

much of the forest within the ski area diversity unit. However, within the ski area diversity unit, five comparatively large blocks of relatively contiguous forest remain, though some have been fragmented by jeep trails which are used as service roads, particularly the area labeled MAT3 (Figure 4.2). Existing block sizes range from approximately 120 acres (MAT3) to 1,120 acres (MAT5). Total acreage of large blocks (greater than 100 acres) of mature forest (which includes several of the smaller old-growth polygons) within the ski area diversity unit is approximately 1,958 acres, or approximately 33 percent. Even though some of these blocks may have a few jeep trails, they are noted here because they have a relatively unbroken character compared to the other portions of the area, which are often fragmented by wide (greater than 100-foot) ski trails.

Environmental Consequences

Direct/Indirect

Telluride
4b

The development of ski pods would require clearing forested areas for ski runs and lifts lines, and glading other forested areas to enhance tree skiing. Clearing for ski runs and lift lines would remove all existing forest vegetation within the designated corridor, thus reducing the patch size (fragment) and continuity of existing forest stands. Glading would decrease the stand density and remove hazard trees, down logs, and dense understory vegetation.

Trail/liftline clearing - Forested areas within proposed corridors would be converted to ski trail vegetation and would remain as such throughout the life of the ski area and beyond. Any old-growth characteristics that may have existed within these corridors would be eliminated and stands would be fragmented. The proposed expansion would convert an additional 250 acres, or approximately 10 percent of the spruce-fir habitat, to ski trail. Specifically, within the proposed expansion area, the Skunk Creek, Novice, Prospect Basin, Gold Hill, and Lift 6 realignment would contribute to the fragmentation of existing spruce-fir forest habitat, including some old-growth forest habitat. Of the 250 acres of disturbance in spruce-fir forest, 32 acres of spruce-fir old-growth would be impacted. Most notably, OG1, which is 61 acres in size, would be fragmented into smaller stands by lift line and ski trail construction; the largest remaining fragment would be 13 acres (Figure 4.2). In addition, old-growth polygon POG3 would be impacted, reducing its size from 71 acres to 61 acres. As a result, total old-growth in the ski area diversity unit greater than 30 acres would decrease to approximately 61 acres, or approximately 2 percent of the potentially forested area. On the larger ecological diversity unit level of analysis, total old-growth under the proposed expansion would decrease to 937 acres, or approximately 17 percent of the potentially forested areas.

Glading - Glading has the potential to affect several old-growth structural attributes. Thinning would reduce the stand density which forest canopy covers. Selective removal of mid-story and understory trees would reduce vertical diversity within the stand. For skier safety, some standing dead trees and down wood would be removed, further reducing or eliminating these stand characteristics. Affecting these structural attributes would not necessarily eliminate the stand's qualifications as old-growth forest, but it would reduce the habitat quality for those wildlife species associated with late successional and old-growth spruce-fir forests. Within the existing ski area, 11 acres of spruce-fir old-growth forest habitat have been gladed. The proposed expansion would allow glading on 418 acres of spruce-fir habitat, 57 of which would be in old-growth stands. Fifty-seven acres would be approximately 45 percent of the old-growth in the ski area diversity unit. Specifically, 34 acres within OG1 would be gladed, including 12 acres within the largest remaining 13-acre block (Figure 4.2), further diminishing the old-growth characteristics of this stand.

Implementation the Skunk Creek Alternative would eliminate most of the impact to old-growth except for approximately 7 acres of clearing and 3 acres of glading impacts along the eastern edge of POG3.

Mature Forest Impacts - Construction of the Skunk Creek and Novice lift pods would result in the greatest impact to mature forest. The impact from these pods would occur in the MAT5 polygon (Figure 4.2).