
File Code: 2720; 1950
Date: April 20, 2016

Friends of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest

Dear Interested Reader

On December 5, 2015, Alta ski area submitted a request to the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest (UWCNF) to authorize a group of projects that the ski area proposes to complete in the next 5 years. Since the projects are included in Alta's accepted master development plan (MDP), are within the ski area's special use permit (SUP) area, and appear to be consistent with UWCNF screening criteria pending review of more detailed plans, we accepted Alta's proposal. Since the proposed projects may impact the human environment, we will analyze and disclose potential impacts in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The analysis will guide our decision on whether or not to approve the projects. We plan to initiate NEPA review in April 2016.

At this time, we anticipate that an environmental assessment (EA) will be prepared. The purpose of this scoping period is to provide an opportunity for public input on the scope of this NEPA review before analysis begins.

Several of the projects included in Alta's 2015 proposal MDP do not require EA-level review and approval, (i.e., micro-hydro modification to snowmaking system, solar power installations on existing buildings, High Traverse off Collins lift, Supreme yurt, and possibly others) and therefore, will be analyzed separately. The remaining projects constitute the proposed action described in the attached Description of the Proposed Action: Alta MDP Improvement Projects.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a public notice of this opportunity to comment in the Salt Lake Tribune. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments should be submitted to:

Rebecca Hotze
District Ranger, Salt Lake Ranger District
6944 South 3000 East
Cottonwood Heights, Utah 84121

Comments may be hand-delivered from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, at that address.



Electronic comments should be submitted in a format such as an email message, rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to: comments-intermtn-uwc@fs.fed.us.

Our decision regarding this proposed action is subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed action during this scoping period or a subsequent comment period will be eligible to file an objection. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to meet the legal requirements (sec. 218.8[d]) and to submit comments by the close of the comment period.

In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, the commenter must verify identity in order to establish eligibility to object. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Forest Service Manual provides the following direction for management of privately provided recreation opportunities: “To provide, under special-use authorization, sufficient, suitable facilities and services that supplement or complement those provided by the private sector, State and local government on private land and the Forest Service on National Forest System land to meet public needs, as determined through land and resource management planning. To facilitate the use, enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of natural resource settings in National Forests” (FSM 2340.2). In addition, the Forest Service now operates under the directive to implement the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act, which guides additional seasonal and year-round recreation activities.

Consistent with this direction and pertinent provisions of the UWCNF Forest Plan, we have accepted Alta’s proposal and will initiate NEPA review. The proposal meets the over-arching Forest Service purpose of providing a diverse range of recreation opportunities to a wide segment of the population, at both the local and national levels, and helps the Forest Service achieve its recreational mandate.

From Alta’s perspective, the purpose of the proposal is to make more efficient and safe use of the resources within the permit area by replacing outdated equipment, upgrading service facilities, increasing water storage, and taking advantage of new technology.

Specific needs to be resolved in order to achieve these purposes include:

- Improving economic and environmental sustainability.
- Improving visitor parking and mass transit.
- Enhancing avalanche control methods.
- Taking advantage of emerging lift technology to provide more efficient service.
- Improving skier distribution, circulation, and access to popular terrain.
- Upgrading skier services.
- Refining the snowmaking system to increase efficiency and storage capacity.

Project-specific rationales are provided in the attached Description of the Proposed Action: Alta MDP Improvement Projects

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

Preliminary issues have been identified based on previous environmental analyses. Additional issues may be included in the analysis based on comments provided by the public and other entities. Preliminary issues include effects on:

- Watershed and soil resources.
- Visual quality.
- Vegetation, wildlife, and fisheries.
- Wetland and riparian areas.
- Parking and transportation.
- Cultural resources.

ALTERNATIVES

NEPA regulations require a “range of reasonable alternatives.” This range must include the proposed action and a no-action alternative. Other alternatives may be identified as a result of the issues raised during scoping or through the analysis of environmental effects. In this case, the proposed action would consist of the projects in Alta’s proposal (attached), and the no-action alternative would allow Alta’s continued use of the permit area as currently permitted, including previously authorized actions.

DECISION TO BE MADE

David Whittekiend, Forest Supervisor, is the Responsible Official for this project. Upon completion of the environmental analysis, he will decide whether and under what conditions to approve the proposed action or an alternative addressed in the EA. This decision will be described in a Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This scoping notice and subsequent documentation of the NEPA process will be available on the Forest’s Schedule of Proposed Actions website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110419>. For further information contact Shawnee Hinman at the Salt Lake Ranger District Office, at 801-733-2664 or sfhinman@fs.fed.us. Thank you for your interest in the management of the UWCNF.

Sincerely,

/s/ David C. Whittekiend

DAVID C. WHITTEKIEND
Forest Supervisor

cc: Shawnee Hinman; Rebecca Hotze;