

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/27/2022 5:38:51 PM

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Comments: April 27, 2022

James Duran, Forest Supervisor

P.O. Box 110

Questa, New Mexico 87556

Re: Taos Ski Valley Gondola and Other Improvements

Greetings, Mr. Duran, and thank you for hearing public comments on the proposed Taos Ski Valley gondola, water storage and other improvements.

I am very concerned that the proposed projects will cause irreversible damage to the Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area, the Columbine Hondo Wilderness, and the Carson National Forest, and that these and related projects will reduce the quality of the water in the Rio Hondo, and the amount of water available to downstream rural historic communities such as Valdez, Cañoncito and Arroyo Hondo.

I request that you:

- * Require TSV Inc. to provide documentation of steps to be taken during all phases of the projects to protect the integrity of the headwaters of the Rio Hondo.

- * Require TSV to fund continuous monitoring of the Rio Hondo for water quality and flow, with monitoring sites at multiple places along the length of the river.

- * Conduct a study to enumerate the expected increases in visitor days in the Ski Valley and identify their impacts. That study must be conducted considering not only the proposed projects but all other public or private projects proposed for the Ski Valley area.

I understand that many of the proposed projects require removing additional trees from the Rio Hondo Watershed. This and previous loss of trees in the area is a significant contributor to the decline of forest health and an associated decline in nearby water quality and quantity.

I strongly request that you:

- * Conduct a study of forest health that will guide decisions about whether additional trees should be removed from the area.

Gondola

The proposed route of the Gondola will be immediately adjacent to and/or directly along the Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo. Clearing trees to allow passage of the gondola cabins would increase silting, destabilize the riverbanks and increase storm run-off, resulting in decreased water quality and the destruction of irreplaceable riparian and wetland habitat.

The gondola operations will discourage animals from using the irreplaceable water sources of the Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo and its associated wetlands, seriously affecting those animal's eating, drinking and mating habits. In addition, the gondola infrastructure will be easily visible from areas with high scenic integrity, including areas of the adjacent Wilderness Areas.

I strongly request that you abandon the proposed gondola project, since it will cause significant and unavoidable harm to the wilderness.

Water Tank and Booster Station

Please clarify where the initial water used to fill the tank come from, i.e., what waters will be used to replenish the tanks. It is crucial that TSV Inc. demonstrate that it has sufficient water rights to support its proposed activities before it begins construction. Additionally, please clarify how the water will be used and how that use will be monitored. Without additional information on the source and usage of the water to be pumped up the mountain it is impossible to know if that diversion and usage is permitted.

Regardless of where the water comes from, holding five million gallons of water and replenishing the water tank will affect the already stressed Rio Hondo watershed and impact the amount of water available to downstream rural historic communities.

I request that you delay the Water Tank and Booster Station Project until TSV Inc. clearly specifies how the water will be used, and until TSV Inc. can prove that it holds water rights to support those activities. I further request that you conduct a study to determine the effects of removing that water from the Rio Hondo Watershed, including the water needed to replenish the tank on a regular basis.

Nordic and Snowshoe Trails

The proposed Nordic and Snowshoe Trails and Buildings would lie immediately uphill from the Rio Hondo. Just like the Gondola, that development will impact wildlife and water quality in the Rio Hondo. Clearing trees uphill from the river and placing building sites there will increase runoff thereby increasing silting and sedimentation in the Rio Hondo. Increased silt and sedimentation will negatively affect the beaver colonies and fish spawning areas downstream from the site and decrease water quality for the communities along the Rio Hondo.

I ask that you require TSV Inc. to develop a site specific plan to address the direct and indirect impacts of the Nordic and Snowshoe Trails center on beaver and fish habitat and overall water quality and quantity in the Rio Hondo.

Lift Replacement

Replacing existing ski lifts will require unnecessary excavation of the old lift towers, and additional cleanup and digging to install the replacement towers. This excavation work will disturb the soil, increasing runoff and erosion and potentially impacting the hydrology of the watershed.

I ask that you require TSV Inc. to reuse the existing towers on lifts #2 and #8.

Restaurants

The size of the proposed new development high on the mountain will disturb the soil, increase runoff and erosion and potentially impacting the hydrology of the watershed, in addition to requiring building more infrastructure. Additional restaurants and shops are not needed in this area.

I strongly request that you deny the request to build additional restaurants, and suggest that TSV Inc refurbish the existing Whistlestop facility if updated on-mountain dining is needed.

Construction Base Area

A construction base area and new roads to support construction will require the cutting of additional trees and permanently harm the soil due to compaction, negatively affecting forest health, water quality and water quantity.

I recommend and request that you cancel the gondola and restaurant projects and restructure the remaining

projects so that a construction base area and additional roads are unnecessary.

In summary, I am asking you to cancel some of the proposed projects and take additional time to study the potential effects of the others. In addition to the actions requested above I'm asking the Forest Service to conduct an Environmental Assessment and to develop an Environmental Impact Statement for these projects. Thank you in advance for acting on my concerns.