach out and connect one-on-one to many people."

That change did not come easily.

In 2007, the Forest Service denied Vail Resorts request to amend its special-use permit to allow for an alpine coaster and other expanded summer activities. Though intrigued, the agency didn't have a choice. Those types of activities Vail sought to offer did not fit within the legal parameters that federal law allowed.

It took an act of Congress, which passed the Ski Area Recreational Enhancement Opportunity Act of 2011, followed by the collective work of agency land managers, partners and the public to develop policy. Now, summer is looking different on many ski areas that use Forest Service-managed lands, but the change is not turning federal lands into large amusement parks.

Proposed activities are scrutinized based on the degree to which they are natural-resource based, encourage outdoor recreation and enjoyment of nature, and harmonize with the natural environment, all requirements of the 2011 law. It also means that not just any zip line is approved. It's all how that line blends with the natural surrounding and how much the user can see and understand about that area.

"We are seeing visitors that this is their first time on a national forest. It is a gateway and facilitated experience into the outdoors," said Daniel Cressy, who has a three-fold job as regional landscape architect, accessibility coordinator and recreation planner for the agency's Rocky Mountain Region. "We talk a lot about activities and

the actual development of infrastructure. We make sure that construction features blend into the natural settings as much as possible. What we build on the landscapes speaks to our values. You create memories here, and that's one of our products."