

DECISION MEMO
for
Snowmaking Repairs and Improvements on Home Run
Alta Ski Area

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

DECISION AND RATIONALE

I have reviewed Alta's proposal and the associated environmental review documentation and have decided to approve the elements described below. These elements constitute the proposed action addressed in this Decision Memo:

- Locating, isolating, excavating, and repairing a break in the existing snowmaking line along the skier's left edge of Home Run, below Alf's Restaurant.
- Installing five new snowmaking hydrants on or adjacent to this existing line (final locations determined during construction; most distant hydrant 25 feet from existing line).
- Installing a 125-kW transformer about midway down the line.

Installation of a lift loading conveyor at the lower terminal of Supreme lift:

- Excavating a site for underground workings then installing a conveyor belt 10 feet wide and 35 feet long to move skiers from the maze end to the loading point of the chairlift.

The project areas lie entirely on National Forest System (NFS) land. The total area disturbed during construction of the snowmaking improvements will be about 0.12 acres, encompassing both the trenches (3 feet deep and up to 4 feet wide) and the installation of hydrants (20 x 40 feet) and the transformer (15 x 40 feet). All of this area has been previously disturbed by trail grading and installation of the snowmaking line and other utilities in the approved corridor.

For the Supreme lift conveyor, the excavation will be 8 feet wide, 20 feet long (less than 0.01 acre), and 24 inches deep. This will accommodate the drive system for the belt, which will be positioned above it on the surface. Roughly half of the installation will lie under the superstructure of the existing lift terminal. The site has been disturbed previously for lift construction and operation of the maze.

No access roads will be constructed for either project. Standard rehabilitation and revegetation efforts will follow construction. Work should be completed within the 2008 construction season.

I believe that these projects will improve the recreational experience at Alta by providing skiers with a consistent snow surface on this key, high-traffic ski trail and by making loading of the Supreme lift more safe and efficient. The snowmaking improvements will improve the functioning of the existing system, making the most efficient use of currently available snowmaking water supplies. Similarly, the Supreme lift conveyor will improve the functioning of the existing lift by alleviating loading issues that are

inherent in its current configuration. The projects have been designed in a manner that will minimize potential impacts on their respective project areas. Overall, I am confident that approval of the proposed action is in the best interest of the public.

MITIGATION MEASURES

Implementation of the mitigation measures listed below will be required as part of my decision. As the project area is within Salt Lake City's municipal watershed, protection of water quality is a primary consideration.

Soil Erosion, Sedimentation, and Water Quality

1. Prior to beginning the project, submit an erosion control plan prepared in accordance with the BMPs typically agreed upon by the Forest Service and Alta for similar projects in the past.
2. Include in the erosion control plan stockpiling of material excavated from the trench lines in windrows on the upslope side of the trench, where possible. If this is not possible, windrows on the downslope side of the trench may require sediment control barriers if in close proximity to live water. Efforts should be made to windrow topsoil separately from subsoil so it can easily be located and re-applied to the backfilled trench surface.
3. Include in the erosion control plan installation of trench blocks and relief drains for subsurface water at any areas where the trench line could intercept underground seepage.
4. Promptly revegetate disturbed areas using the standard techniques developed by Alta for this purpose. The Snow Ranger will monitor revegetation efforts.

Wetland and Riparian Resources

5. Minimize impacts on any wetland crossed by the trench lines by:
 - Depositing no fill material in it (i.e., by hauling fill material from the upslope side by truck to the ravine below the wetland).
 - Securing any permitting required under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for crossing the wetland with the trench line (presumably authorization under Nationwide Permit No. 12).

Cultural Resources

6. Notify the Forest Service archaeologist immediately if and when any historic or prehistoric resources are exposed during construction activities.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

On May 9, 2008, the WCNF circulated a scoping notice summarizing this proposal and soliciting input on associated environmental issues and concerns. The notice was mailed to individuals, organizations, and agencies on the agency mailing list and posted on the WCNF website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/wcnf/projects/proposed>. A 30-day scoping period was provided. Comment letters were received from one environmental organization. This letter raised the issue of potentially increased water use due to the project. As noted above, no water use beyond the ski area's existing rights and supplies is authorized. The water to be used by the repaired and improved system is within Alta's existing set contract with Salt Lake City. The comment letter is in the project file and available for review through the Salt Lake Ranger District.

In reaching my decision, I considered issues identified by Forest Service interdisciplinary team members who reviewed the proposal as well as the water-use issue. Some of these issues fell under the headings of “extraordinary circumstances” and are discussed in detail below (see Reason for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action). The specific category and the analysis of potentially extraordinary circumstances are discussed below.

REASON FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

I have determined that the proposed project, as described above, is consistent with the types of actions described under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3) - Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than 5 contiguous acres of land. As noted above, the entire project will affect about 0.12 acres of NFS land, all within the ski area’s special use permit boundary. The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the entire project were reviewed and considered in my decision.

Forest Service and contractor resource specialists visited the project area, reviewed relevant studies and other published information, and documented their findings in the project file. No extraordinary circumstances to resource conditions were identified. The following resource conditions found at 36 CFR 220.6 (b) were considered:

- A. **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.** A biological assessment (BA) was prepared for this project. The determination reached was that no federally listed or candidate plant or animal species will be affected. A biological evaluation (BE) was also prepared, concluding that the project will not impact any Forest Service sensitive plant or animal species. Surveys and analysis of potential impacts on these special status species in the project area were completed. Based on these considerations, threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat do not constitute an extraordinary circumstance for this proposed action.
- B. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.** As currently laid out, the new trench lines, hydrants, and transformer will not affect any wetland. Mitigation measure no. 5 above precludes deposition of fill material in any wetland that is potentially affected by the final design and calls for appropriate permitting under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, which requires minimization of impacts. Based on these considerations, flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds do not constitute an extraordinary circumstance for this proposed action.
- C. **Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.** The project area does not include any designated wilderness, wilderness study area, or National Recreation Area, so such areas do not constitute an extraordinary circumstance for this proposed action.
- D. **Inventoried roadless areas.** The project area does not include any inventoried roadless areas, so such areas do not constitute an extraordinary circumstance for this proposed action.
- E. **Research Natural Areas.** The project area does not include any Research Natural Areas, so such areas do not constitute an extraordinary circumstance for this proposed action.
- F. **American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.** The 1996 MDP Draft EIS (Section 3.4.1.1) states that “prior to European settlement the ski area was used by Native Peoples

for both hunting and plant gathering in a lifeway that was otherwise tied to the more abundant resources of the adjacent Salt Lake Valley. This short-term use leaves little archaeological imprint, and few examples of Native sites remain anywhere in the canyon.” No Native American sites have been found in or near the project area. The two relevant Tribes in the area were contacted during the scoping period, and neither responded to identify any concerns regarding the project. Based on these considerations, American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites do not constitute an extraordinary circumstance for this proposed action.

- G. **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.** In the course of completing the 1996 MDP Draft EIS (see Sections 3.4.1.2 and 3.4.1.3), the history of the area and investigations of archaeological sites and historic properties were reviewed, and sites affected by that proposal were surveyed. The only site identified as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places was the Old Watson Shelter. This structure will not be affected by this proposed action. Mitigation measure no. 6 above will protect any archaeological resources discovered during construction. Based on these considerations, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas, do not constitute an extraordinary circumstance for this proposed action.

Based on the findings summarized above, this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. Based on experience with management activities similar to this, and upon the environmental analysis conducted for this project, the effects of implementing this action will be limited in context and intensity. Connected and cumulative actions have been appropriately addressed, an appropriate category for exclusion has been established by law and documented in federal regulation, and our review indicates no extraordinary circumstances to preclude its application.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

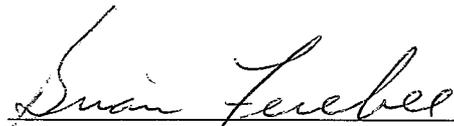
The only finding required by other laws not addressed directly or indirectly above is Forest Plan compliance in accordance with the National Forest Management Act. The proposed action has been evaluated for consistency with the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines of the 2003 Revised WCNF Forest Plan. The project area is located within a 4.5 Management Area, which emphasizes providing developed recreation opportunities, often under the terms of a special use permit. Thus, the proposed action is consistent with the management area prescription. In terms of more specific Forest Plan direction, my review indicates that the proposed action, with required mitigation measures in place, is consistent with all applicable standards and guidelines.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f) is not subject to appeal. This decision is not an authorization to proceed. These permitted actions are not one of the 10 activities subject to notice and comment under Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215, as clarified on October 19, 2005, by the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of California in Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck. Once all conditions and mitigation measures have been met, a written authorization to begin work will be issued.

CONTACT PERSON

For further information contact Steve Scheid at:
Salt Lake Ranger District, 6944 South 3000 East
Salt Lake City, Utah 84121
(801) 733-2689
sscheid@fs.fed.us



BRIAN FEREBEE
Forest Supervisor
Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest

8/6/08

Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.