

File Code: 1950; 2720
Date: March 21, 2017

Dear Interested Party,

The White River National Forest (WRNF) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to consider and disclose the anticipated environmental effects of implementing projects proposed by Vail Ski Resort (Vail) on Golden Peak designed to improve ski/snowboard racing terrain and associated facilities. These projects have been titled the "Golden Peak Improvements Project" and would occur within the resort's existing Special Use Permit (SUP) area and would be consistent with the Vail Master Development Plan (2007 MDP Update).

Vail planned improvements to the Golden Peak Race Venue in the 2007 MDP Update, and the projects were subsequently analyzed in the 2009 Vail Ski Area Improvements Project EIS (2009 EIS). The projects analyzed in the 2009 EIS included approximately 46 acres of additional ski trails, two surface lifts, and new snowmaking coverage on 46 acres of terrain. The 2009 EIS contained site-specific analysis of the proposed racing/training terrain and infrastructure, but these projects were not approved in the 2009 Record of Decision (ROD) due to concerns with stream health, soil stability, and sedimentation. Vail, in collaboration with Forest Service hydrologists, has subsequently addressed identified stream health, soil stability, and sedimentation issues on Golden Peak with the development and implementation of a drainage management plan and slope stability analyses. Following these improvements to the resource conditions on Golden Peak, Vail proposed a modified version of the project including a reduced area of developed terrain and one lift.

You are receiving this letter because we are soliciting public comments on this project as we begin the scoping process. Your comments will help identify issues that will be used to focus the analysis of the EIS and generate additional action alternatives, if needed. These alternatives will be analyzed within the EIS in addition to the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. Based on the analysis that will be documented in the forthcoming EIS, the WRNF Forest Supervisor will decide whether to approve the Proposed Action (in whole or in part) or one of the alternatives, including the No Action Alternative. The decision will also include a determination of whether additional site-specific management requirements and/or mitigation measures will be required. The purpose and need for action and a description of the project follows.

PURPOSE AND NEED

In the 2007 MDP Update, Vail identified a lack of adequate ski/snowboard racing and training terrain on Golden Peak to accommodate current and anticipated demand. There is a need for ski/snowboard racing and training terrain that meets international racing standards and separates training/racing terrain from the general public.

There is a long history of ski/snowboard racing and training at Vail, and this is a valued use of National Forest System lands. Notable international events include the 1989, 1999 and 2015 World Alpine Ski Championships and the Burton Open. Golden Peak is the primary ski/snowboard racing and training venue for Vail and the Ski and Snowboard Club Vail (SSCV),



and provides a world-class venue for local athletes and international events. As local, regional, national, and international groups continue to seek areas devoted specifically to ski/snowboard racing and training, a contained venue with adequate facilities to serve high-caliber events is needed.

Currently, the limited training and racing space on Golden Peak is unable to accommodate all users, and many activities must be held at other locations on the mountain, resulting in a disruption to the public's skiing experience. In the 2015/16 ski season, the following racing/training-related practices took place at Vail:

- The Golden Peak Race Venue was utilized for races, events, and event preparation for 91 days. On these days SSCV athletes trained on non-Golden Peak venues across the mountain (*Black Forest* and *Whippersnapper*). SSCV athletes trained on Golden Peak virtually every other day of the season.
- *Cookshack* was closed to the public at all times for mogul training by SSCV athletes.¹
- 13 mogul events were held on *Cookshack*.

Training and racing in other locations at Vail when Golden Peak is utilized for events detracts from the experience for both racers and members of the general public. *Black Forest*, *Whippersnapper*, and *Cookshack* are located in the center of Vail's frontside terrain and are parallel to and/or intertwine other trails open to the public. Closing these additional trails for training reduces the amount of terrain available for the general public, and the presence of racers increases skier traffic in these areas. The locations of these trails away from the training center at the base of Golden Peak is also inconvenient for racers and creates operational inefficiencies.

In conclusion, there is a need for:

- Developed racing and training terrain at Vail that meets international racing standards for women's Downhill, men's Super G, moguls, and skier cross courses to adequately meet demand.
- Adequate separation between ski/snowboard racing and training terrain and terrain used by the general public at Vail to improve the quality of the training venue and guest experience.

PROPOSED ACTION

Since it was originally proposed and analyzed in the 2009 EIS, the project has been modified in response to resource concerns. In particular, the area of new ski trails and number of lifts has been reduced.

The Proposed Action includes the following elements (refer to the Scoping Figure for project locations):

¹ *Cookshack* is used for specialized mogul training and competition and is surrounded by trails that are open to the public. This trail is accessible from the Avanti Express, a mid-mountain lift requiring uploading on Gondola One, the Eagle Bahn Gondola, or the Born Free Express. The *Cookshack* location is not desirable due to difficult access for racers and spectators, and the subsequent mixing of competitors and public before and after races and training.

- Lift and Terrain – construction of one lift (either surface or aerial) and approximately 42 acres of new ski trails for women’s Downhill and men’s Super G courses, moguls course and skier cross course
- Facilities – lift operating buildings, race start buildings, equipment storage, fuel storage, and maintenance building
- Snowmaking – infrastructure to support snowmaking on new ski trails
- Construction Maintenance and Access – access road for construction of new lift and ski trails
- Clearing, Grading and Surfacing – vegetation removal and surface smoothing/grading for new ski trails and drainage management

Lift and Terrain

The Golden Peak Race Venue trail network would be expanded by approximately 42 acres and 760 vertical feet. The proposed terrain would be served by one new lift (either surface or aerial) roughly 1,870 feet in length. This would accommodate construction of a women’s Downhill course, men’s Super G course, skier cross training, and a moguls venue.

Facilities

Lift operations shelters are proposed at the top and bottom of the proposed lift. The bottom shelter would be approximately 75 square feet in size (roughly 8 feet by 8 feet). The top shelter would be slightly larger to accommodate a warming area and storage—approximately 225 square feet (roughly 15 feet by 15 feet).

The top lift operations shelter is designed to have restrooms in the vicinity (two separate structures roughly 8 feet by 8 feet in size). The restrooms would include composting toilets, which require 500-gallon water tanks for efficient operation. The water tank would be incorporated into each structure.

A race building to provide space for coaching and storage for safety fencing and other equipment is proposed near the bottom of the proposed mogul course, with an approximate area of 1,500 square feet (30 feet by 50 feet). No potable water is necessary or proposed.

Two race start houses (each approximately 75 square feet) would be constructed on the new trails. One would be located at the top of the downhill course and the other at the top of the slalom course.

A new underground diesel fuel storage tank and snowcat maintenance shop are proposed on the southwest side of the Riva Bahn Lift mid-station. The fuel tank would have a capacity of 100,000 gallons, and is a logical location to store fuel for use on Golden Peak for the maintenance of racing/training areas and terrain parks. The maintenance building would be large enough to accommodate one snowcat. These facilities would reduce snowcat traffic across the mountain and reduce fuel use by keeping snowcats on the eastern side of the mountain. The proposed tank would meet all local, state and federal standards.

All proposed facilities would comply with Vail Mountain Design Guidelines.

Snowmaking and Infrastructure

Snowmaking infrastructure would be installed to provide coverage on all new ski trails (42 acres), including a 500-square foot booster pump station located near the bottom of the proposed lift. The booster station would comply with the Vail Mountain Design Guidelines. Approximately 7,500 feet of snowmaking pipelines and 9,000 feet of buried electric lines would be installed. In addition, communication cables and transformers would be installed and a waterline would be constructed from the existing pump station to the booster station (approximately 4,300 feet).

Construction and Maintenance Access

Existing roads on Golden Peak are sufficient to provide access for much of the construction, operation and maintenance of these proposed projects. Existing roads are sufficient to access the bottom of the lift; above that, tracked and wheeled vehicles would utilize a proposed construction and maintenance access road (approximately 5,000 feet) to access the upper third of this lift and terrain (refer to the Scoping Figure). Vegetation clearing would be required for this road; the area is included in the overall trail acreage. This access road would be used rarely in the summer.

Clearing, Grading and Surfacing

To ensure consistent early season training conditions and to comply with requirements of the International Ski Federation (FIS) for hosting races, all proposed trails on Golden Peak (42 acres) would be cleared of overstory vegetation, de-stumped, and the surface would be smoothed (thereby lessening the amount of snow that is necessary to open and maintain the terrain). Minimal traditional or terrain modification grading would be necessary (totaling approximately 3 acres) for the following proposed projects: construction of lifts and buildings, snowmaking pipe installation, construction of the mogul venue, and construction of the road to the top of the proposed lift. Additionally, installation of drainage management infrastructure, including waterbars, would likely require grading/smoothing across much of the project area. All disturbed areas would be stabilized/revegetated promptly (including seeding, fertilization and mulching).

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

The WRNF Forest Supervisor requests your comments on any component of this project. The purpose of this scoping period is to provide an opportunity for interested parties to engage in early and meaningful participation on this project and to learn more about the project. Comments from this scoping period will be used to help formulate the foundation of the upcoming environmental analysis by identifying resource issues and, potentially, developing additional action alternatives. Your questions and comments regarding this proposal are an integral part of the environmental analysis process. To be most effective when submitting comments, please include: (1) name, address, telephone number, and organization represented, if any; (2) reference the “Golden Peak Improvements Project” and (3) specific facts, concerns or issues, and supporting reasons why they should be considered.

Written comments must be submitted via mail, fax, electronically, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Scott Fitzwilliams, c/o Max Forgensi, Mountain Sports/Special Uses Administrator, White River National Forest, P.O. Box 190, Minturn, CO 81645; FAX (970) 827-9343.

Electronic comments including attachments can be submitted to:
<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=47937>

Your comments will be most helpful if received by April 19, 2017. Only those persons who submit comments during this comment period will be placed on the mailing list for future information regarding these projects. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Individuals who do not submit comments but wish to remain on this mailing list should contact Max Forgensi via phone at (970) 827-5157, or via email at mforgensi@fs.fed.us.

Visit the project website for more details regarding this project:
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=47937>. Additional information will also be made available at a public open house on April 6, 2017 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Forest Service Holy Cross Office, 24747 US Highway 24, Minturn, Colorado 81645.

It is important to note that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of this project is governed by the Pre-Decisional Objection Process, which has replaced the Forest Service's previous Administrative Appeal Process (36 CFR 218). The Pre-Decisional Objection Process involves the following steps: publication of a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register initiates the NEPA analysis and scoping comments are gathered and analyzed; a Draft EIS will be issued along with publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register to start the 45-day Comment Period; the Final EIS will be issued along with a Notice in the Federal Register of a 45-day Objection Period (individuals and organizations who provide comments during the 45-day comment period on the Draft EIS will have standing to file objections); and objections will be reviewed and resolved prior to issuance of a decision document (Record of Decision).

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,


for SCOTT G. FITZWILLIAMS
Forest Supervisor

cc: Matt Ehrman, Roger Poirier, Max Forgensi, Mike Jackson