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Organization:

Title:

Comments: May 3, 2022

James Duran, Forest Supervisor

? Paul Schilke, Winter Sports Coordinator

P.O. Box 110

Questa, NM 87556

Re: Taos Ski Valley water usage and proposed development

Mr. Duran,

I am a skier and I appreciate Taos Ski Valley and what the Blake Family created for our community. I am also extremely concerned that the current proposed projects at TSV will have a negative effect on the Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area, the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Area, and the Carson National Forest. I love our mountains and forests and would like to see TSV Inc. act in cooperation with the health and longevity of these areas. And I'm concerned about water-water quality and water quantity in a continually changing climate.

Planning and Monitoring

I'm requesting that TSV Inc. be required to detail concrete steps to be taken during all phases of the projects to protect the integrity of the headwaters of the Rio Hondo and for 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.

It seems obvious that a study should be conducted 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.

Tree Removal

Many of the proposed projects require removing additional trees from the Rio Hondo Watershed. Taos Ski Valley Inc. has already cleared a significant number of trees in the area, and it has plans to clear many more acres. As you must know, loss of trees is a significant contributor to the decline of forest health and an associated decline in nearby water quality and quantity.

Again, a study of forest health needs to quantify forest health and guide decisions about how many more trees can be removed from the area before proceeding with development.

Water

I'm curious where the water for 5 million gallons of water used to fill the proposed water tank at the base of Chair #2 will come from? What waters will be used to replenish the tanks?

While TSV holds diversionary rights to 200 acre-feet of water those rights are severely constrained by their permit which allows only 21.42 acre feet to be consumed. Those rights are further limited by a hard cap of only 0.11 acre feet of daily consumptive use between April 11th and October 25th each year. Given these limitations on its water usage. Taos Ski Valley Inc. must demonstrate that it has sufficient water rights to support its proposed activities before it begins construction on a costly and permanent water system.

Also, the Notice is silent on how the water will be used once it is pumped up the mountain. Does TSV Inc. have uses other than snowmaking in mind? If so, how will those uses 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.

The Water Tank and Booster Station Project should be delayed 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.

Overall, I am asking you to pause on the proposed growth and take additional time to study, in detail, the potential effects. There are some big questions still to answer.

I'm additionally asking the Forest Service to conduct an Environmental Assessment and to develop an Environmental Impact Statement for these projects.

I support ethical skiing and recreation in our mountains and forests. With responsible planning, transparency and monitoring, we can have healthy forests, clean and adequate water supply for downstream communities, and skiing/outdoor recreational access. Unnecessary development and careless planning will only hurt our communities and our wilderness moving forward.

Thank you in advance for acting on my concerns.