



DURANGO MOUNTAIN RESORT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT PROJECT UPDATE



USDA – FOREST SERVICE

SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST

COLUMBINE RANGER DISTRICT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT TO BE PREPARED

The Durango Mountain Resort Master Development Plan (DMR MDP) project was originally available for a 30-day public comment period subsequent to the Notice of Intent (NOI) being published in the Federal Register on February 17, 2004. In addition, a public meeting was held on March 3, 2004. Scoping comments from the initial Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) scoping period will be incorporated into the EIS process, but due to the inclusion of additional project components discussed on page 3 of this update, the Forest Service is conducting a supplemental scoping comment period.

Additional scoping comments should be post-marked within 30 calendar days of the NOI being published in the Federal Register, which should occur on approximately October 20, 2005. Comments can be sent to Richard Speegle, San Juan Public Lands Center, 15 Burnett Court, Durango, CO 81301 or (970) 375-2973 (fax), or via email at richard_speegle@blm.gov.

Project Activity

Over the previous two summer and winter field seasons, all of the remaining fieldwork for each resource area has been completed. This includes: Vegetation and Wildlife, Archeology, Geo-technical Engineering, Hydrology and Stream Surveys, and Wetlands. Each resource area included extensive surveys to contribute analysis to the forthcoming EIS and to comply with Federal law such as, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Historic Preservation Act.

Original Project Purpose and Need

The Forest Service and Durango Mountain Resort (DMR) cooperatively identified a need to enhance the facilities and recreation experience at DMR by balancing facilities and amenities with visitation and utilization. The specific needs were identified from a comparison of desired con-

ANTICIPATED NEPA SCHEDULE

End of Supplemental Scoping Comment Period	November 2005
Draft Environmental Impact Statement	February 2006
Final EIS and ROD	July 2006
Project Implementation	June 2007

ditions with the current situation. The purpose and need for action is detailed as follows:

Purpose

To upgrade and expand DMR within the existing SUP area to achieve a balance of guest service facilities and amenities, thereby enhancing the quality of the recreation experience.

Need #1

To upgrade existing lift network with modern technology and to provide higher capacity lifts in the base area to facilitate skier circulation during morning access periods. Additionally, to reconfigure the lift layout with proposed lifts to better service the available terrain; this would help minimize lift lines and improve skier circulation across the mountain.

Need #2

To enhance snowmaking capabilities in order to provide more durable and consistent skiing conditions during periods of reduced snowfall. Also, to provide snowmaking on integral connector trails; this would enable more of the mountain to be utilized earlier in the season.

Need #3

To provide additional parking to accommodate day skiers and create a functional transportation center for buses and vans servicing the area.

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Need #4

To provide additional terrain to accommodate a range of ability levels (particularly beginner and low intermediate) skier demands.

Need #5

To create a viable alternative route for snowmobile to access adjacent National Forest System (NFS) lands that does not conflict with skiers on developed ski terrain within the SUP area.

Original Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, DMR intends to improve the overall recreational experience and safety on the mountain through increased uphill (i.e., lift) and downhill (i.e., terrain) capacities, upgrading/constructing on-mountain guest facilities, implementing additional snowmaking coverage, and re-routing the existing *Pinkerton Toll Road* (trail #29) snowmobile access trail.

Lifts

Durango Mountain Resort (DMR) proposes to modify three existing lifts and install ten new lifts. Existing lifts 2 and 8 would be replaced with higher capacity lifts along their existing alignments, and Lift 6 would be shortened along its same alignment while utilizing the same lift equipment. The new lift installations would include one six-person lift (Lift 11) and five three or four-person chairlifts (lifts 12, 13, 14, 16 and 17), one surface beginner lift (Lift 15), and three lateral surface lifts (transfer lifts - T1, T2, T2' and T3).

Terrain

DMR proposes improvements to four trails within the existing trail network, the addition of 17 new trails, and the development of two gladed areas. Full implementation of these terrain modifications would increase the formal trail network from approximately 542.5 to 691.4 acres of skiable terrain (an increase of approximately 148.9 acres or 22 percent).

New trails would be constructed in the vicinity of new lifts 8, 11, 14 and 16 to improve the overall terrain distribution by skier ability level and to better meet the skier market demand. One gladed area would be developed to the west of Lift 8 to provide additional advanced intermediate terrain. The other gladed area would be developed as part of a children's play and adventure area near proposed Lift 16.

Snowmobiling

In order to better accommodate existing snowmobile

use within the area, DMR proposes several changes to both the developed and dispersed activities. The existing snowmobile access route, which originates in the base area and follows the Forest Service road to *Hermosa Park*, would be re-routed just before its intersection with the *Pinkerton Toll Road* ski trail. This would reduce potential skier/snowmobile conflicts within the existing ski area and circumvent the proposed *Ice Creek* ski expansion area. To ensure the viability of the snowmobile re-route, DMR proposes to install snowmaking infrastructure and to make snow on the first 400 feet of the proposed re-route. DMR would also periodically groom the re-route to create a smooth rideable surface for snowmobile riders of all ability levels.

DMR also proposes to relocate the existing snowmobile outfitter and guide service to the top of the *Twilight Lift* (Chair 4). Guests would ride the lift to the top, walk across the snow to the maintenance shop, and start their guided tour from this staging area.

Lastly, DMR proposes to develop a snowmobile parking/staging area along *Hermosa Park Road*, north of *Purgatory Village* on the east side of Highway 550, which would accommodate cars, trucks, and trailers.

Snowmaking

Existing snowmaking currently covers approximately 202 acres; previously approved snowmaking coverage would provide an additional 13 acres of coverage. DMR proposes to expand snowmaking coverage on 14 existing trails and two proposed trails by approximately 149 acres for a resort total of 364 acres. The following trails are proposed for additional snowmaking coverage:

Styx, The Bank, Divinity, Dead Spike, Lower Hades Upper Hermosa, Pinkerton Toll Road, Legends, Lower Catharsis, Angel's Tread, Nirvana, Proposed Run, Mercy, Columbine, Peace, Proposed Snowmobile Re-route

The proposed upgrades would require additional water to operate the expanded snowmaking system. Based upon the upgraded snowmaking coverage requirements, the production capacity of the snowmaking system at DMR would have to be doubled to a peak production capacity of approximately 3,000 gallons per minute (gpm). DMR is currently investigating two options for increasing its water supply for snowmaking. The first option is to develop a portion of the extensive water rights currently owned by the resort on the mountain and/or on private land to the east of Highway 550.

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DURANGO

MOUNTAIN RESORT

MASTER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

JULY 2003

PREPARED BY:



Durango Mountain 1

A new surface lift (Lift 15) would be installed to service the beginner terrain near Lift 16. This will provide additional beginner and teaching terrain, to complement the Columbine Beginner Area.

A new chairlift (Lift 16) would be installed to access the excellent beginner terrain north of the Twilight Lift top terminal area. The installation of Lift 16 would serve much of the beginner terrain that is currently serviced by the mid-load of Lift 4; this would reduce skier congestion at Lift 4.

A new access lift (Lift 17) would be installed from the Gelande Parking lot to the current top terminal of Purgatory Village Express. This triple chair would provide out-of-base access for skiers parking at the Gelande lot, and for future residential accommodations in this area, thus reducing morning access congestion in the main base area.

Three transfer lifts would be installed at DMR to improve skier circulation across the north face of the ski area. Transfer lift T1 would extend from the intersection of Lower BD and M, Legends and Boogie trails to Dante's Restaurant. This two-way lift would provide direct access between service facilities at Dante's and the front side of the ski area.

Transfer lift T2 would connect the base terminals of lifts 3 and 14. This two-way lift would allow skiers to transfer directly between lift terminals. Additionally, T2 would facilitate evacuations in the event of lift failure at Lift 8 or Lift 14. T2 would also reduce the potential for morning lift lines at Hermosa Park Express by allowing skiers to transfer quickly to Lift 14, and in conjunction with T3, on to Lift 8.

Transfer lift T3 connects the base terminals of lifts 14 and 8. This two-way lift would allow skiers to transfer directly between lift terminals, as well as providing lift access from the steep slopes below Legends trail and between Bull Run and Siegele Street

2. Ski Terrain

Improvements to the existing ski trail system, coupled with the addition of new trails would increase the formal trail network from 542.5 to 691.4 acres, for a gain of 148.9 acres. This represents an increase of approximately twenty-two percent. Table V-2 identifies the terrain specifications for the upgraded trail network.

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TABLE V-2
SKI TERRAIN SPECIFICATIONS – UPGRADING

Map Ref	Trail / Area Name	Top Elev. (ft.)	Bottom Elev. (ft.)	Vert Drop (ft.)	Plan Length (ft.)	Slope Length (ft.)	Avg. Width (ft.)	Slope Area (ac)	Avg. Grade (%)	Max. Grade (%)	Ability Level
41	Harris Hill Run	9,971	9,682	289	1,492	1,530	84	2.9	19%	39%	Intermediate
42	Path to Peace	10,489	10,148	341	1,633	1,671	190	7.3	21%	30%	Low Intermediate
43	Snag	10,337	9,517	820	3,577	3,705	89	7.6	23%	54%	Adv. Intermediate
43a	Snag Cutoff	9,850	9,580	270	982	1,029	70	1.7	28%	45%	Adv. Intermediate
44	Old Snag	9,819	9,398	421	1,346	1,432	59	2.0	31%	55%	Adv. Intermediate
45	Gunsight	9,600	9,378	222	868	911	75	1.6	26%	55%	Adv. Intermediate
46	Dead Spike	10,491	9,379	1,112	4,634	4,800	196	21.6	24%	45%	Intermediate
47	Legends	10,541	9,445	1,096	8,454	8,562	98	19.3	13%	33%	Low Intermediate
47a	Legends Cutoff	10,084	9,801	282	1,436	1,471	94	3.2	20%	34%	Low Intermediate
48	Wapiti	10,453	9,350	1,103	3,992	4,197	148	14.3	28%	67%	Expert
49u	Upper Bull Run	10,496	10,186	310	1,343	1,387	145	4.6	23%	46%	Adv. Intermediate
49l	Lower Bull Run	10,093	9,350	743	2,749	2,909	129	8.6	27%	69%	Expert
50u	Upper BD&M	10,806	10,529	278	3,370	3,388	68	5.3	8%	23%	Intermediate
50l	Lower BD&M	10,581	10,318	263	4,194	4,208	68	6.6	6%	18%	Novice
51	Joan's Jubilee	10,644	10,507	137	1,974	1,981	61	2.8	7%	14%	Low Intermediate
52	Cathedral	10,120	9,852	267	1,429	1,460	64	2.2	19%	32%	Intermediate
53	Vincent's	10,589	9,741	849	3,482	3,598	136	11.3	24%	40%	Intermediate
54	Sally's Run	10,596	9,742	854	3,659	3,774	127	11.0	23%	38%	Intermediate
55	Chet's	10,699	9,669	1,030	4,241	4,383	129	13.0	24%	41%	Intermediate
56	Paul's Park	10,785	10,052	733	2,460	2,594	163	9.7	30%	62%	Expert
57	Blackburn Bash	10,793	9,332	1,461	4,855	5,112	202	23.7	30%	60%	Expert
58	Siegele Street	9,758	9,331	427	1,770	1,854	101	4.3	24%	66%	Expert
59	Bottom Chute	9,695	9,358	338	911	985	72	1.6	37%	64%	Expert
60	Boudreaux's	10,583	10,330	253	672	720	162	2.7	38%	45%	Adv. Intermediate
61	Ray's Ridge	10,796	9,333	1,464	5,164	5,401	119	14.8	28%	55%	Adv. Intermediate
62	Elliot's	10,498	9,870	628	2,020	2,131	128	6.3	31%	55%	Adv. Intermediate
63	Flock's Junction	9,806	9,677	128	489	508	89	1.0	26%	37%	Adv. Intermediate
64	Skiway	8,814	8,800	14	164	165	110	0.4	9%	9%	Beginner
65	Apprentice	8,949	8,797	153	1,391	1,407	76	2.5	11%	22%	Novice
66	Graduate	8,863	8,800	63	504	509	86	1.0	12%	17%	Novice
67	Professor	8,860	8,791	69	773	782	101	1.8	9%	12%	Beginner
68	Ph.D.	8,861	8,790	71	508	514	140	1.7	9%	12%	Beginner
69	Proposed run	8,989	8,865	124	779	796	53	1.0	16%	22%	Novice
70	Proposed run	10,090	9,547	543	2,269	2,369	161	8.8	24%	50%	Adv. Intermediate
71	Proposed run	9,940	9,912	28	437	438	39	0.4	6%	10%	Beginner
72	Proposed run	9,911	9,754	157	1,331	1,346	74	2.3	12%	25%	Novice
73	Proposed run	9,919	9,816	102	1,324	1,332	95	2.9	8%	21%	Novice
74	Proposed run	9,747	9,725	22	150	151	115	0.4	15%	15%	Novice
75	Proposed run	9,888	9,410	478	3,662	3,710	162	13.8	13%	35%	Low Intermediate
76	Proposed run	9,722	9,422	301	2,278	2,307	132	7.0	13%	26%	Low Intermediate
77	Proposed run	9,636	9,418	218	2,026	2,047	112	5.3	11%	25%	Low Intermediate
78	Proposed run	9,892	9,416	476	4,581	4,624	172	18.3	10%	25%	Low Intermediate
79	Proposed run	10,536	10,102	433	1,676	1,747	140	5.6	26%	50%	Adv. Intermediate
80	Proposed run	10,567	10,076	491	1,740	1,821	175	7.3	28%	45%	Intermediate

Durango Mountain 1

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81	Proposed run	9,985	9,364	621	1,726	1,866	182	7.8	36%	85%	Expert
82	Proposed run	9,551	9,357	195	904	933	32	0.7	22%	46%	Adv. Intermediate
83	Proposed run	9,719	9,353	366	1,575	1,654	116	4.4	23%	56%	Expert
84	Proposed run	9,577	9,425	153	1,092	1,107	29	0.7	14%	25%	Low Intermediate
85	Proposed run	10,587	10,060	526	2,201	2,272	131	6.8	24%	41%	Intermediate
86	Proposed run	10,419	10,085	334	1,462	1,506	69	2.4	23%	37%	Intermediate
87	Proposed run	10,732	10,530	202	1,003	1,029	107	2.5	20%	45%	Adv. Intermediate
88	Proposed run	10,541	10,285	256	652	704	107	1.7	39%	50%	Adv. Intermediate
89	Proposed run	10,355	10,219	136	312	341	129	1.0	44%	45%	Adv. Intermediate
90	Proposed run	10,522	9,366	1,156	4,831	5,037	318	36.7	24%	62%	Expert
Totals						242,092		691.4			

Source: SE GROUP

Note: New and upgraded trails in bold.

Ski Terrain Discussion

With a few exceptions, the upgraded trail system respects the natural fall-line, resulting in the development of trails that would be more enjoyable to ski, less expensive to construct, and create minimal impact on the environment. One component of the trail upgrading consists of widening trails to satisfy skier circulation flows resulting from the reconfigured lift layout and to eliminate existing bottlenecks. New trails would be constructed in the vicinity of new lifts 8, 11, 14 and 16 to improve the overall terrain distribution by skier ability level.

As a means of providing a smooth surface on which to build snow cover, much of the new trail work should include the removal and burial of stumps and rocks, followed by fine grading, fertilizing, seeding, and mulching. All trail work would utilize natural and existing manmade clearings to the greatest extent possible, thus minimizing the amount of tree removal. Where tree removal is required to create a safe skier experience, efforts would be made to avoid visually hard edges or lines, and manmade openings would be interspersed to simulate the natural surroundings and to encourage naturally occurring forbs, grasses and shrubs. Trail layout would incorporate management of the existing tree stands for diversity in species and age classes as well as for resistance to wind, insect infestation, disease and fire.

There are many opportunities on the mountain to improve the visual quality of the resort development, both by modifying existing trails and through creative design of new trails and lift



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