

skier circulation and access on Tea Cup and China Bowls. This is a proven technique and should have been analyzed in the DEIS.

EPA believes that the lack of alternatives explored in the DEIS is a flaw. Multiple options that are typical ski area management operations/techniques to improve skier circulation and skier density should be analyzed and disclosed in the FEIS.

Direct and Indirect Impacts to Waters of the U.S.

The construction of the SDB Express lift and Chair 5 replacement lift will impact approximately 1.4 acres through grading and raising the elevation of the base area. These lifts are located at the bottom of two drainages, the confluence of the SDB Creek and SUB Creek. These creeks are probably ephemeral but do have adjacent wetland vegetation. The document states that no wetlands will be affected by the proposed project (pg 1-14) but waters of the U.S. may be present on the site. EPA is very concerned that the document discounts impacts to wetlands but the project may have impacts to waters of the United States. The Protection of Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 requires the Forest Service to show "there is no practicable alternative" to the proposed action and "that the proposed action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands." The FEIS needs to clearly demonstrate that the Forest Service has fulfilled that requirement.

Snowmaking and Aquatic Resource Issues

EPA is concerned about the impacts of depletions from additional snowmaking and lack of disclosure in DEIS. The DEIS (page 3-148) describes the fact that Vail Resorts has water rights for additional withdrawals related to proposed snowmaking and the ability to maintain in-stream flows in Gore Creek. However, the timing and magnitude of withdrawals are not disclosed, and potential adverse impacts to the aquatic habitat in Gore Creek are not described. ~~These diversions are typically taken during low-flow periods and the DEIS should disclose the~~ amount of habitat loss or degradation when compared to the no action (baseline) alternative. The DEIS uses stream health as a proxy for impacts to aquatic resources. Because ~~stream health is~~ negatively affected by the proposed action, EPA believes a more direct assessment of aquatic communities and their habitat is necessary. The FEIS should include an analysis of impacts to habitat availability and habitat quality that includes fish and macroinvertebrate sampling as well as a suite of habitat variables, where data is available. These analyses should address potential impacts from additional diversion as well as changes in water yield due to snowmaking. In addition, EPA requests that flow information be provided in the following forms: estimates of virgin flow at the structures, total annual flow diverted, total monthly flow diverted, and diverted flow/virgin flow as a proportion.

The Proposed Action would add snowmaking coverage on approximately 78 acres of terrain on the front side of Vail Mountain. The DEIS does not identify the public purpose for the use of snowmaking on National Forest System lands. The adverse impacts to aquatic resources (including past, present and future reasonably foreseeable development (RFD) impacts) should be fully evaluated and disclosed, including the amount of additional water needed for this action.