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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service,

I am a resident of the South Valley of Albuquerque and have come to the Sandia Peak and many of the trails for many outdoor activities, such as hiking and wildlife watching since before I even moved here in 2016. I am writing to comment on the proposal to develop a "Mountain Coaster" on Sandia Peak (Project #56985).

I oppose this project for at least four reasons:

First, in light of ongoing stresses to the health of the Sandia Mountain coniferous tree population (due to decreased precipitation, warmer temperatures, disease, and other adverse impacts of climate change), the deliberate and permanent elimination of trees that this project would entail seems entirely inappropriate. Now is not the time for us to be eliminating yet more forested mountain acreage. If anything, we should be doing exactly the opposite -- i.e., protecting the health of the existing tree population and expanding it where it makes sense to do so from an ecological perspective.

Second, again due to climate change, the risk of a catastrophic forest fire on Sandia Peak is greater than ever in the history of the Cibola National Forest. More people on the mountain means a higher probability of anthropogenic fire origination. Why would we add a major year-round recreational attraction to a fire-prone area in light of this increased risk? This seems completely foolhardy to me.

Third, this project is likely to generate substantial additional automobile and motorcycle traffic to and from Sandia Peak in all seasons in which the coaster operates. This traffic will be in addition to the traffic that existing mountain travel destinations and attractions already generate. Traffic has a variety of adverse impacts on the health of the Sandia Mountain ecosystem and its socioeconomic environment. These impacts include higher rates of wildlife mortality (due to collisions with vehicles), increased noise pollution, more roadway dust and toxic chemical deposition (from tear wear and other sources), more vehicle exhaust emissions, increased traffic crashes, more litter from car windows, greater congestion on mountain roadways, greater risks to pedestrians and bicyclists walking or riding alongside roadways, and many others.

Fourth, the noises generated by the operation of the coaster itself are likely to be substantial, with consequent adverse impacts to both wildlife populations and non-coaster recreational users in Cibola National Forest. Sources of noise are likely to include the machinery to pull coaster vehicles up the mountain, the sound of coaster vehicles sliding down the mountain, the screams of the coaster occupants as they experience the falling sensation of the coaster ride, and possibly others.

In sum, I oppose this project because I do believe that any benefits it might bring would outweigh its costs. The project is very likely to have substantial adverse impacts on the ecology of the Sandia Mountain resource, the experience of people who wish to visit Sandia Peak for more quiet and benign recreational purposes (e.g., hiking and wildlife watching), and the surrounding socioeconomic environment.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on this project.

Terra McKeown