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Submitted Electronically

Mr. Derek Ibarguen

Forest Supervisor

White Mountain National Forest

c/o Justin Preisendorfer, Winter Sports Team Leader

71 White Mountain Drive

Campton, NH 03223

Dear Forest Supervisor Ibarguen:

I am writing separately from Waterville Valley Resort's formal comment letter to offer my personal perspective on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Waterville Valley Resort Proposed Expansion.

I serve as President and General Manager of Waterville Valley Resort, and I understand that role comes with a responsibility to speak carefully, honestly, and respectfully during this public process. But I am also writing as someone who has dedicated much of my professional life to Waterville Valley as a whole - not simply the alpine ski area, but the broader resort community, the town, the village, our employees, our guests, our families, our partners, and the long-term future of this Valley.

This project is not just about expanding skiing. It is about completing and strengthening the larger vision of Waterville Valley as an integrated, four-season mountain resort community. The gondola, the Green Peak improvements, the village connection, the guest-service facilities, the added recreational opportunities, and the long-term investment in public access all work together. They are not separate ideas. They are pieces of one larger strategy to position Waterville Valley as one of the premier mountain resort communities in the East.

I have spent decades in the ski and resort industry. I have worked at resorts in different parts of the country, been part of expansion efforts, studied mountain communities, and seen firsthand what allows a resort community to remain healthy over time. The industry has changed dramatically. Guest expectations have changed. Climate pressures have changed. Workforce challenges have changed. The economics of operating a mountain resort have changed. Communities that do not reinvest thoughtfully and responsibly fall behind, and once that happens, it becomes very difficult to reverse.

Waterville Valley has lived through that reality. For many years after the resort's earlier peak, the Valley struggled with stagnation, declining competitiveness, and an incomplete vision. Since the current ownership group purchased the resort sixteen years ago, they have shown unwavering commitment to changing that trajectory. They have supported the resort through difficult periods, invested in the mountain and the broader resort community, strengthened operations, expanded year-round thinking, and remained committed to the larger vision of reconnecting the town and resort in a way that honors Waterville Valley's original promise.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to help carry that work forward.

Waterville Valley is a unique place. It is not simply a ski area, and it is not simply a town. It is a resort community surrounded by the White Mountain National Forest, with a history that began with a bold idea: that recreation,

lodging, village life, public lands, a school, families, guests, employees, local businesses, and residents could work together as one integrated Valley. Tom Corcoran's vision was not just to build lifts and trails. It was to build a complete mountain community.

That vision has never been fully realized. The proposed village-to-summit gondola is, in many ways, the missing connection that has been discussed for generations. It would finally create a true non-vehicular link between the village and the resort. It would allow guests, residents, employees, families, and non-skiing visitors to move between the town and the mountain without relying only on cars, shuttles, parking lots, and road congestion. It would make the resort more accessible and more understandable. It would make the village and the mountain feel like one connected place.

That matters.

It matters to guests arriving in Waterville Valley for the first time. It matters to families staying in the village who want to access the resort easily. It matters to older visitors, young children, and non-skiers who may not be able to hike, ski, or navigate winter parking lots, but who still deserve the opportunity to experience the beauty of Green Peak and the White Mountain National Forest. It matters to employees who depend on a healthy resort for stable work. It matters to local businesses that depend on visitation. It matters to the long-term economic health of the Valley.

I also want to speak personally about the team at Waterville Valley Resort.

I am proud of this team. The people who work at Waterville Valley care deeply about this place. They are not anonymous employees of a corporation somewhere far away. They are lift mechanics, snowmakers, groomers, ski patrollers, instructors, food and beverage employees, lodging employees, shuttle drivers, finance and administrative staff, marketers, managers, seasonal workers, and year-round employees who show up in difficult weather, during holidays, in early mornings, late nights, storms, power outages, and all the operational realities that come with running a resort community in New England.

They care about the guest experience. They care about the town. They care about our homeowners and visitors. They care about public recreation. They care about doing things the right way. They also know better than anyone that Waterville Valley cannot stand still. The status quo is not neutral. Without thoughtful reinvestment, we risk continuing a slow decline that would harm the resort, the town, our employees, our guests, and the broader Waterville Valley community.

This project is a chance to move forward responsibly.

I recognize that there are legitimate concerns raised during any project of this scale. Questions about wildlife, water, forest resources, traffic, visual impacts, community character, public access, lighting, and construction impacts deserve to be taken seriously. That is why the EIS process matters. It is also why Waterville Valley Resort has participated in this process in good faith, invested in technical studies, worked with the Forest Service, listened to public input, and supported a full environmental review.

I also recognize that wildlife agencies, conservation organizations, residents, and other commenters have raised serious resource concerns during this process. Those concerns deserve careful review. I am not asking the Forest Service to minimize or dismiss them. To the contrary, I believe the strength of this process is that it gives the Forest Service the ability to evaluate those issues directly, apply the best available science, refine the project where appropriate, and require design criteria, mitigation, monitoring, and operating practices that protect the resources entrusted to its care. Waterville Valley Resort should be expected to be a constructive partner in that work.

Stewardship does not mean doing nothing. Stewardship means understanding the resource, respecting the landscape, making informed decisions, avoiding and minimizing impacts where possible, and creating long-term public value. In my view, this project can do that.

The proposed improvements would create a meaningful four-season connection between the village and the resort. That would improve access to public lands. That would support skiing and riding, but also sightseeing, dining, events, family visits, educational opportunities, and experiences for people who may never put on skis. That would strengthen the connection between Waterville Valley's existing assets and help bring them together into one cohesive resort community.

The expansion of terrain and glades would provide needed variety and improve the resort's ability to serve modern skiers and riders. The mid-station would improve access from existing parking areas and help better distribute guests. The Green Peak Summit Facility would create a four-season public destination that allows people of all ages and abilities to experience the mountain. The gondola would reduce reliance on vehicle trips between town and resort and create a connection that has been part of Waterville Valley's long-term vision for decades.

At the same time, I understand that the Record of Decision is not simply a choice between one alternative or another exactly as written. A final decision of this kind may include refinements, design criteria, mitigation measures, monitoring requirements, and elements drawn from more than one alternative. That is appropriate. A responsible decision should improve the project where it can be improved, avoid and minimize impacts where practicable, and address legitimate resource concerns while still preserving the core purpose and public benefit of the proposal.

For example, refinements that avoid or reduce impacts to wetlands, streams, vernal pools, wildlife movement, habitat connectivity, lighting, visual resources, construction impacts, or human-wildlife conflict may strengthen the final decision if they can be made without undermining the project's essential purpose. Waterville Valley Resort has shown throughout this process that it is willing to work collaboratively with the Forest Service on reasonable refinements. What is most important is that the final decision protect resources through thoughtful, workable conditions while still preserving the public access, four-season recreation, guest-service, transportation, and long-term community goals that brought the project forward.

I respectfully ask the Forest Service to evaluate the full project not as a collection of isolated components, but as an integrated, long-term investment in public recreation, community vitality, and responsible use of National Forest lands. The essential purpose of the project is to connect the village and resort, improve public access, support four-season recreation, provide needed guest services, protect long-term high-elevation flexibility, and allow Waterville Valley to continue serving the public on the White Mountain National Forest for generations.

The No Action Alternative does not meet the needs of the resort, the guests, the employees, or the community. It would leave Waterville Valley with the same structural challenges that have held it back for years: disconnected town and resort areas, limited on-mountain guest service space, insufficient terrain variety, difficult access, and declining competitive position in the regional resort industry.

I also respectfully ask the Forest Service to consider what this decision represents beyond Waterville Valley. This is not simply a local resort improvement. It is an opportunity to affirm that developed recreation, when carefully planned and responsibly managed, remains an important public use of National Forest lands. Ski areas on National Forest lands have long helped millions of Americans access mountain landscapes that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for many people to experience. That access matters - for families, children, older guests, people with disabilities, non-skiers, employees, local businesses, and gateway communities.

That is especially important in the East, where major new developed-recreation opportunities on National Forest

lands are rare. The White Mountain National Forest has an opportunity to show that public-land stewardship and responsible recreation investment are not opposing ideas. They can and should work together. A carefully written Record of Decision can protect resources, require meaningful mitigation, and still allow a long-planned, community-shaping recreation project to move forward.

I do not say that lightly. I say it after years of living this work every day.

My family's life is tied to this Valley. My professional life has been dedicated to helping Waterville Valley become what it has always had the potential to be: a complete, connected, four-season resort community where the town, the resort, the mountain, the village, public lands, local businesses, residents, employees, and guests all support one another.

Waterville Valley deserves a future that is strong, vibrant, accessible, and sustainable. The goal is not simply to improve one part of the resort. The goal is to bring the pieces of Waterville Valley together into one cohesive, four-season resort community that can compete at the highest level while still preserving the character, stewardship, and sense of place that make the Valley special.

The Resort's employees deserve the chance to be part of a growing and resilient organization. The Town deserves a resort that continues to attract visitors, support local businesses, and strengthen the local economy. The public deserves better access to the beauty of the White Mountain National Forest. Future generations deserve more than maintenance of the status quo.

I hope the Record of Decision reflects that broader responsibility: protecting resources while also allowing public lands to serve the public. Waterville Valley is ready to continue working collaboratively with the Forest Service on design criteria, mitigation, monitoring, and operational details that make the project better. I respectfully ask that the final decision preserve the essential purpose, public benefit, and long-term vision of the project, with clear, science-based conditions that allow Waterville Valley to move forward responsibly.

Thank you for your consideration and for the work the Forest Service has put into this process.

Sincerely,

Tim Smith
President & General Manager
Waterville Valley Resort