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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Forest Supervisor

White Mountain National Forest

71 White Mountain Drive

Campton, NH 03223

Re: Waterville Valley Resort Proposed Expansion, Project #289908 - Strong Support for Alternative 2

Dear Forest Supervisor:

As a resident of Waterville Valley, I am writing to express my strong support for Alternative 2, the proposed action submitted by Waterville Valley Resort.

This is not simply a proposal to add ski terrain. It is a long-term investment in the economic vitality, accessibility, resilience, and future identity of Waterville Valley. The proposed village-to-summit connection, expanded terrain, improved guest facilities, and year-round summit activities would address weaknesses that have constrained the resort and the town for decades. Together, these investments would help Waterville Valley remain a viable mountain community rather than slowly lose ground to competing destinations that have continued to modernize and expand.

The Forest Service's decision should recognize that the economic health of Waterville Valley and the health of the resort are inseparable. The resort anchors local employment, hospitality, property ownership, business activity, and municipal investment. When the resort succeeds, the benefits extend well beyond its permit boundary. When it stagnates, the effects are felt throughout the community.

Waterville Valley is also located within the North Country Economic Development District, a federally designated region encompassing Grafton and Coös Counties and northern Carroll County. The district exists specifically to encourage economic stimulation and resilience in the northern part of New Hampshire. Its current Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy recognizes outdoor-recreation infrastructure as essential to the continued growth of the regional economy. It also identifies the importance of expanding the range of experiences offered by ski areas so that communities can attract visitors across more of the year and become less dependent on a single weather-sensitive season. Alternative 2 is directly aligned with those regional priorities.

The proposal would expand the resort's special-use permit boundary by approximately 333 acres, create new traditional and gladed terrain, add snowmaking, construct two on-mountain facilities, and establish a village-to-summit lift system. The Forest Service's own description indicates that the full lift connection would reduce travel between the village and the summit of Green Peak to approximately 10 to 15 minutes and could operate throughout the year. That connection is the most important element of the proposal.

For generations, Waterville Valley has existed as a mountain community whose town center and principal recreational asset are physically separated. Visitors staying in the village must drive, take a shuttle, or arrange other transportation to reach the ski area. This produces unnecessary vehicle trips, parking demand, congestion, and inconvenience. It also weakens the economic relationship between the resort and Town Square.

The village-to-summit lift would finally address this long-standing structural problem. It would make the mountain more accessible from the town, reduce reliance on short automobile trips, and allow visitors to move naturally between lodging, restaurants, shops, community activities, and mountain recreation. Rather than treating the

town and mountain as separate destinations, the lift would allow them to function as a unified resort community.

That integration would create substantial hospitality value. It would give visitors a reason to stay longer, spend more time in the village, patronize local businesses, and experience Waterville Valley as a coherent destination. It would also help restore some of the distinctive, immersive character that has historically made Waterville Valley special.

This investment is increasingly necessary because Waterville Valley is competing in a market that has not stood still. Other New Hampshire resorts, including Loon Mountain and Bretton Woods, have made significant investments in terrain, lifts, lodging, guest services, and non-winter attractions. Those investments have changed visitor expectations. Waterville Valley cannot preserve its position merely by maintaining what already exists. A decision to take no action would not preserve the status quo; it would allow the resort's competitive position to continue eroding.

The Draft EIS acknowledges this reality. Waterville Valley Resort's annual skier visitation remains well below its early-1990s peak even as national skier visits have increased substantially. The resort has identified limited terrain diversity, inadequate guest-service space, and inefficient access as continuing threats to its market position. Alternative 2 responds to those deficiencies as an integrated plan rather than as a series of incomplete compromises.

The proposed expansion would also produce important employment and economic activity. Construction would generate work for contractors, tradespeople, engineers, equipment operators, suppliers, and other regional businesses. The completed project would support additional positions in mountain operations, maintenance, snowmaking, food service, hospitality, events, transportation, retail, and recreation. These jobs would create secondary economic benefits as employees and visitors spend money throughout the region.

The employment argument should not be reduced to a simple count of seasonal positions. A stronger and more competitive resort supports a broader network of local livelihoods, including lodging operators, property managers, restaurants, shops, instructors, builders, service providers, and small businesses. It also creates opportunities for career development in outdoor recreation, hospitality management, skilled maintenance, and resort operations.

The year-round elements of Alternative 2 are especially important. Scenic lift rides, summit dining, special events, and other proposed warm-season activities would help Waterville Valley move beyond an economy concentrated primarily around winter skiing. I would describe this as three-season value rather than true four-season development: winter recreation, summer mountain activity, and fall foliage and events. Extending meaningful activity across these seasons would make employment more stable, give businesses a longer operating window, and improve the community's resilience to variable winter weather.

A more attractive and economically active community should also strengthen demand for local property and encourage reinvestment in Waterville Valley. Increased property values are not guaranteed and should not be treated as the sole measure of success. Nevertheless, improved access, stronger amenities, and a more competitive resort are likely to support confidence in the community's future. A stronger tax base can, in turn, expand the town's capacity to invest in infrastructure, public spaces, transportation, services, and other community priorities.

Waterville Valley needs that cycle of reinvestment. Without significant new economic energy, the community risks gradual decline: aging infrastructure, reduced competitiveness, weaker business activity, and less capacity to fund the improvements needed to remain an attractive place to live and visit. Alternative 2 offers a credible opportunity to reverse that trajectory.

I recognize that development on National Forest System lands must be evaluated carefully. Wildlife habitat, water resources, soils, scenic integrity, forest health, and the long-term stewardship of public lands all matter. Support for Alternative 2 does not require dismissing those concerns. It requires weighing them against the public, recreational, and economic benefits of the proposal and adopting enforceable measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate material impacts.

The reduced-scale Alternative 3 appears to address some environmental concerns, but it also risks weakening the integrated value of the project. The Forest Service should not reduce the proposal simply because a smaller alternative creates fewer effects on paper. It should determine whether the impacts of Alternative 2 can be responsibly managed through siting, operating requirements, seasonal restrictions, habitat protections, restoration commitments, monitoring, and other mitigation measures. Where they can, the Forest Service should approve the stronger and more economically consequential alternative.

I therefore urge the Forest Service to select Alternative 2, subject to reasonable mitigation requirements and continued public transparency.

In particular, approval should not provide a blank check for the appearance, scale, or placement of the project's most visible structures. The final architectural and infrastructure designs for the summit restaurant, mid-station facility, lift terminals, access roads, parking areas, lighting, signage, and other prominent components should be disclosed with sufficient detail for meaningful public review and comment before construction. Public input should be used to refine how these facilities fit within the landscape and the established character of Waterville Valley.

This condition should improve the project, not become a mechanism for endlessly reopening the fundamental decision to proceed. The Forest Service can approve Alternative 2 while requiring transparent design development, clear visual and environmental standards, and opportunities for focused public comment on significant final design elements.

Waterville Valley has an opportunity to make a generational investment: one that reconnects the town and mountain, strengthens the regional recreation economy, creates employment, expands hospitality activity, supports property and municipal reinvestment, and positions the community for a more resilient future.

Doing nothing is not the cautious choice. In a competitive and changing recreation economy, failing to invest carries its own substantial risks.

I strongly urge the White Mountain National Forest to approve Alternative 2, incorporate effective environmental safeguards, and require meaningful public transparency as the final designs are developed.

Sincerely,
Bryan Reimer
Waterville Valley resident