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Comments: Public Comment on the Brian Head Resort Expansion Draft Environmental Impact Statement

I am concerned about the potential environmental impacts of expanding Brian Head Resort, particularly the effects on water resources, wildlife habitat, and the surrounding landscape. I understand that the expansion could improve recreational opportunities and benefit the local economy, but I believe the Forest Service needs to carefully consider whether those benefits justify the permanent changes to public lands.

One of my biggest concerns is water use for snowmaking. The proposal includes approximately 19 miles of new snowmaking lines and up to 186 acres of additional snowmaking coverage. Snowmaking may help the resort maintain reliable skiing conditions, but it also requires additional water in a region where water availability is an important environmental consideration. I would like the final EIS to clearly explain how much additional water each alternative would require, where that water would come from, and how withdrawals could affect groundwater, streams, wetlands, and other users during dry years. The analysis should also consider how climate change and potentially shorter snow seasons could affect the long-term sustainability of the proposed expansion.

I am also concerned about the amount of new development proposed on the Dixie National Forest. The plan includes up to 382 acres of new ski trails, 14 new lifts, up to 10 miles of new roads, and additional utilities. Clearing vegetation and building infrastructure can fragment wildlife habitat, disturb animals during construction, increase erosion, and change how water moves across the landscape. I would like the Forest Service to identify which habitats and wildlife species could be affected by each alternative and explain how impacts would be avoided or minimized. Restoration plans should include measurable standards for revegetation and erosion control, along with monitoring to determine whether those measures actually work.

Finally, the expansion could affect the scenery and dark night skies around Cedar Breaks National Monument, an International Dark Sky Park. The final EIS should carefully evaluate how new buildings, lifts, lighting, and cleared slopes could affect the area's natural character. I encourage the Forest Service to compare the alternatives based on their actual environmental consequences, not just their recreational benefits, and to consider a smaller expansion if it would meet important recreation needs while causing substantially less damage. Public lands should support recreation, but their ecological integrity and long-term value should not be sacrificed unnecessarily.