

Decision Memo

Snowmass Snowmaking Improvements—Pumphouse Component


USDA Forest Service
Aspen/Sopris Ranger District, White River National Forest
Pitkin County, Colorado
T10S, R86W, in the SE ¼ of the NW ¼ of Section 12

Background

In February of 2007, the Aspen Skiing Company submitted a proposal to construct a pumphouse near the base of the Alpine Springs Ski Lift, and to expand the storage capacity of Rayburn's Pond. In April of 2007 the White River National Forest accepted the proposal and initiated a formal review of the project. The purpose of this project is to increase efficiency in the pumping and storage of water to support snowmaking operations. The project is needed to achieve the previously approved level of snowmaking coverage. The original proposal has been reviewed by a team of resource specialists, and modified as necessary to ensure consistency with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the White River National Forest, and to ensure that the project received the appropriate analysis.

Decision

I have decided to implement one component of the Snowmaking Improvements project. This decision approves the construction of a pumphouse near the base of the Alpine Springs lift. The expansion of Rayburn's Pond is not approved at this time, however, this decision does not preclude approval of the pond expansion in the future. Approved activities are limited to:

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- Construction of a pumphouse, with a footprint of 875 square feet, near the base of the Alpine Springs ski lift

As part of my decision, I am requiring the Aspen Skiing Company to implement the following design measures:

- Specify in the construction plans for the pumphouse building a rust colored metal roof and matching wainscoting, and submit final plans for approval before construction;
- Seed and mulch all disturbed areas and ensure that seed mix is free of persistent or invasive exotic plants;
- Ensure that heavy equipment and large trucks are not allowed to operate during periods of heavy rain, or when soil is saturated;
- Install sediment fence and drainage control to prevent the export of sediment from the construction site that may then enter streams;

This activity falls within a category of actions established by the Chief of the Forest Service, which normally do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an

Project Implementation Plan


SNOWMAKING EXPANSION PROJECT

Snowmass Mountain
Aspen Skiing Company

May 7, 2007

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Snowmaking Expansion Project.



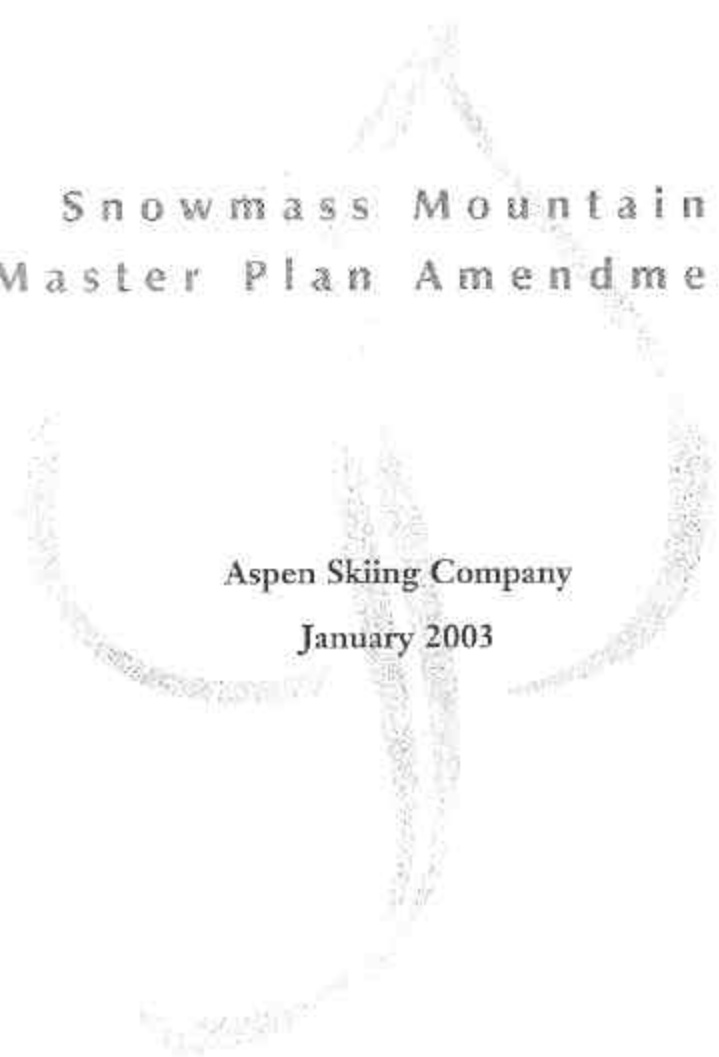
Completion of the first phase of this project will give snowmaking capabilities to the top of the Elk Camp Gondola and support beginner skier egress down Funnel to the Elk Camp Gondola, Assay Hill and Base Village. This project is an expansion of the existing snowmaking system to the bottom of Alpine Springs and establishing a new snowmaking system and water source to support the Elk Camp Beginner area.

The majority of this project includes the trenching for and installation of 9,700 feet of underground pipeline, with 48 aboveground hydrants and 25 electric pedestals. It also includes the installation of one (1) pumpstation, one (1) valve station and 25 above ground hydrant assemblies.

The 2007 construction season will start with the installation of Valve Block House 12 (VBH12) at Guggenheim Corner and extending air/water piping, hydrants and electric pedestals to the bottom of the Alpine Springs chair lift. The 912 square foot pump house will be constructed at the bottom of the Alpine Springs Lift, housing up to three 350 horsepower vertical turbine can style pumps and associated valving to support the distribution of pressurized water from the pumps and gravity water coming from Sheer Bliss Pond.

Aspen Skiing Company will proceed with approved Snowmaking expansion of Rayburns Pond, Turkey Trot Beginner area and 8 inch Gravity line down Funnel to the top of Assay Hill in future building seasons.

The conceptual elements of this Snowmaking Expansion were identified in the 1994 Snowmass EIS and Record of Decision.



Snowmass Mountain
Master Plan Amendment

Aspen Skiing Company

January 2003



ASPEN SKIING COMPANY



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Snowmaking

The proposed snowmaking expansion for Snowmass Mountain is intended primarily to provide snowmaking coverage for the area served by the new Elk Camp Gondola and the Alpine Springs area. Snowmaking in this area will be necessary to accommodate the traffic increase on the trail system accessed from Base Village and the Gondola. Because the Gondola will be the primary mountain access, it will also be necessary to have this terrain available in the early season.

See Figure 3. *Snowmaking, Existing and Proposed Conditions*, page 58c.

Terrain Coverage

The snowmaking expansion adds 163 acres (7 acres on private lands and 156 acres on USFS lands) of snowmaking to the existing system. Snowmaking currently exists for 196 acres (124 acres on private lands and 72 acres on USFS lands) in the Fanny Hill/Sam's Knob and Assay Hill/Funnel areas.

The proposed snowmaking system capacity will be 359 acres -- 131 acres on private lands and 228 acres on USFS lands. The 1994 Snowmass Ski Area EIS and Record of Decision has authorized and approved a total of 235 acres on USFS lands.

At approximately 175,000 gallons per acre-foot of snow, the proposed snowmaking system will require 94 million-gallons of water to cover this area with 18" of man-made snow. This number will vary from season to season based on natural snowfall amounts, early season temperature and humidity ranges, and specific ski area operational needs.

TABLE N. Proposed Trails with Snowmaking Coverage

Trail	Private (acres)	USFS (acres)	Total
Adams Ave. (Bottom's Up to Slider)		5.7	5.7
Slider (Adams Ave. to B-8)		12.3	12.3
Greca Cabin (T-8 to B-9)		21.5	21.5
Naked Lady		40.4	40.4
Turkey Trot		18.8	18.8
Funnel		25.6	25.6
Sunnyside		8.3	8.3
Slot (Upper)	7.0	23.7	30.7
Total Acreage:	7.0	156.3	163.3





United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ecological Services
764 Horizon Drive, Building B
Grand Junction, Colorado 81506-3946

IN REPLY REFER TO:
ES/CO-6-CO-06-F-006
TAILS 65413-2006-F-0032

June 15, 2006

Maribeth Gustafson, Forest Supervisor
White River National Forest
P.O. Box 948
Glenwood Springs, Colorado 81602-0948

Dear Ms. Gustafson:

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This document transmits the Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) biological opinion (BO) based on our review of the proposed Snowmass Ski Area (SMSA) Elk Camp Beginner Park Project located on the White River National Forest in Pitkin County, Colorado, and its effects on the threatened Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*). Your February 6, 2006, letter requesting consultation on the effects of the proposed action, on the Canada lynx was received in our office on February 7, 2006. This BO was prepared in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

This BO is based primarily on our review of your January 2006, biological assessment (BA) regarding the effects of the proposed action on the Canada lynx. A complete administrative record of this consultation is on file at this office.

Consultation History

On February 10, 2005, the Service issued BO number ES/GJ-6-CO-93-F-037 for new and historic water depletions on the Snowmass Ski Area. As stated in the 2006 biological assessment, existing development involving water depletions, including some snowmaking and on-mountain facilities, totaling 16.3 acre-feet of depletions of the total water depletion of 70.2 acre-feet addressed in the 2005 BO. The current proposal includes additional snowmaking activities that were previously addressed (but not implemented) in the 2005 consultation and therefore are included in the environmental baseline.

Purpose of a Biological Opinion

Section 7(a) (2) of the Act requires that:

"Each Federal agency shall, in consultation with and with the assistance of the Secretary, insure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out... is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat of such species... In fulfilling

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Guest Services in Elk Camp

In conjunction with the previously-approved Elk Camp Gondola, and to create a more user-friendly and comfortable experience in the Elk Camp pod, a new guest services facility is proposed adjacent to the Elk Camp Gondola's top terminal. The 15,000 square foot facility would provide indoor and outdoor seating (both cafeteria and restaurant style), restrooms, ski school operations, and retail sales. The proposed action does not provide for removing the Café Suzanne structure, the guest services function served by Café Suzanne will be shifted to the new guest services building at the Elk Camp Gondola.

Small-scale (acoustic and non-amplified) musical events,³ similar to those held on private lands at Fanny Hill, are proposed to occur in conjunction with the operation of the proposed Elk Camp guest services facility periodically during the summer. These events may be restricted by seasonal wildlife closures, similar to use of summer multiple use trails. Musical programs would accompany special events, parties and weddings at the proposed facility. No night time musical events are proposed.

Snowmaking

Consistent snow coverage is essential in order to accommodate the anticipated increased traffic on the trail systems in the proposed teaching area at Elk Camp as well as trails accessed by the previously, approved Elk Camp Gondola. In addition to snowmaking coverage proposed in the Beginner Park, snowmaking will occur on upper *Funnel* and *Adam's Avenue* to provide consistent snow for access to the Base Village and Alpine Springs areas.



Proposed snowmaking coverage totals 50.1 acres. All areas along *Turkey Trot* that are proposed for widening in conjunction with the creation of the Elk Camp Beginner Park are included for snowmaking coverage. The *Upper* and *Lower Bypass* trails are included in the total snowmaking coverage acreage; although, the bypass trails would not include the installation of a snowmaking line⁴.

Snowmaking occurs early November through late December⁵ to provide a base that augments natural snow, which typically arrives after December. Once ambient, early season temperatures are low enough, snowmaking will commence and continue throughout the day and night until a sufficient base is achieved. Approximately 2 employees would be required to set up snowmaking guns and tend them periodically during their operation. Approximately 3 visits each 8 hours are required.

Proposed snowmaking is consistent with the determination of available Snowmass Creek stream flow analyzed/approved in the 1994 Final Environmental Impact Statement/Record of Decision. Additional snowmaking requires the installation of underground water and compressed air lines as well as hydrants. Trenching is required to complete this phase of the proposed snowmaking system, as articulated in the Snowmass 2003 Mountain Master Plan.

³ Larger musical events, if desired, requires separate proposals and approval processes with the Forest Service on a case-by-case basis.

⁴ Snowmaking coverage will occur through snow management and farming practices.

⁵ As per the 1994 ROD, there would be no need to make snow after December 31. Any re-coverage or "patching" after that point would be limited to that which can be done with water stored in on-mountain reservoirs.