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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Supervisor Duran:

Re: Taos Ski Valley Expansion

I object to the Taos Ski Valley Gondola and Other Improvements Projects

This is New Mexico- one of the driest states in the United States. While those of us who live in New Mexico are preparing for a future of worsening drought, cutting back our water usage, and engaging in better environmental practices, the Taos Ski Valley should be doing the same. This expansion will attract even more people up into the limited, tightly built-up space in the Taos Ski Valley, and put even greater strain on the beautiful high country environment.

A full Environmental Impact Statement should absolutely be required.

With what happened last year, with the fearsome Hermits Peak/ Calf Canyon Fires, it seems unwise to permit TSVI to go forward with this huge construction project.

They will be trucking large equipment up through the small towns on narrow roads, and all this taking place during the dry, summer forest conditions.

The benefits will go to the TCVI, and some of the wealthier of the skiers, condo and home owners of the Village of Taos Ski Valley, but not to many of the rest of us that live in nearby communities, who will suffer the impacts. Yes, it brings more people to Taos that will spend some money here and there, but is it worth the sacrifice of our water, roads and villages, and the serenity of where we live? Who of us who live here will be able to afford to ski at the Taos Ski Valley anymore, or ride the new gondolas?

NOT ENOUGH TIME FOR PUBLIC INPUT

The public was not given ample time to learn about the expansion, nor opportunity to respond. The two public meetings that were held were not properly announced, and were not set up in a way that allowed discussion. Fortunately before the 2nd meeting, a few people in our community saw this coming and turned things around on the spot, so at least some Taosenos were able to speak. It was not the proper way to hold a community forum. There still needs to be more meetings in Taos. Many people have no idea of what the TSVI is proposing to do.

SKI RESORTS IN THE TIME OF DROUGHT

From an article written Jan 25, 2022 in AP News discussing the future of ski resorts, Senior vice president of sustainability at Aspen Ski Co. Audin Schendler warns that " the ski industry is not on track to be viable beyond 2050."

It's a sobering thought, that Ski Areas will no longer be viable in a little over 25 years, and it's likely to be less.

Should TSVI be allowed to build more restaurants, structures, and Gondola machinery, that will further degrade the alpine beauty, increase their carbon footprint, and diminish our water supply? Being an environmental company as they claim, it would be better for them to invest in ways to use reclaimed water for their snowmaking, make improvements on what is already there, and reduce their impact on the fragile alpine environment.

If the TSVI are allowed to expand, we would experience even more cars and traffic on the narrow and dangerous road through the historic village of Arroyo Seco, and on up through the canyon to the Ski Valley. It would mean more water being drawn from the water table, creating drier conditions in the forest, and less water for everyone downstream. There would be a greater chance of fire. The TSVI is proposing to build a bridge, terminal and maintenance center in a riparian area near to a freshwater forest wetland, a very important part of the Rio Hondo river system, in a delicate area that should be protected. Their ideas need to be scrutinized and reviewed carefully, by doing a full EIS.

IMPACTS ON THE RIO HONDO RIVER, VALDEZ AND ARROYO HONDO

My husband and I live in Valdez, and are parcientes of the Acequia de San Antonio. Our acequia association uses water judiciously.

It's a historic system set up on the principle of sharing equally, and has been a way of life for many generations. The health of our small community depends on the mountain water for our orchards, farms, gardens and livestock. The water that comes down our acequia in Valdez has decreased over the years- not everyone gets what they need. The proposed TSV plan completely disregards the concept of sharing water.

It is unwise to assume that there will be a continuation of the same amount of rain and snowfall over the drought years ahead to fill our streams, wells, and acequias.

What goes on at the Ski Valley affects the flow of water for all of us in Valdez, Arroyo Hondo, and the beautiful Rio Hondo stream that flows into the Rio Grande, and there on down. Extensive water quality testing ought to be happening at all times, and the public should have the right to see these reports.

FIRE DANGER

For the Taos Ski Valley to assume they can keep their operations running fully through the summer seasons is not being realistic.

During some of the past extremely dry summers, trails and businesses were closed down for public safety. Each year, not long after the snow melts, the forests become tinder dry. I frequently hike on trails in various places on the Ski Valley Road and areas above.

It was very disconcerting to me last summer, when the Hermits Peak/ Calf Canyon fires were raging just east side of us, TSV kept their businesses running and the forest trails remained open. It seemed very dangerous to me.

EVERY DROP OF WATER MATTERS

Many days out of each ski season, snow making is needed to keep the slopes in good condition for skiing. Snow making in all the ski areas has needed to increase each year. With 20% of the water lost in evaporation, that's a bigger loss than they tell us. Rather than using up water to make snow, shouldn't a ski run or two be eliminated? Should TSVI be allowed to keep using water freely like that? Dry slopes in the winter could be in the not too distant future.

The TSV can't make enough snow for all those runs forever. As the drought wears on, it would be much wiser for them to invest in a system of using reclaimed water - rather than using up more and more of our pristine mountain water.

PRESERVE THE HIGH MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS AND THE UNIQUE HISTORICAL COMMUNITIES

Taos is unique, historically and culturally. It's important that this is protected- for the people who live here, and for the visitors to experience a different kind of place. People come here also to enjoy the quiet and beauty of the high country. Being able to get away from the mechanized, overcrowded world helps us all to stay healthy and

sane.

Preserving the habitat of the Sangre de Cristo mountains is necessary and crucial for all the wildlife, and endangered species that live there.

I have talked with tourists through the years, when I was working in a gallery in Taos. Time and again I would hear visitors say they didn't want to see Taos to get overrun, like so many other places. They loved how so much of its historic and cultural uniqueness has been saved.

The wilderness, the beauty, all this is what people come here for. If it becomes overcrowded, we will have lost what we have.

GONDOLA, RESTAURANTS and TRAILS

The gondola seems extravagant and unnecessary. It will disrupt the natural beauty with its structures and machinery.

The lifts that are already there could be improved if necessary, keeping their same locations.

One solution to help get people up to the Bavarian and the trail heads in the summer, might be to have vans take people up, and drop them off.

A ticket on a gondola is not cheap. If the TSV arranged a system where they would drive people up, it would have far less impact.

Renovating the Whistle Stop should be all that is needed. Not changing its location. The idea of adding still another restaurant, is an unnecessary extravagance, and would take away from the high country experience and the alpine feeling that many people come to the Taos Ski Valley to enjoy.

New trails for summer and winter use is a good idea, low impact, and a good way for people to spread out and have different experiences while up there.

Taos Ski Valley was known for a more rugged, natural experience. Many people have preferred coming to the Taos Ski Valley as it's not like so many other ski resorts.

When I told my daughter about the Taos Ski Valley's proposed expansion, she commented that Taos Ski Valley is her favorite place to snowboard, because

" It ISN'T one of those packed Ski Resort places, with all the long lines and craziness."

I am in favor of more time and thought be given to this. TSVI needs to take care of their leaking water pipes to start, and a water quality monitoring should be put in place, so the public can really see what is going on.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts,

Erica Collins

Valdez, New Mexico