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Organization:

Title:

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Dear Forest Service,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed improvements in Taos Ski Valley (TSV). As a long-time TSV skier and now TSV resident, I'd like to express my family's general support for the proposed improvements, and in particular, highlight our interest in the base-Kachina gondola.

TSV is northern New Mexico's premier recreational destination and a vital economic engine for the greater Taos area. Over the past few years there has been a significant increase in visitation to TSV, especially during the summer. The main dirt road that accesses the Kachina area has become overwhelmed with vehicular traffic, creating major safety, parking, and dust issues. The planned gondola could significantly reduce traffic pressure on the road, decreasing environmental impacts and improving quality of life for both residents and visitors.

Gondolas and trams that serve as "people movers" to provide access to fragile high alpine environments are common throughout the European Alps, where they have enabled pedestrian-oriented mountain communities. These lifts have a very minimal ground footprint and can be powered by solar-generated electricity.

We are also largely supportive of the other planned improvements. TSV has no plans to significantly increase winter visitation, and the proposed upgrades to lifts and on-mountain amenities are necessary to maintain user service and remain competitive in the ski industry. The areas that will be impacted by construction have mostly already been disturbed by prior construction activities. In the case of the planned Nordic and snowshoe trails, that area has already been heavily thinned a few years ago as part of a broader fire mitigation program. The water tank would provide essential storage for snow making and fire suppression, and it would not increase TSV's annual water uptake from the Rio Hondo. I believe that filling the tank could be done during high flow periods, which would ameliorate down-stream impacts.

A number of concerns have been raised by others anticipating adverse environmental impact from the planned improvements. I believe the improvements can be thoughtfully done with minimal environmental impact, and this expectation can be a stipulation in the approval.

Thanks again for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely, Ben Cook