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Comments: Comments to US Forest service NEPA process re: Current round of Taos Ski Valley Expansion --- Gondola, Mountain Side Restaurant, and Lift Replacements

The following substantive comments are provided as evidence that the current Taos Ski Valley expansion over steps the bounds of responsible resource allocation. The forest Service should curtail or outright refuse the Ski Valley proposal. Any Taos Ski Valley proposals for development should require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Substantive comments as follows:

1)In evaluating this proposal, the importance of the affected resource must be considered. The Upper Rio Hondo watershed is arguably the most important watershed in New Mexico and one of the most important in the Southern Rocky Mountains. This is not an ordinary water catchment. This is THE highest catchment in all of NM and one of a few alpine watersheds geographically positioned at the southern or the Rocky Mountains. Due to its high elevation, it is one of our best chances to keep pure, clean water unaffected by upstream impacts. Also due to the watershed's high elevation and southernly latitude, it is one of the few places this far south where our water resource is naturally accumulated and stored later into the year. As I write this on May 13, 2023 a storm just blanketed this watershed with precious frozen moisture. There is almost nowhere else in North America this far south that is still accumulating frozen precipitation this late into the season. This is an exceptional watershed and deserves exceptional protection, not increasing over allocation. At the bare minimum this watershed deserves the consideration of an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement).

2)When weighing such an important resource management decision, it can be useful to look at how other similar resources are being managed. If a proposal is dramatically different than how other similar resources are being allocated then it may be worth more analysis, such as an EIS. For example, the City of Santa Fe's watershed also comes from a high mountain catchment. How is this watershed managed? Access is tightly controlled. All public access is completely restricted for protection of the watershed. Looking immediately south to the lands of the Taos Pueblo, how is this watershed managed? Again, the watershed is completely protected for its resource to the Taos Pueblo people, and for its part of the Pueblo's origination story which likely encompasses the fundamental, deep cultural knowledge that these places deserve reverence and protection. How do these resource management policies compare to what is being proposed in the Ski Valley. The difference in management b/t complete protection and a huge restaurant and a gondola right up the gut of the watershed is obvious and stark. With such a contrast, it is apparent that the assumptions being made in this development plan should be double checked, and the scrutiny of an EIS deserved.

3)Trends. It is important to not only consider where we stand today, but also where we will stand in the future. All data and science points to drier and warmer climate in our region, which will reduce our water supplies. What is already a scarce and precious resources will only become more scarce and more precious in our lifetimes and our children's lifetimes. The trend of the ski valley is more consumption, more use, over allocation. Looking at these two trends concurrently paints a bleak picture. When you clearly see a developing problem, the wise move is to plan ahead, conserve, and manage the situation with care and caution. Exacerbating the problem with this development plan is to move completely against the trends. It is the forest service's duty to look ahead and make wise management decisions of our collective resources.

4) Public Recreational Opportunities. One of the great uses of our public lands is for recreation. This is the rational the forest service uses for allowing the ski valley a permit to operate and the also the rational for this

latest round of development. Will this development really increase public recreation opportunities? The developments will not help the "public" as the vast majority of the public cannot afford to pay for the ski valley services. The ski valley is only servicing the very small portion of people that have the ability to pay the absorbent cost, not the "public". Similarly, this plan will not increase "recreational" opportunities. There are already multiple ways to access the area served by the proposed Gondola such as taking the lifts and skiing, driving up the road, or walking. Allowing the proposed Gondola does nothing to increase "recreational" opportunities, it only seems to increase adjacent property values. Similarly, at what point did public recreational opportunities include eating at overpriced restaurants on the side of a mountain? There are plenty of places for a restaurant, they do not have to be on our public lands.

It is kindly requested that the above substantive comments are recorded as part of the NEPA process.

It is also requested that the Forest Service fulfill its duty as stewards of our public forests and both require an EIS and reject this development. Within this plan the new Gondola and Restaurant are particularly egregious and over the top. They represent completely new development that impacts the highest and arguably most important watershed in our state. The development is completely contrary to how other similar watersheds are managed and to the increasing trend of water scarcity. This development will have such a significant impact to our public land and water, and yet no significant increase to "public recreation".