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Comments: Dear Mr. Wright,

We submit this supplemental comment to add several points drawn from the Draft EIS. This comment supplements our comments previously submitted both during the scoping process and my earlier comments submitted for the Draft EIS. Alternative Four is the best action alternative because it still permits substantial resort growth while avoiding many of the most serious and permanent impacts of Alternatives Two and Three. They also show that several important questions remain unresolved and should be addressed before the Brian Head Ski Resort (BHR) is allowed to expand.

The Draft EIS Itself Shows That Alternative Four Is a Meaningful Compromise.
Alternative Four is not a "no growth" alternative. The Draft EIS estimates that it would add 210 acres of developed ski terrain, seven lifts, 117 acres of new snowmaking, and substantial new roads and utilities, while increasing comfortable carrying capacity from 4,330 to 7,520 guests. See Draft EIS, at p. 38. It would also still support an estimated 495,000 winter visits by 2036, $88 million in additional annual direct spending, and 1,116 full-time-equivalent jobs. Id. at 82. At the same time, it eliminates the entire Navajo Ridge to Dry Lakes Pod in the area where my cattle graze. Id. at 23-24. Those numbers confirm what we said in our original comment: Alternative Four is a real compromise. It gives BHR substantial room to grow without sacrificing every existing use and every undeveloped area around it.

The Grazing Conclusion Does Not Match the Draft EIS's Own Information.
Appendix A says grazing does not warrant detailed analysis because no permit changes are proposed and any construction disruption would be temporary. Id. at 151. That reasoning is too narrow. The fact that the grazing permit itself would not be changed through this NEPA document does not account for the effects that permanent development within the grazing area may have on the existing use. For example, Alternatives Two and Three, for example, would permanently convert forest to ski terrain, roads, utilities, and other infrastructure. Those physical changes will reduce usable forage, disrupt livestock movement and gathering, interfere with access, and increase conflicts with visitors.
The Draft EIS also states that the Forest Plan supports ski development only where it is integrated with management that maintains healthy vegetation and supports livestock forage. Id. at 74-75. Yet the Draft EIS does not evaluate whether the proposed development can coexist with existing grazing uses. There should be a direct analysis of effects on authorized grazing, including effects on forage, stock-water access, livestock movement and gathering, fences and gates, construction timing, and conflicts with increased recreation before a decision is made. At a minimum, the Record of Decision should require prior coordination with permittees and prohibit project construction or operation from reducing authorized grazing use.
Ignoring grazing impacts because changes to a grazing permit would occur through a different permitting process misses the point. The critical question is not whether this decision formally changes the grazing permit. It cannot. The question is whether the development authorized by this decision will affect the existing grazing use, and there is ample reason to conclude that it will.

The Water Questions Have Not Been Answered.
The water supply falls short of the Draft EIS's own estimate of demand and the groundwater studies were never completed. Id. at 124-125, 129-130. Important questions regarding how additional pumping could affect the aquifer, springs and streams have been left unanswered. In a dry country, with drought and growth already putting more pressure on the limited water supplies, these questions should be answered before additional snowmaking is approved. At the very least, these concerns weigh heavily in favor of Alternative Four, which would require substantially less water than Alternatives Two and Three.

Alternative Four Preserves Other Public Uses and Scenic Settings.
The Draft EIS acknowledges that Alternatives Two and Three would permanently eliminate five miles of the Brian Head snowmobile trail, reroute riders through Brian Head Town, reduce OHV staging and dispersed access, and change undeveloped or semi-primitive recreation settings into developed ski-area settings. Alternative Four avoids those effects in the Navajo Ridge to Dry Lakes Pod, keeps the Dry Lakes Road open to existing public use, preserves snowmobile route connectivity, and maintains the area's existing recreation settings. Id. at 50-56. The Draft EIS also concludes that Alternative Four would leave the Dry Creek Road/Dry Lakes view unchanged and would retain the highest scenic integrity among the action alternatives. Id. at 67-72. These are important public benefits, not merely the preferences of a few neighboring landowners.

Alternative Four Still Needs Enforceable Safeguards
Our support for Alternative Four does not mean its remaining impacts should be ignored. Alternative Four would still permanently disturb about 228.5 acres of soil, affect about 0.8 acre of wetlands and 326.5 linear feet of stream, withdraw about 159 acre-feet of additional groundwater annually, and cause a significant adverse impact to the local population. Id. at 135-140. Even under Alternative Four, the unanswered water issues should be resolved before additional water use begins, and the Forest Service should work with grazing permittees to make sure construction and resort operations do not interfere with their existing grazing operations.

Conclusion
The Draft EIS confirms that Alternative Four best balances resort growth with protection of grazing and water resources, scenery, and the rural character of the area. It provides substantial economic and recreational development while avoiding the most damaging expansion into the Navajo Ridge to Dry Lakes Pod and the most intrusive ridgeline infrastructure. We therefore renew our request that the Forest Service select Alternative Four and include enforceable protections for water and grazing resources.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Respectfully Submitted,
Burton Ranches LLC
Burton Land and Livestock LLC
David M. Burton and Deia P. Burton Family Living Trust