

**Scoping Notice  
for the  
Heavenly Mountain Resort Tamarack Project**

**USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region  
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit  
Douglas County, NV and El Dorado County, CA**

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) is seeking scoping comments on Heavenly Mountain Resort's (Heavenly) proposed capital improvement project described hereafter as the Tamarack Project. The Tamarack Project is consistent with the vision described in Heavenly's accepted Master Development Plan (MDP) to provide world class recreation opportunities while also protecting the environmental quality of the area. Construction of all proposed activities would be conducted in accordance with applicable portions of the revised Construction Erosion Reduction Program (CERP), as contained in the MDP and 2015 Epic Discovery Environmental Impact Statement. The following project summary describes the proposal in detail, and corresponds with the attached maps.

**EXISTING CONDITION:**

There is existing skiing and snowboarding terrain located at the top of the Heavenly Gondola that is well-suited and has been planned for use as ski school teaching area for beginner and low-intermediate ability levels. The terrain does not presently contain any ski lifts which are necessary for its use as a teaching and development area. The existing Tamarack Return ski trail was not implemented to its full width approved in the MDP when it was first developed in 1997. It provides a critical connection to return to the Gondola area and Tamarack Lodge. Based on use levels and patterns particularly in early-season and low-snowpack conditions, the trail is not sufficiently wide enough to provide a high-quality experience. Currently, on-mountain ticketing for all summer and non-skiing winter activities are done in a temporary facility which does not provide a consistent, high-quality visitor experience. The Blue Streak zipline which is located adjacent to the upper-mountain Tamarack Express lift is not operated during the winter season. The Blue Streak's overhead trolley riding and return lines are removed each year when not in use in order to prevent snow and ice buildup on them. Trees located underneath the lines make this removal difficult and can cause damage to the equipment because the lines must be removed manually and the lines can hang up in the trees.

**DESIRED CONDITION:**

The desired condition is a high-quality guest experience for visitors to Heavenly in both winter and summer operating seasons. This will be accomplished by improving the quality of existing facilities and by providing a more complete set of facilities for the visitor. The top of the Gondola is a very popular ski school area because of its access from Heavenly Village, consistent snow conditions and its relatively flat slopes. It is a popular area for destination and other guests who participate in non-skiing and summer activities and access the resort using the Heavenly Gondola from Heavenly Village.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED:**

The Tamarack Project Activities are linked, both directly and indirectly, to the Master Plan - the purpose of which is:

*“to improve the overall quality of the visitor experience at the resort, creating an improved, multi-seasonal visitor and skier/snowboarder experience that is competitive with the experience offered by other destination resorts and that reflects current market trends and preferences.” and “to modify and improve existing facilities for more efficient use.”*

Heavenly and the Forest Service have identified an opportunity consistent with the Forest Plan and the objectives of Heavenly’s Master Development Plan to improve the quality of the facilities in order to provide a higher quality and more efficient management of ski school facilities and recreation opportunities.

## **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES:**

### New Activity Ticketing Sales Kiosk

Add a new 300 square-foot permanent sales kiosk to provide Epic Discovery summer and winter non-skiing activity ticketing needs. Currently, activity ticketing is provided in a set of temporary 10' x 10' structures which do not provide the guest with a high-quality point of contact where they can purchase tickets and receive information about participating in the activities. The new structure will be sited adjacent to the existing Bear Cave Ski School building near Tamarack Lodge at the top of the Gondola. Architectural design will be consistent with the Forest Service Built Environment Image Guide. Electrical power and low-voltage utilities will be extended in an underground trench a short-distance of approximately 150' by 3' to the new kiosk from the adjacent Bear Cave Ski School building utility point of connection. The total approximate area of temporary disturbance will be a maximum of 1,000 square feet. No tree removal will be necessary.

### Relocation of the Existing Red Fir Handle Tow Lift

The site location for the new Alpine Coaster requires the relocation of the existing Red Fir handle tow lift in order to reduce user conflicts. The Red Fir lift serves beginner and low-level ski and snowboard students. It will be relocated to the skiers' right-hand side of the existing Easy Street trail. The existing lift is approximately 515 feet long. It will be re-installed at approximately 400 feet in length. The manufacturers' one-hour rated uphill capacity of the lift will not increase and may be reduced based on the final length of the lift. Limbing of trees and possible removal of a few individual trees along the right-hand side of the trail will be included for the lift alignment in order to ensure proper clearance from fixed objects. A 10' by 10' operator's booth that includes the drive control systems for the lift will be included. A new electrical power connection is included and will be extended in an underground trench approximately 500' by 3' from the nearby Bear Cave Ski School building utility point of connection. The total area of temporary disturbance for the lift will be approximately 10,000 square feet.

### Addition of New Magic Carpet Ski School Lift

A new Magic Carpet surface lift will be installed on lower Easy Street Trail near the relocated Red Fir lift alignment. As a beginner-level lift, the Magic Carpet will be used primarily for ski school activities. It will serve as a part of the progression sequence of lifts and terrain to move students on to the Red Fir lift as their skills and abilities increase. The Magic Carpet will have a manufacturer's one-hour rated uphill capacity of 600 persons/hour. The lift will be approximately 300 feet in length. A new electrical power connection is included and will be extended in an underground trench approximately 150' by 3' from the nearby Bear Cave Magic Carpet. The total approximate area of temporary disturbance will be approximately 7,000 square feet. No tree removal will be necessary.

For construction of both lifts, a temporary spur approximately 10' x 500' will be developed and then decommissioned following construction.

### Tamarack Return Trail Ski Widening

Widen the existing trail to an average width of 125 feet. The widening will remove trees on approximately 1.3 acres, most of which are located on the skiers' right side of the trail where a more consistent natural grade exists. A small number of trees will be cleared on the skiers' left side of the trail near the bottom.

The existing aboveground snowmaking lines will be relocated to near the new right-hand edge of the trail and will remain aboveground. As part of the project, the Easy Street Run Hazard Reduction prescription will be implemented on the entire length of the existing trail in order to reduce obstacles and allow improved surface coverage under natural and manmade snow conditions. The total area of the prescription will be approximately 1.42 acres. Based on the existing ground surface conditions in the widened area, it is not necessary to implement the prescription in that area.

A temporary staging area for the trees that are removed trees as part of both this activity and the Blue Streak zip line tree removal project will be created at the bottom of the Tamarack Return Trail where it intersects the existing summer maintenance road. It will be approximately 0.75 acres in size.

### Blue Streak Zip Line Tree Removal

Remove trees underneath the existing Blue Streak Zipline to facilitate the efficient annual removal and reinstallation of the riding and return cables. All efforts will be made to retain trees, especially whitebark pine trees, as part of the project; including small-diameter individuals that do not conflict with the required cable installation and removal procedures. Limbing will be used where feasible. Following tree removal, the cleared area will provide a more consistent, clear work area for the staff. It will remedy the situation where the cables get hung up on trees and may break loose with little to no advance warning. It will not be necessary to remove shrubs or groundcover as part of the project.

The clearing will take place along specific sections of the line but will not be a continuous area of disturbance. The area to be cleared will be closer to 0.5 acres because of the open nature and spacing of the tree canopy in the area.

## **DESIGN FEATURES AND CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS**

The following design features and construction methods will be utilized in all projects as appropriate. The measures are taken directly from the Master Plan Construction Erosion Reduction Program (CERP).

Specific design features include:

- Installation of temporary water quality Best Management Practices (BMPs). These may include but will not be limited to: silt fences, straw wattles, coir logs, mulching, gravel/sand bags and construction fencing.
- Limited disturbance and construction staging areas.
- Limit tree removal to minimum amount necessary, including white bark pine where present.
- Utilize over-the-snow tree removal and skidding in areas of known Tahoe draba or habitat. In other areas utilize over the snow tree removal and skidding when possible. Trees may be dropped when there is no snow and then removed over snow at a later time. During over-the-snow tree removal, trees will be skidded over a minimum of 12” of compacted snow behind a snow cat to designated staging areas in order to prevent soil disturbance. Trees will be limbed and chipped at the staging area for use for erosion control and soil amendments.
- The easy street run hazard reduction prescription will not be implemented in areas where Tahoe draba have been found. Currently, surveys have not located any in the areas proposed for this treatment.
- No areas of mapped archaeological features will be used. Off-limits areas will be identified and established jointly by Heavenly and Forest Service staff near these sensitive areas and lined with rope barriers in order to prevent access.
- Proper backfilling and compaction of all excavations.
- Separating top soil and duff layers from excavation spoils for later re-use in revegetation where possible.
- Implementing site-specific revegetation, soil erosion and sedimentation plans and specifications.
- Incorporating organic material into soil amendments to promote soil infiltration and plant establishment where necessary.
- Implementing permanent water quality BMPS following project construction.
- Re-establishing vegetation and soil function capacities at staging areas following project completion.
- Dust control measures, at construction sites and on roads.
- Using US EPA Tier 2/Tier 3 level engines and power units to minimize emissions.
- Multi-year, post-construction monitoring and reporting of construction areas as required by the Forest Service BMP Effectiveness Protocol Program.

**DECISION TO BE MADE:**

CEQ regulations allow federal agencies to exclude from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) categories of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment, based on the agency's experience with and knowledge of Heavenly Mountain Resort. The proposed action fits under 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(3), "Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land."

These activities fit within this category because the activities are located within the special use permit area for Heavenly Mountain Resort and are less than 5 acres in total.

**IMPLEMENTATION DATE:**

Implementation of this project is proposed for Spring/Summer 2016.

**HOW TO COMMENT AND TIMEFRAME**

Comments would be most helpful if received by **December 21, 2015**. Provide comments by mail, fax, email, or in-person to the responsible official, Jeff Marsolais, Forest Supervisor, c/o Matt Dickinson at the contact information below. Acceptable formats for electronic submissions include email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc or .docx) or portable document file (.pdf). Submit hand-delivered comments during business hours Office Business Hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

**CONTACT PERSON:**

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Attachments: Project Area Map