



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

August  
2005



# Environmental Assessment

## STONE CREEK TRAIL PROPOSAL BEAVER CREEK RESORT

Holy Cross Ranger District, White River National Forest  
Eagle County, Colorado

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wetland meadows where these species might occur. Therefore, it is my determination that this project would have NO IMPACT on Slender cottongrass.

## 6. *Astragalus sibirica* (Park Milkvetch)

This species is found in Summit County near Green Mountain Reservoir in wet meadows, streamside willows, moist swales and hummocks and aspen. No ground disturbing or vegetation management activities are planned in wetland meadows where these species might occur. Therefore, it is my determination that this project would have NO IMPACT on Park milkvetch.

## 7. *Cirsium perplexans* (Rocky Mountain Thistle)

This species is found on barren gray shale slopes at elevations from 4,500 to 7,000 feet elevations. The proposed project is located above the elevational range and will not occur on the shale topography. Therefore, it is my determination that this project would have NO IMPACT on Rocky Mountain Thistle.

## 8. *Penstemon harringtonii* (Harrington Penstemon)

This species is found in sagebrush habitat in Eagle County. The species is wide spread through out the sagebrush habitat on the Eagle and Holy Cross Districts. The proposed project is above the elevational range of this species and will not occur in sagebrush habitat. Therefore, it is my determination that this project will have NO IMPACT on Harrington Penstemon


## B. Mammals

### 1. *Gulo gulo boreas*, (North American Wolverine)

The wolverine is the largest terrestrial member of the weasel family. Its range extends from the arctic islands southward to the Central Rockies, but its present status in the southern part of its range is uncertain (it may be extirpated from Colorado). Wolverines are mammals of heavy forest but they may range past treeline into alpine tundra or inhabit subalpine rock piles. They are solitary animals that utilize large territories, and lack of human disturbance is an important component of their habitat. The project area occurs in a forested landscape that might be suitable for wolverines, if they occurred in the state. The project is located next to a heavily used ski area. This use would preclude use by wolverines during winter. During summer and fall the use would be very little and this habitat would be available for use by wolverines. Because there is no evidence that wolverine occurs in Eagle County, the alternative will not greatly change human use patterns, and the least developed areas are deferred from vegetation treatments, it is my determination that this project would have NO IMPACT on wolverines.

### 2. *Sorex hoyi*, (Pygmy Shrew)

The pygmy shrew is a widespread species in North America that occupies a wide variety of niches, including wet meadows and a wide-variety of forests types. In Colorado it has only been found at elevations above 9,600 feet in Gunnison and Grand County. This species has not been found on the White River NF, but potentially occupies a wide variety of ecological condition in subalpine forests (spruce, fir, lodgepole, clearcuts, partial cuts, forest meadow edges, boggy meadows, willow thickets, aspen and parks, [Forest Service 2002a]). Potential habitat is found within the project area. The lower end of the chutes is in a mesic spruce fir stand that could be occupied habitat. Increased skiing use will cause more snow compaction that may limit the movement of this species during the winter since this species burrows on the ground surface under the snow in winter. Therefore, because of the low probability that pygmy shrews occur within the project area and the fact that the majority of the project area would not be disturbed, it is my determination that, for pygmy shrews



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this project MAY ADVERSELY IMPACT INDIVIDUALS, BUT ARE NOT LIKELY TO RESULT IN A LOSS OF VIABILITY ON THE PLANNING AREA, NOR CAUSE A TREND TO FEDERAL LISTING OR A LOSS OF SPECIES VIABILITY RANGE-WIDE.

### 3. *Martes americana*, (American Marten)

Martens are boreal weasels closely associated with conifer forests, especially those dominated by spruce-fir and containing complex physical structures near the ground (Buskirk and Ruggiero 1994). Due to their denning and foraging needs, they prefer old growth or late successional forests but may also inhabit talus fields above treeline. The species is not generally associated with pure aspen stands. Marten sign is common and well distributed in conifer habitat within the project area (personal observations).

The cutting of new trails will not have any impact on Marten. The individual animals will be able to avoid the construction activity. The increased skiing may limit the ability of individual martens to effectively hunt on about 85 acres of timbered habitat during the winter. The habitat would be available to the martens in the summer and fall.

Since the effected area may represent the home range of one or two martens and their ability to forage in winter may be limited, it is my determination that, for marten, the project MAY ADVERSELY IMPACT INDIVIDUALS, BUT ARE NOT LIKELY TO RESULT IN A LOSS OF VIABILITY ON THE PLANNING AREA, NOR CAUSE A TREND TO FEDERAL LISTING OR A LOSS OF SPECIES VIABILITY RANGE-WIDE.

### 4. *Lontra canadensis*, (River Otter)

River otter historically occurred in most of the major river drainages of Colorado at mostly low to moderate elevations (Fitzgerald et al. 1994). They were extirpated in Colorado and then reintroduced beginning in 1976. Reintroductions were successful and the species has been reestablished on a number of major rivers including the Colorado River (op cit.)

Because the project area has no known current otter use and was not prime historic habitat for the species and because all action alternatives would protect riparian areas in accordance with Forest Plan standards and guidelines, it is my determination, that for river otters, this project would have NO IMPACT.

## C. Amphibians/Reptiles

### 1. *Bufo boreas boreas* (Boreal Toad)

Boreal toad biology is described in detail by Loeffler (2001) and that document is incorporated by reference. No boreal toads have been found on NFS lands within the project area, but a known breeding area occurs on private land in a beaver complex on the Vail Golf course. Toads, especially adult females, may move up to about three miles from breeding areas after egg laying (Loeffler 2001).

There are no known populations in the project area and no known habitat in or near the project area. Therefore, it is my determination that, for boreal toad, the proposed project will have NO IMPACT.

### 2. *Rana pipiens*, (Northern Leopard Frog)

The northern leopard frog occupies habitats that contain a body of permanent water. They have not been found on the White River National Forest in recent years, except two locations on the Rifle Ranger District (Forest Service 2002a). The White River Land and Resource Management Plan



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March  
2003



# Final Environmental Assessment

## GONDOLA PROPOSAL BEAVER CREEK RESORT

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pale (*B. pallidum*), and slender moonwort (*B. lineare*) could also occur in Eagle County. Of the remaining nine species, all occupy habitats other than those found in the project areas. Therefore, the proposal would have no impact on sea pink (*Armeria maritime*), molybdenum milkvetch (*Astragalus molybdenus*), smooth rockcress (*Braya glabella*), woolly fleabane (*Erigeron lanatus*), globe gilia (*Ipomopsis globularis*), Colorado tansy-aster (*Machaeranthera coloradoensis*), Debeque scorpion weed (*Phacelia scopulina*), Porter feathergrass (*Ptilagrostis mongholica*), and Hapeman's coolwort (*Sullivantia hapemanii*) (Thompson, 2002a).

Two of the three species known to occur on the WRNF, Altai cotton-grass (*Eriophorum altaicum*) and Harrington Beardtongue (*Ilenstemon harringtonii*), do not occur on National Forest System land within the project area. Alternatives 1-4 should have no impact on Altai cotton-grass. Alternatives 1-4 should have no impact on Harrington Beardtongue on National Forest System lands however, this species may be affected on private land (Thompson, 2002a).

A portion of the Stage 2 gondola alignment crosses through private, mountain shrub habitat on the west side of Daybreak Ridge Road. A few penstemons were detected along the staked gondola centerline during a August 3, 2001 survey. The survey was conducted when conclusive species identification was no longer possible (Thompson, 2002a).

Clustered lady slipper: The August 3, 2001 survey did not cover the exact proposed Chair 15 alignment under Alternative 4 and was also not optimally timed to coincide with flowering. No suitable habitat was located along the gondola alignment on NFSL or private lands. The chair 15 corridor crosses through mixed aspen and lodgepole habitats with a northeastern exposure. While it is unlikely that this plant is present in the proposed lift corridor, if present, plants could be impacted by tree removal. Therefore, it was determined that Alternative 4 may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide. Alternatives 1-3 would have no impact on this species (Thompson, 2002a).

Moonworts: During the August 3, 2001 survey of the proposed gondola corridor at Beaver Creek Ski Area, two moonwort aggregations were located (Thompson, 2002a). Both were on NFSL under existing chair 12 in what would be Stage 4 of the proposed gondola alignment. No R2 sensitive moonwort species, including reflected, pale or slender moonwort, was present. It is unknown if these two aggregations would be affected by gondola development under Alternative 3. Additional potential moonwort habitat was identified along the proposed gondola alignment in Stages 3 and 4, however, no other moonworts were located in those areas. For reflected and pale moonwort, Alternatives 2 and 3 may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability range wide. Alternatives 1 and 4 would have no impact on reflected moonworts or pale moonworts. For slender moonwort, it was determined that Alternatives 1-4 would have no impact on this species (Thompson, 2002a).

#### Vegetation Cover:

Installation of the proposed gondola on National Forest System Lands is expected to occur mostly in existing ski runs which consist of previously disturbed ground. Vegetation in the existing runs consists of grass seed mix approved by the Forest Service as well as some native plants which are recolonizing disturbed areas.

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alternatives 1-4 should have no impact on the common loon, white-faced ibis, osprey, ferruginous hawk, greater sandhill crane, black tern, black swift, Lewis woodpecker, and loggerhead shrike (Thompson, 2002a).

Because of either seasonal migrational patterns, limited suitable habitat, or the limited nature of the proposed gondola construction, it was determined that alternatives 1-4 would also have no impact on the merlin, boreal owl, three-toed woodpecker, olive-sided flycatcher, purple martin, pygmy nuthatch and fox sparrow (Thompson, 2002a).

Because of the limited tree removal associated with either the proposed gondola or lift 15, it was determined that alternatives 2-4 may adversely impact individual goshawks and flammulated owls, but are not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species rangewide. Alternative 1 should have no impact to either northern goshawks or flammulated owls (Thompson, 2002a).

Owl surveys were conducted by the Forest Service on March 27, 2002 and May 28, 2002. No owls were heard. Given the limited habitat that would be directly affected by the proposed corridors and the lack of owl detections, no further owl surveys are necessary for this project. If raptor nests are found at some other point in project planning or implementation, they will be protected in accordance with Forest plan standards and guidelines (Doerr, 2002).

No golden-crowned kinglet nesting habitat would be affected by alternatives 1-4. However, tree removal along the proposed gondola corridor would remove potential migratory foraging habitat. Therefore, it was determined that alternatives 1-4 may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide (Thompson, 2002a).

**Mammals:** Seven species of sensitive mammals occur or are expected to occur on the WRNF. The spotted bat has not been reported in Eagle County and occurs in cliffs and canyons in ponderosa pine, pinyon-juniper, and deserts. Ringtails occur in broken, arid terrain below 9,000 feet. Because these habitats are not found in the project area, alternatives 1-4 should have no impact on these species (Thompson, 2002a).

Neither the pygmy shrew or the dwarf shrew have been detected during small mammal surveys conducted to date on Beaver Creek Ski Area, the Vail Ski Area or anywhere else on the WRNF and they are not known to occur in Eagle County. Therefore, alternatives 1-4 should have no impact on either of these species of shrews. No likely roosts or water sources for the pale townsend's big-eared bat would be affected by any of the alternatives. Therefore, alternatives 1-4 should have no impact on this species. No known wolverine foraging, denning, travel, or security habitats would be affected by the proposed action. Therefore, alternatives 1-4 should have no impact on wolverine (Thompson, 2002a).

No marten denning, travel, or security habitats would be affected by the proposed actions. Potential marten foraging values would be affected by the loss of small mammal habitat associated with tree removal in the gondola corridor. Total potential foraging habitat losses would be greatest under Alternative 4 (lift 15 corridor). It was determined that Alternative 4 may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide. The alternatives

**BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FOR THE  
BEANO'S TRACE REGRADE PROJECT,  
BEAVER CREEK SKI AREA,  
HOLY CROSS RANGER DISTRICT,  
WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST,  
EAGLE COUNTY, COLORADO**

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**JANUARY, 2004**

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existing graded ski trail would be temporarily disturbed by regrading. Tree removal and regrading would occur during daylight hours in the summer construction season, beginning on or after July 1, 2004. Once the mountain road/ skiway is restored, it would be used for the same purposes and in the same ways as it is now used.

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Regarding the northern goshawk, flammulated owl, pygmy shrew, and American marten, addressed below in more detail, the Proposed Action **may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.** The Proposed Action would have **no impact** on any other R2 plant, insect, fish, or wildlife species on the WRNF (USFS 2003b) for the reasons presented in Table 1 and in Section 3.0. The Proposed Action would have **no impact** on any other sensitive species known to occur in Region 2 (USFS 2003a) because their habitats are not found within the affected project area, they have no affinities to project area habitats, they have distributional ranges excluding the project area, and activities on NFS lands related to the Proposed Action would not affect the species.

### 4.1.1.1 Northern Goshawk

The Proposed Action would affect goshawks by removing a relatively small area of potential foraging habitat along the margins of the existing mountain road/ skiway that occurs within the highly dissected interior of the ski area. That habitat conversion would result in an insignificant and discountable reduction to the potential goshawk prey base within the potential home range of a pair of birds. Therefore, it is my determination that the Proposed Action **may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.**

### 4.1.1.2 Flammulated Owl

Although it is discountable that flammulated owls are present in the low quality habitat within the project area, because the Proposed Action would remove potential foraging habitat within the potential home range of a pair of birds, it **may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.**

### 4.1.1.3 Pygmy Shrew

The forest patches along the existing mountain road/ skiway represent potential, but in all probability, unoccupied pygmy shrew habitat. The Proposed Action would result in a permanent conversion of higher quality, potential habitat into lower quality shrew habitat. In the unlikely event that this shrew was present within disturbance areas during construction, those individuals may be killed. The likelihood that this shrew would be affected by a total of approximately four acres of ground disturbance when it has never been located on the WRNF is discountable. Nevertheless, because potential pygmy shrew habitat would be adversely affected by part of the Proposed Action, the Proposed Action **may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.**

**BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT/ BIOLOGICAL  
EVALUATION FOR CHAIR 11 REPLACEMENT,  
BEAVER CREEK SKI AREA,  
HOLY CROSS RANGER DISTRICT,  
WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST,  
EAGLE COUNTY, COLORADO**

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**FEBRUARY, 2004**

## 4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES


This section addresses the consequences of the Proposed Action on those R2 sensitive species carried forward in the document.

### 4.2.1 DIRECT EFFECTS

The Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ 1997) regulations for implementing NEPA defines direct effects as those:

“which are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place.” (40 CFR, § 1508.8, [a]).

The Proposed Action would result in the permanent loss of developed ski terrain associated with the footprint of the replaced McCoy Patrol building, recovery of a slightly smaller area of developed ski terrain at the former patrol building site, and temporary disturbance of developed ski terrain associated with the two, upgraded lift terminals and new/ existing lift towers. BCR proposes to implement Chair 11 replacement and McCoy Patrol building replacement outside of the elk calving closure period (May 1 through June 30, dates inclusive; VA 1994).



Regarding the pygmy shrew, addressed below in more detail, the Proposed Action **may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.** The Proposed Action would have **no impact** on any other R2 plant, insect, fish, or wildlife species that is present or potentially present on the WRNF (USFS 2003b) for the reasons presented in Table 2 and in Section 4.0. The Proposed Action would have **no impact** on any other sensitive species known to occur in Region 2 (USFS 2003a) because their habitats are not found within the affected project area, they have no affinities to project area habitats, they have distributional ranges excluding the project area, and activities on NFS lands related to the Proposed Action would not affect the species.

#### 4.2.1.1 Pygmy Shrew

The developed ski terrain (i.e., non-native and native [worst case scenario] mountain grassland) at the proposed site of the McCoy Patrol building and in some lift tower locations along the upgraded lift corridor represent potential, but in all probability, unoccupied pygmy shrew habitat. The Proposed Action would result in a permanent conversion of low quality, potential habitat into building and lift tower footprints. Old tower footings would be reclaimed to low quality, potential habitat. There would be no change in habitat quality at upgraded lift terminals, which represent unsuitable shrew habitat. In the unlikely event that this shrew was present within disturbance areas during construction, those individuals may be killed. The likelihood that this shrew would be affected by a total of <two acres of ground disturbance when it has never been located on the WRNF is discountable. Nevertheless, because potential pygmy shrew habitat would be adversely affected by part of the Proposed Action, the Proposed Action **may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.**