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First name: Melissa

Last name: Larson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear James Duran, Carson National Forest Supervisor,

Please accept these public comments as pertains to Taos Ski Valley's proposed Gondola and other watershed proposals.

I support a full environmental impact study of impact to the Rio Hondo water quality and quantity and impact to forest health and wildlife.

Full disclosure of TSV water rights and proof that there is enough water currently available to support the expansion without further tapping of springs, streams and groundwater.

Action Requested: Require TSV to fund continuous monitoring of the Rio Hondo for water quality and volume. Based on a preliminary study and the advice of acknowledged experts, monitoring sites should be located at a number of places along the length of the Rio Hondo.

Action Requested: 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 projects proposed for the Ski Valley area whether they are public or private.

Gondola

The proposed route of the Gondola will be immediately adjacent to, and, at points, directly on the Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo. The Scoping Notice says that a corridor will be cleared of trees to allow passage of the gondola cabins. That clearing would be immediately adjacent to the Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo for most of its length and at some points right on the river itself. Among other effects, removing trees along the Lake Fork will increase silting and suspended particulate matter, destabilize banks and increase storm run-off. The end result will be decreased water quality and the destruction of irreplaceable riparian and wetland habitat.

A year-round gondola operating for most of the day and part of the night will discourage animals from visiting the irreplaceable water sources of the Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo and its associated wetlands. Those animals' eating, drinking and mating habits will be seriously affected by the year-round, 12+ hours-a-day noise, visual disturbance and increased presence of humans. In addition, the gondola infrastructure will be easily visible from areas with high scenic integrity, including areas of the adjacent Wilderness Areas.

Action Requested: Cancel the Gondola Project because it will have significant unavoidable harmful impacts

I oppose 5 million gallon water tank near lift #2

Action Requested: Delay the Water Tank and Booster Station Project until TSV Inc. provides more information on how the water will be used and until it can prove it has water rights to support those activities. Conduct a study to understand the effects of removing that water from the Rio Hondo Watershed including the water needed to replenish the tank on a regular basis.

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.

Action Requested: 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 with a focus on eliminating run-off and reducing silting, sedimentation and SPM in the Rio Hondo.

11,000 square feet of new development high on the mountain will disturb the soil, increase runoff and erosion and potentially impacting the hydrology of the watershed. It will also require additional infrastructure for utilities with similar impacts. The Ski Area has multiple restaurants close to the lifts and slopes, additional facilities are not needed.

Action Requested: Deny the request to build additional restaurants. Suggest refurbishing the existing Whistlestop facility if updated on-mountain dining is needed.

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

Sincerely,
Melissa Larson