

DECISION MEMO
for
Lower Men's Downhill Chute Widening and Utility Corridor Construction
Snowbird Ski and Summer Resort

Salt Lake County, Utah
Wasatch-Cache National Forest
Salt Lake Ranger District

DECISION AND RATIONALE

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I have reviewed Snowbird's proposal and the associated environmental review documentation and have decided to approve the following elements described below that involve National Forest System (NFS) land. These elements constitute the proposed action addressed in this Decision Memo:

- Widen the Lower Men's Downhill Chute, a narrow, steep and rocky chute that is difficult for lower level skiers to negotiate. This will allow skiers to leave Chip's Way, currently the only easier route off of Hidden Peak and the new Peruvian lift into Peruvian Gulch. The existing rock outcrops will be blasted, and then the material will be pushed and graded down slope and contoured, resulting in an intermediate ski trail. The total disturbance area will be about 4.3 acres, of which about 0.75 acres are NFS land. The NFS land will be affected through grading of fill material at the lower end of the chute.
- Replace aging and outdated utilities, installing them underground in a corridor in Peruvian Gulch. The 1.7-mile corridor includes about 0.6 miles of NFS land, all on an abandoned mining road. At an average corridor width of 30 feet, this translates to about 6.2 acres of temporary disturbance, with about 2.2 acres on NFS land. The corridor will extend from a tie-in just west of the new skier tunnel at the head of Peruvian Gulch down to the culinary water reservoir in the lower portion of the gulch. An upper branch from the main corridor will run from Middle Chips to Anderson Hill. Lower down, two forks from the main line near the top of the Men's Downhill Chute will run north down the summer road toward the Back Door and up along the stream channel (at least 50 feet from it) to the S Turns.

While only the NFS portions of the project are subject to Forest Service approval, the entire proposal was reviewed prior to issuance of this Decision Memo. The NFS portion is a minor component of the overall project, but the private-land portion is viewed as a connected action. Therefore, I considered effects on private land along with those on NFS land in arriving at my decision. This approach is consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) direction regarding connected actions.

Lower Men's Downhill Chute

This widening project will improve efficiency of terrain use, skier circulation, and safety by alleviating the current bottleneck and providing an alternative to Chip's Way for intermediate skiers descending into Peruvian Gulch. Chip's Way is typically crowded on busy days, and snow surface conditions can be poor.

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This project will:

- Provide adequate and reliable supplies of snowmaking water and power to areas of existing and new snowmaking and to new areas on private land (e.g., below Anderson Hill, the Back Door, and the Lower Men's Downhill Chute). Snowmaking coverage and capacity have become important issues as skier use of Peruvian Gulch has increased since the new lift was built. This has resulted in poor snow surfaces in heavy use areas at times.
- Provide reliable, redundant electrical power to Hidden Peak, a necessity when supplies from the Gad Valley side are down for any reason.
- Provide upgraded, more reliable communications through Peruvian Gulch and to Hidden Peak, including telephone and the fiber optics needed for ticket scanning and other modern technologies.

I believe both of these projects will enhance the skier experience at Snowbird. The Downhill Chute widening will improve circulation and increase skier safety. The utility corridor will improve snowmaking and provide reliable power and communications, thus decreasing the likelihood of delays and downtime for skiers.

MITIGATION MEASURES

As part of my decision, implementation of the mitigation measures listed below will be required on NFS land and recommended on private land. As the project area is within Salt Lake City's municipal watershed and adjacent to the air quality non-attainment area, protection of air and water quality are primary considerations. The 1999 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) regarding Snowbird's Master Development Plan (MDP) addressed these and a range of other environmental considerations and identified appropriate mitigation. As a result, I drew on the 1999 ROD in developing the mitigation outlined below.

It should be noted that Salt Lake County, Planning and Development Services, has reviewed Snowbird's proposal and authorized it as a Permitted Use within the Foothills and Canyons Overlay Zone. The County permit includes a number of mitigation measures to minimize adverse environmental impacts on private-land portions of the project area. Many of the county's mitigation requirements were derived from the Forest Service's 1999 MDP and ROD, insuring that potential NFS and private land impacts will be addressed in a similar way.

The Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities responded to the scoping effort undertaken for this project (discussed below), requesting that several mitigation measures be implemented to protect the municipal watershed. All applicable measures are reflected in the following list. Snowbird will submit final design plans to Public Utilities prior to construction and notify them within 2 weeks of the start of construction.

Soil Erosion, Sedimentation, and Water Quality

1. Prior to beginning construction on NFS land, submit an erosion control plan prepared in accordance with Appendix C of the 1999 MDP EIS. This plan must be approved by the Forest Service prior to construction on NFS land.
2. Include in the erosion control plan a 100-foot buffer of undisturbed vegetation between the area