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Organization:

Title:

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James Duran, Forest Supervisor
c/o Paul Schilke, Winter Sports Coordinator
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 110
Questa, NM 87556

Dear Mr. Duran and Mr. Schilke:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Taos Ski Valley Gondola and Other Improvements Project. It is my pleasure to offer the highest possible support for the proposed projects, in particular the base-to-base gondola and the on-mountain water tank and booster station. These proposed projects are an exceptionally good fit for the Taos Ski Valley (TSV) and surrounding Carson National Forest due to the positive environmental impacts, improved wildfire protection, and enhanced recreational opportunities the projects enable.

The proposed gondola to be situated between the TSV main base and the Kachina Basin base areas holds potential to reduce significantly many unnecessary and redundant motor vehicle trips using Twining/Kachina Road. The latter is currently the only viable means for moving between the two base areas. One consequence of the growing popularity of the Kachina Peak lift for skiing, the Kachina Basin area in general for mountain biking, and the improved Williams Lake and other Kachina Basin area hiking trails is more skiers, hikers, and mountain bikers wanting to start their day in the Kachina Basin. Thus, during peak recreational periods, early-to-mid-morning and mid-to-late afternoon vehicle traffic on Twining/Kachina Road is notably heavy for a winding, two-lane dirt road with several steep grades.

Adding to traffic are a rising number of short-term rentals on the backside at the Wheeler Peak Condominiums and the Bavarian Condominiums. A fair number of these renters start their days driving to the TSV base to purchase lift tickets, rent skis or bikes, or to put children into ski school.

Twining/Kachina Road was not designed for the volumes of vehicle traffic it is now carrying, particularly during peak winter and summer activity periods. This heavy traffic load chews up the road surface and base, increases more rapid water runoff, and necessitates nearly constant and costly road maintenance which in itself adds more vehicle traffic.

A high proportion of the vehicle trips on Twining/Kachina Road would not need to be made in cars or trucks if there were alternative means of moving between the two base areas. The proposed gondola provides an excellent, effective, and certainly more environmentally favorable alternative.

In these times of unprecedented wildfire danger, no project may be more important than the proposed on-mountain water tank and booster station. All who live in, who depend on their livelihood, who participate in the many recreation activities or who simply enjoy the wondrous beauty and magic of the Ski Valley are grateful for all steps that can be taken to improve the ability to suppress the magnitude of wildfires in the area.

Thank you again for considering the proposed Taos Ski Valley Gondola and Other Improvements Project and for offering the means to comment on the proposal. Without reservation, I enthusiastically and unequivocally support the proposed project.

Regards,

Dr. Gary Gittings