



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White River
National
Forest

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File Code: 2720/1950-3

Date: November 15, 2007

Dear Interested Public:

Vail Associates, Inc. (VA) has submitted a proposal to the White River National Forest to initiate a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of proposed on-mountain improvements. This proposal, the **2007 Vail Ski Area Improvements Project**, is designed to provide for an improved balance of services to meet the needs and expectations of guests immediately and in the long-term.

The White River National Forest has accepted VA's proposal, and is initiating a review under NEPA requirements. The Proposed Action and Purpose of and Need for Action are discussed in the following sections. At this time, I am soliciting constructive feedback from the public on this proposal. Details on how to comment are found at the conclusion of this scoping notice.

SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND DECISION

This proposal (the "Proposed Action") will be analyzed within an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS will contain full disclosures of potential biological and social effects. A result of public scoping may be the generation of additional action alternatives. These alternatives would be analyzed within the EIS in addition to the Proposed Action.

All proposed projects are within VA's Forest Service-administered Special Use Permit (SUP) boundary. One component of the proposal would create a groomed pathway to enhance guest and mountain operations access to West Earl's Bowl, and would occur outside of VA's current operational boundary. The operational boundary is within the SUP area boundary and is the area maintained and patrolled as a part of the ski area's regular operational protocol.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

The EIS process will culminate with a Record of Decision being issued by me. Based on the analysis in the EIS, I will decide whether to implement an action alternative, a modified action alternative (if needed), or the no-action alternative. If an action alternative is selected, it will include: details on the location(s), physical parameters(s), and scheduling of any approved improvements, as well as any mitigation measures and monitoring requirements needed to meet Forest Plan and other legal direction.

A Record of Decision is anticipated to be released in late summer or fall 2008.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The goal of the Proposed Action is to enhance the guest experience through a series of strategic, qualitative improvements. It is important to note that, with this proposal, VA is not proposing to alter its "Manage To" number of 19,900 daily guests. Rather, the proposal is tailored to improve Vail's ability to respond to its changing market/guests' demands, expectations, and preferences—both in the near and



Snowcat Maintenance Facility

Vail has outgrown its existing on-mountain lift maintenance facilities. As part of Vail's continuing efforts to keep its fleet of snowcats on the mountain and out of Vail Village, the existing four repair bays and parts storage at the Snow Summit Cat Garage located between Eagle's Nest and Mid-Vail is proposed to be converted to a lift maintenance facility. A new snowcat garage (~6,000 square feet) is proposed to be constructed adjacent to (and uphill of) it. Although the existing Snow Summit Cat Garage is undersized for its intended use, it is well suited for VA's lift maintenance needs. Providing approximately 6,000 square feet for snowcat maintenance would accommodate four snowcat bays, as well as a break room, restrooms, and parts storage. Centrally locating lift maintenance and the snowcat garage would make VA's operations more efficient and would allow easy access for employees via the Eagle Bahn Gondola. Consolidation of VA's lift maintenance and snowcat storage would meet VA's operational needs into the foreseeable future.

Additional Snowmaking Infrastructure on the Front Side of Vail Mountain

Additional snowmaking infrastructure is proposed to be installed sufficient to add coverage to *Simba*, *Upper Born Free*, and *Ledges*. This would total approximately 56 acres. In addition, snowmaking is proposed at the Golden Peak Race Venue, which would total approximately 39 acres. Total proposed snowmaking coverage to be added is approximately 95 acres.

PROJECT DESIGN FEATURES INCORPORATED INTO THE PROPOSED ACTION

Applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Best Management Practices, and Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction will be incorporated in project design and implementation. The following is an initial list of design elements and best management practices that will be incorporated into the proposed action and analyzed in the Environmental Analysis. They are designed to further detail management actions, mitigate environmental consequences, and establish priorities for implementation.

Hydrology

1. Connected disturbed areas could be mitigated, and additional sediment controls that could result in improved stream health may be implemented concurrently with on-mountain construction (this may be necessary for the project to be in compliance with Watershed Conservation Practices (WCP) Handbook).
2. Streams draining the front side of Vail Mountain are in a diminished stream health category (Mill Creek and tributaries). Snowmaking, tree clearing, and other construction activities may not be in compliance with WCP handbook direction without mitigation or site-specific design criteria developed to meet the intent of the WCP handbook. An evaluation of existing connected disturbed areas, considering stream health improvements made in the past two years, would be necessary for analysis.

Timber and Forest Vegetation

1. The trend on National Forest System lands within and surrounding the SUP is continued mortality of mature lodgepole pine. Approximately 90-95 percent mortality of the mature lodgepole pine is to be expected. Major changes to the vegetation, naturally and through intense management, should be expected. Efforts should be made to retain or transplant seedlings and saplings to other areas to maintain vegetation cover.
2. The vegetation type consists of Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, aspen and lodgepole pine. Any Engelmann spruce that is felled must be either removed from the area or treated within one year after felling to prevent the buildup of spruce bark beetle. Treatments can include burning, burying or peeling the bark off felled Engelmann spruce.



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FAX (970) 827-9343

Vail 5

Reply to: 1950/2720

Date: August 30, 2000

To Interested Party:



Vail Associates, Inc. is proposing to expand the existing snowmaking system on Vail Mountain. Vail Associates, Inc. is also proposing to expand the existing Gold Peak Race Center. The snowmaking part of the proposal would add 369 acres of snowmaking coverage of which 366 acres would be on Forest Service land and 3 acres on private land. The current snowmaking system on Vail Mountain covers 390 acres of which 343 acres are on USFS lands and 47 on private land. The combined total of existing and proposed would be 759 acres of snowmaking coverage. This proposal also includes a proposed 120 million gallon reservoir to be constructed in the upper Sundown Bowl area. If approved, the intent would be to implement this proposal over the next ten years.

The Gold Peak Race Center part of the proposal consists of about 16 acres of trail clearing for a ski lift and two trails with snowmaking to the crest of Golden Peak. Up to an additional 3 acres of clearing would also be part of the proposal for future trail modifications as needed.

The Vail and Beaver Creek Resorts snowmaking water supply systems are closely related. Vail Associates, Inc. currently has an estimated 2,559 acre feet of water available for snowmaking through a combination of water sales contracts and previously adjudicated water rights. Average water usage for snowmaking at Vail and Beaver Creek for the last six years has averaged 342 acre feet on both the private and public land at Beaver Creek and 296 acre feet at Vail. Water withdrawals are under the jurisdiction of the Colorado Water Conservation Board and outside of Forest Service authority. These water withdrawals have been subject to previous analysis under both the National Environmental Policy Act and other State and Federal permitting processes.

The U.S. Forest Service is asking for public input on this proposal. Please send all comments in writing to Dave Ozawa, U.S. Forest Service, PO Box 190, Minturn, CO 81645 by October 3, 2000. For additional information, please contact Dave Ozawa or Dave Van Norman at (970)827-5715.

Sincerely,

DAVID T. VAN NORMAN
Acting District Ranger



Caring for the Land and Serving the People



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Recycled Paper

2101 VAIL MOUNTAIN APPROVAL SIGNATURES

2004 SUMMER CONSTRUCTION PLAN

Prepared by: Tom Allender Date: 4-29-04
Tom Allender
Senior Mountain Planner
SE Group

Reviewed by: Dave Ozawa Date: 4/30/04
Dave Ozawa
Snow Ranger
Holy Cross District
White River National Forest

Approved by: _____ Date: _____
Cal Wettstein
District Ranger
Holy Cross District
White River National Forest

Approved by: Brian McCartney Date: 4/28/04
Brian McCartney
Vice President of Mountain Operations, Vail
Vail Associates, Inc.

Element #2 - Chair 10 Trails Area

The Chair 10 Trails Area is that terrain in Northeast Bowl served by lift #10 and encompassing the area bounded by the Flapjack and Choker Cutoff trails (but not including the Flapjack trail), and the eastern permit boundary paralleling the Blue Ox trail.

Until the Forest Service approves the updated Master Development Plan, or until January 1, 2005, whichever comes first, VA will not seek to undertake development or operations, beyond those which now occur, within the Chair 10 Trails Area except for:

- a. Upgrading and extending the Chair 10 lift to the Two-Elk restaurant;
- b. Installing and operating a snowmaking system along Blue Ox and Roger's Run trails; and
- c. Constructing a catwalk from the bottom of the steep pitch on Blue Ox to the top of Chair 6.

At such time that VA submits the updated Master Development Plan to the Forest Service for approval, the Forest Service will reinitiate consultation on this opinion.


In addition, VA will limit the frequency of trail grooming in this area to a maximum of three out of every seven nights. VA will undertake such grooming so as to minimize the period during which nocturnal grooming operations are active on these trails, especially seeking to avoid the middle of the night or early morning hours when lynx are most likely to be present in Northeast Bowl. VA will not undertake any nocturnal operations in the Chair 10 Trails Area, except (a) for trail grooming, as specified, or (b) undertaking unanticipated and necessary repairs essential to next day operations and/or the safety of guests and employees.

This lightly developed area provides a degree of buffering between the highly developed and active front side and undeveloped Mushroom and Benchmark Bowls. The Chair 10 Trails area also likely provides foraging habitat for lynx. Evidence indicates the current level of use and development of this area may support at least limited use by lynx so long as adequate proximal security habitat is retained. Reasons for limiting grooming operations and other nocturnal activities in the Chair 10 Trails Area are to protect the value of the area as lynx foraging habitat and its proximity to diurnal security habitat. Restrictions on trail grooming hours or frequency are believed prudent to achieve temporal segregation of human and lynx use of the area in order to optimize for lynx use. This element is not intended to preclude such things as lift modifications or upgrades. This provision does not substantially alter or limit current operations or affect the approved project in Category III.

Element #3 - Game Creek Bowl and the Back Bowls

Until the Forest Service approves an updated Master Development Plan, VA will not seek to undertake additional development or operations in Game Creek Bowl and the Back Bowls, beyond the nature and extent of that now occurring, except for the following:

Vail 5

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- a. Installing and operating the Tea Cup Bowl improvements as approved by the Forest Service in the 1996 ROD;
 - b. Installing and operating a snowmaking system in Game Creek Bowl along the Lost Boy, Ouzo, and Woods Trails;
 - c. Installing and operating a snowmaking system in the Back Bowls along the Slot and Poppyfields Trails, along the Sun Up, Sun Down, and Sleepytime catwalks; and one route to the bottom of Tea Cup Bowl;
 - d. Developing overnight accommodations on private land owned by VA in the vicinity of the Game Creek Club as previously approved by the Eagle County Board of County Commissioners;
 - e. Upgrading or modifying existing chairlifts in Game Creek Bowl and the Back Bowls; and
 - f. Upgrading and realigning Chair #22 as previously approved by the Forest Service in the existing Master Development Plan.

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These lightly developed areas provide a degree of buffering between the highly developed and active front side and the habitat complex on Battle Mountain. Game Creek Bowl may also provide limited foraging habitat. This provision is intended to maintain that buffering effect. This provision does not substantially alter or limit current operations or affect the approved project in Category III.

Element #4 - Mushroom and Benchmark Bowls

As agreed among VA, CDOW, the Forest Service, and the Service, VA will (a) erect a suitable barrier to discourage skier entrance into Mushroom and Benchmark Bowls; and (b) install signs along these Bowls to educate ski area users about the importance of these habitats and to request their cooperation in not skiing through or otherwise entering designated areas. Until the Forest Service approves an updated Master Development Plan, VA will not undertake any operational activities in Mushroom and Benchmark Bowls, except for the following:

- a. VA will sign the area adjacent to the top of Chair 21 and erect an appropriate barrier to keep skiers back from the cornice at the head of Benchmark Bowl in order to prevent them from inadvertently triggering an avalanche;
- b. As needed, when extreme avalanche danger places unauthorized skiers below the cornice at substantial risk, VA may use traditional avalanche control measures to abate the danger at that site only; and
- c. During the winter, VA may continue to pack the Mill Creek Road as it historically has done at the request of the Eagle County Sheriff to facilitate emergency search and rescue operations. Although the Service would prefer that VA cease the packing of Mill Creek Road, the Service will not require the activity to cease for so long as the Eagle County Sheriff continues to request it to protect public safety. If, in the future the Eagle County Sheriff no longer requests this practice, VA will discontinue this practice. The Forest Service will consider closing this road year long to motorized and mechanized use (except for emergency and law enforcement purposes) as a travel management issue during preparation of and section 7 consultation on the Forest Plan.

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Infrastructure Upgrades Related to Chair #5 and the Sundown Chairlift

Proposed projects in conjunction with construction of the bottom terminals of the proposed Sundown Chairlift and Chair #5 include:

- Re-grading/excavating the vicinity of the bottom terminals;
- Installing a retaining wall;
- Replacing an existing culvert at the bottom of Chair #5 and extending it by approximately 40 feet (the culvert is substantially silted in, and has served its useful life);
- Upgrading the road between Chair #17 and the bottom of Chair #5 (defined below);
- Re-grading the top terminal location of Chair #5;
- Installing a power line extending from Chair #17 to the bottom of Chairs #5/Sundown Chairlift in the Sun Up access road.

Sun Up Access Road Improvements

The existing "Sun Up" road between Chairs #5 and #17 would need to be used for both construction of the new Chair #5 and Sun Down chairlift, as well as for long-term access and maintenance. This road has a native surface that is rutted. Stream sampling conducted in October 2007 indicates that stream health in the stream paralleling the road is diminished due to the abundance of fine sediment originating from the road. Therefore, a series of road improvements are proposed. These improvements include: insloping the road; graveling the surface; installing water bars and an armored ditch; and installing sediment ponds/traps. The switchback on the Sun Up road near the bottom terminal of Chair #5 would be lengthened and realigned. Culverts would be replaced as needed.

New Restaurant on Vail Mountain

A new (up to) 400 seat restaurant is proposed at the top of Vail Mountain at the confluence of the top terminals of Chairs #4, #5 and #11. Detailed designs of this proposed structure are forthcoming. Although power, water and sewer currently exist in this location, upgrades to water storage would be necessary and the proposal is to bury water tanks adjacent to this facility.

Golden Peak Race/Training Venue Expansion

The existing Golden Peak Race Venue is proposed to be expanded by approximately 41 acres. The western trails would include limited terrain features for training (e.g., kickers and sliding features). The lower race trail expansion would include a mogul training/competition course which would require some terrain modification. The expansion of this facility would accommodate an FIS-sanctioned Women's Downhill or a Men's Super G Course, and would allow for races and training to occur simultaneously, which is not currently possible. Two surface lifts are proposed for this Venue, as is a storage and maintenance facility. Snowmaking infrastructure is proposed to meet the FIS requirements. All trails in the proposed Golden Peak Race Venue Expansion would be graded and snowmaking infrastructure would be installed.

Groomed Access to West Earl's Bowl

The proposed West Earl's Access Route would provide a designated, maintainable Skiway between Belle's Camp and the chutes/glades of West Earl's Bowl that are routinely strip skied via Earl's Express (Chair #38). The Skiway would be approximately 25 feet wide to accommodate groomers, and approximately 1.5 acres of tree removal would be necessary. If constructed, the new route would allow Vail to include West Earl's within its operational boundary.

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