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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service,

Thank-you for asking the public to comment on the proposed Sandia Peak Ski Area Mountain Coaster. I am, generally, opposed to this project. First, you estimate that the Tram ridership will increase "slightly" by about 10-15%. However, you state that the estimated Coaster riders per year will be 100,000, while the current Tram ridership is about 250,000 per year. I calculate an increase in Tram ridership of about 40%, much larger than your estimate of even 15%. Granted, in the winter some of those Coaster riders will apparently access the Coaster from the chair lift on the east side, and some of the current Tram riders could also be considered as riders of the Coaster. Still, I think the increase demand on the Tram will be much more than your "slight" estimate. The wait time at the Upper Tram Terminal to return down mountain can already be quite long, and having to deal with the increased wait time will probably discourage me from using the Tram again. Once I was obliged to wait outside at the Upper Tram in bitter cold and windy conditions, to ensure I had a place in line for the next Tram down. I think Sandia Peak needs to better manage the first-come-first-served basis for getting on the Tram to go back down. This management will be harder with the larger demand caused by the Coaster.

Second, my main objection is a philosophical one regarding the use of our National Forests. I do not have much regard for those people who would visit the Sandia Mountains only in order to ride a Coaster. I do not think we should be turning our National Forests into amusement parks. I think the Sandia Mountains' National Forest, Wilderness and Open Spaces are highly valuable assets for Albuquerque and surrounding communities and should be treasured and properly cared for. I value the Sandias primarily for hiking and enjoying the scenery. The abundance of hiking trails is one asset that lured me to move here to retire. One of my concerns is the apparent lack of "law and order" in the Sandias, especially with regard to preventing wildfires. I have witnessed people in picnic grounds (at Cienega, for example) building unnecessarily large fires, once the CoVid restrictions last summer were relaxed, and there have been no Forest police or rangers around to help combat this practice. Many people are careless and inconsiderate, in general, and forest fires in the U.S., especially in the west, are just getting worse with very fire season. I think the Cibola National Forest should worry much more about the best management of the forest so as to reduce risk of fire, rather than worrying about adding an amusement park ride that will lure more and more people that do not have any regard for how to treat the Forest with care and respect.

Third, I'm concerned that the increase in visitors caused by the Coaster would further increase the "dislaw" and "disorder" in the Sandias. Yes, my number one concern in general is a devastating forest fire in the Sandias, but I'm also concerned about vehicles speeding up and down the Sandia Peak highway, as well as aggressive convoys of loud motorcycles. A single accident caused by reckless driving could easily start a terrible forest fire. If the Cibola National Forest can already not provide sufficient police and rangers to monitor the few roads and picnic grounds in the Sandias, how are they going to do so when many more people are being lured there? If most riders of the Coaster are expected to take the Tram to access it, that would help to lessen the increased use of the Sandia Crest highway, but I'm still wishing that more funds could be diverted to being able to hire more rangers.

Finally, I would like to call your attention to a Letter to the Editor of the ABQ Journal by Paula J. Lane in the March 23rd edition. She emphasizes the relatively small areal extent of the Sandias, that the Coaster will not "further the goal of enhancing people's appreciation of nature". I understand your motto Land of Many Uses "captures the National Forest goal of a healthy, vigorous forest that provides wood products, watershed protection, a variety of wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities -- not only for us today, but in a sustainable way so future generations can enjoy these benefits, too", but this is the 21st Century and wildfires around the globe are a real threat to our forests. I believe the ski center can more-or-less be "grandfathered" into existence

within the wide swath of National Forest that is not designated as Sandia Wilderness, especially since the traffic on the Crest Highway that it causes is mainly in the winter when threat of wildfires is relatively very low. However, I am opposed to the Coaster. I would prefer funds and resources to be spent on educational programs for the public about fire prevention and also on programs to "enhance people's appreciation of nature". In other words, I would prefer funds to be spent on promoting the natural aspects of the Forest, as opposed to building an amusement park ride. I would also like to see more funds being directed toward increasing the presence of rangers and monitoring by rangers of fire-building (or fire-causing) activities.

Again, thank-you for the opportunity to provide my input.