

Decision Memo

Waterville Valley Lift Improvements Project

USDA Forest Service
White Mountain National Forest, Eastern Region Winter Sports Team
Grafton County, New Hampshire

Decision and Rationale for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action

After careful consideration of public input, the recommendations of appropriate resource specialists, and the requirements of applicable laws and regulations, I have decided to implement the Waterville Valley Lift Improvements project at the Waterville Valley Ski Resort, Waterville Valley, Grafton County, New Hampshire (NH). The purpose of this project is to improve the overall guest experience by providing upgraded and modernized infrastructure to improve the reliability and safety of lift operations, improve resistance to weather, and provide more consistent winter operation. Project activities include removal of the White Peaks Express detachable chair lift and replacing it along the same alignment with a new 6 passenger bubble detachable chair lift and base area carrier storage garage, replacement of the Sunny Side fixed grip triple chair along the same alignment but with a slightly lower top terminal, with a fixed grip quad, and removal of the Northside fixed grip double chair. All lifts are located within the Waterville Valley Resort Ski Area Special Use Permit area situated off Route 49 in Waterville Valley, NH and are entirely on National Forest Lands.

Access to the project area would be via Waterville Valley Resort's work roads or ski trails. Work would be done using excavators, a crane, possibly a helicopter for setting towers and concrete, and hand tools. Some blasting of ledge may be necessary for proper construction of tower and terminal footings. The scope of work includes removing or relocating the existing lifts, reduction or removal of the old lift tower footings, installation of footings for the new or relocated lifts and construction of the lift terminals. About 35 trees would be removed to accommodate the new base area carrier storage garage.

Implementation will be phased and will begin no earlier than the spring of 2021 and likely will take several years to implement in its entirety. Implementation will be limited to the summer and fall. This project is consistent with the Master Development Plan submitted by Waterville Valley Resort and accepted by the Forest Service. Additional information is provided in the "Small Projects Day Form 1—Project Information" (attached).

Project Design Features

The following project-specific measures to avoid or minimize potential impacts to key resources shall be implemented as part of this project.

- Waterville Valley Resort shall obtain the required federal, state, and/or local permits prior to implementing activities in jurisdictional wetlands or other waters of the U.S.
- The Forest Service and Waterville's contracted lift engineer will monitor construction to ensure that Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, Best Management Practices, and pertinent construction mitigations are followed.
- Implementation of this project is contingent upon the approval of final construction plans to include engineer stamped lift designs and adequate protection for existing wildlife and other resource conditions.
- No noisy construction activities should take place adjacent to (or overhead of, in the event helicopters are used) Bicknell's thrush habitat (thick spruce-fir forests at elevation of 3000 feet above sea level and higher) between the dates of May 15th and August 15th.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. The action is a routine activity within the following category of exclusion found at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(2) and (3): "additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor" and "approval, modification, continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land".

Based on information presented in this document and the project record, including input from appropriate resource specialists, I have evaluated the resource conditions listed in 36 CFR 220.6(b)(1) and determined there are no extraordinary circumstances related to this project. Supporting information is provided in the "Small Projects Day Form 2—Resource Specialist Review" (attached).

Public Involvement

This project was listed on the quarterly White Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning September 30, 2019 and updated periodically during the analysis. No comments were received from interested parties, though one individual requested a copy of the Decision.

Findings Required By and/or Related to Other Laws and Regulations

My decision is consistent with the 2005 White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This decision also complies with all applicable laws and regulations, including the National Environmental Policy Act, National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act.

Administrative Review and Objection Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative review or objection pursuant to 36 CFR 215.

Implementation Date and Contact Information

Categorically excluded projects are not subject to notice, comment, and opportunity to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Therefore, this decision may be implemented immediately.

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Joe Gill by mail at Saco Ranger District, 33 Kancamagus Highway, Conway, NH, 03818, by email at joseph.gill@usda.gov, by phone at (603) 447-5448 extension 5108, or by fax at (603) 447-8405.

Derek Ibarguen
Forest Supervisor

Date