

DECISION MEMO

Arapahoe Basin Ski Area

Food Service and Lenawee Replacement Project

USDA Forest Service Dillon Ranger District, White River National Forest Summit County, Colorado

April 2021

BACKGROUND

Arapahoe Basin Ski Area (A-Basin) has proposed to replace the existing Lenawee Chairlift, construct a warming hut in the vicinity of the existing Lenawee Parks ski trail, and construct a food service building adjacent to the Black Mountain Lodge within A-Basin's existing Special Use Permit (SUP) and operational boundary. The proposed projects are consistent with goals and objectives identified in A-Basin's Master Development Plan (MDP). The attached map depicts the locations of these projects. For more information, visit the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59357>.

DECISION

Based on project scoping and analysis conducted, it is my decision to authorize A-Basin to replace and upgrade the Lenawee Lift, construct a warming hut (Steilhang Hut), and construct a food service building adjacent to Black Mountain Lodge (Midway Barbeque). The Lenawee Lift replacement will be designed to increase uphill lift capacity to the summit of A-Basin as well as improve the lift loading and unloading experience for guests with a wide range of skiing abilities. The two additional buildings, the Steilhang Hut and Midway Barbeque, will improve the on-mountain experience through providing additional guest warming space and food service. The approved projects will better meet the expectations of visitors by improving skier circulation and enhancing the quality of the on-mountain guest experience at A-Basin.

My decision includes several project specific design criteria (PDC) to minimize resource impacts (refer to Table 1: Project Specific Design Criteria). The project will also adhere to White River National Forest (WRNF) General Design Criteria (GDC), which are available on the project website. The project area has been reviewed by Forest Service specialists for impacts to relevant resources, including cultural resources, botany, wildlife, aquatics, scenery, soils and wetlands and no significant impacts were identified. The analysis for this project is documented in a project file maintained by the Dillon Ranger District. The projects are consistent with management direction provided by the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act of 2011 (2011 SAROE), the WRNF 2002 Land and Resource

Management Plan (2002 Forest Plan), and the specific standards and guidelines established for Management Area 8.25.

Lenawee Lift Replacement

The existing fixed grip three-person chair is the only way for guests to repeat ski most of the frontside upper mountain terrain and access terrain in Montezuma Bowl and the East Wall. The existing Lenawee Lift has an uphill capacity of 1,800 people per hour and lift lines can be longer than 15 minutes; in addition, lower ability level guests can have difficulty loading and unloading due to the speed of the fixed grip lift, which cannot slow down. The upgraded lift is anticipated to be a detachable lift which will improve the loading and unloading experience and have an uphill capacity of approximately 2,400 people per hour. The bottom terminal will be regraded and to improve access to the lift, the approach along the existing Lenawee Traverse ski trail will be widened. The top terminal will also be graded and moved approximately 25 feet downhill and the egress towards Snow Plume Refuge will be widened. Existing lift towers will be retained where feasible and replaced if necessary. The project will be designed to avoid impacting wetlands and does not require any tree removal.

Steilhang Hut

The Steilhang Hut will provide on-mountain space for food service, guest seating, composting toilets (and leech field for composted fluids), and an outdoor deck. It will be located adjacent to the existing Lenawee Parks ski trail and will be approximately 1,000 square-feet in size. It will operate year-round to support skiing in the winter and via ferrata activities located nearby on the East Wall in the summer. Water will be hauled to the site as needed and electricity will be supplied by an existing underground power line adjacent to the site.

Grading will be required to construct the hut and color and design of the hut will match A-Basin's existing exterior design themes. A-Basin would also remove the existing Avalauncher tower and several sections of snow fencing at the site. Snow fencing would be replaced as necessary, but the Avalauncher tower would not be replaced. Construction and maintenance access to the site is via the adjacent existing mountain road.

Midway Barbeque

The Midway Barbeque building will provide permanent housing for the barbeque that typically occurs at the Black Mountain Lodge. It will be approximately 2,100 square feet and include food service, guest seating and storage space. Utilities for the building will come from the adjacent Black Mountain Lodge and the design will match the existing building. Construction and maintenance access to the site is via the adjacent existing summer mountain road.

Project Specific Design Criteria

To minimize resource impacts, my decision incorporates both PDC and WRNF GDC.

**Table 1:
Project Specific Design Criteria**

General
<p>Prior to starting construction activities on NFS lands, A-Basin shall develop a Construction Implementation Plan for Forest Service review. All proposed construction methodologies and practices will be reviewed for compliance with the decision and resource management direction. Hydrologist review of the bottom terminal construction plans is required. This plan shall include the following information:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Construction Management: Project timelines, project contacts, disturbance boundaries, grading and site plans, staging and parking areas, construction access, and any required survey information. 2. Erosion Control and Drainage Management Activities. 3. Post-Construction Revegetation and Rehabilitation: Include methodology, seed mixes, and soil amendments. 4. Noxious Weed Management: Weed control methodologies including equipment cleaning, pretreatment, and post-construction monitoring and treatment. 5. Best Management Practices (BMPs) list to be employed and adhered to during project implementation.
Pre-Construction
<p>Chairlift and building designs must be approved by the Forest Service prior to construction.</p> <p>The Forest Service will survey the wetland adjacent to the Lenawee lower terminal for boreal toads in summer 2021. If toads are found, except for project ingress/egress routes, a combination of silt fence with straw wattles will be installed around the lower terminal grading area to limit direct mortality due to project activity.</p>
During Construction
<p>Identify the location of the two moonwort plants located within the lift corridor and avoid them during construction.</p> <p>To limit the spread of the invasive fungus causing the amphibian disease chytrid:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Any equipment being used on the Lenawee lower terminal and transported to A-Basin from other sub-watersheds will be cleaned and disinfected with fungicide or cleaned and allowed to dry or a period of a least 24 hours before being put to use on the project. 2.) Any equipment that has the potential to come into contact with surface waters (including, standing or flowing) transported to A-Basin from other watersheds will be cleaned and disinfected with fungicide or cleaned and allowed to dry or a period of a least 24 hours before being put to use on the project.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) when they are within one of the categories identified by the USDA in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or the proposed action is within a category listed in 36 CFR 220.6 (d) and (e), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. I have determined that the project, as proposed by A-Basin and described in detail above, is consistent with the category 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(22), “*Construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, or disposal of buildings, infrastructure, or improvements at an existing*

recreation site, including infrastructure or improvements that are adjacent or connected to an existing recreation site and provide access or utilities for that site.”

It is my determination that the projects within the A-Basin SUP area will result in minimal impacts to National Forest resources. I find no extraordinary circumstances related to this decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. Prior to implementation, Forest Service resource specialists will further review the approved projects for field fitting, as necessary.

Therefore, I have decided to authorize the projects, as described above, without further analysis and documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The following resource conditions were considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the project exist.

Federally-Listed Threatened or Endangered Species or Designated Critical Habitat, Species Proposed for Federal Listing or Proposed Critical Habitat, or Forest Service Sensitive Species

The Endangered Species Act requires that federal actions not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered or result in adverse modification to such species designated critical habitat. The only Federally listed species with potential to be present or affected by the approved projects is the Canada lynx. The projects are in areas considered to be non-habitat for lynx and there will be no tree removal. Lynx may use portions of the project area for travel, but it is anticipated these movements would not be impacted by project implementation activities. The project-related impacts result in a determination of “No Effect” to Canada lynx.

Forest Service Region 2 Sensitive wildlife species were also considered and species with potential to be present or affected by the approved projects include white tailed ptarmigan and boreal toad. There is a small potential for white tailed ptarmigan habitat to be impacted by grading or construction of the Steilhang hut and cause ptarmigan to abandon nesting areas and move to other locations. While there is no known occupied boreal toad habitat in the immediate vicinity of the Lenawee Project there are documented boreal toad breeding sites downstream. Due to dispersal movements up and down the riparian corridor both direct and indirect mortality to boreal toads is possible. Surveys for boreal toads will be conducted prior to project implementation to ensure that there are no individual toads near the ground disturbance locations and PDCs described in Table 1 will minimize potential impacts. Overall, for white tailed ptarmigan and boreal toads the project may adversely impact individuals but is not likely to result in a loss of viability in the Planning Area, nor cause a trend toward federal listing. For the remainder of Region 2 Sensitive species, the projects would have “No Impact”.

The project area does not provide habitat for federally listed plant species and no Forest Service sensitive plant species were documented during field surveys. Two moonwort individuals (a Species of Local Concern) were documented in one location along the chairlift corridor but were noted as common at A-Basin; they will be avoided during project implementation.

Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds

There would be no impacts to wetlands and other waters of the U.S. from the approved project. The project is not located within a floodplain or municipal watershed. Wetlands were surveyed in September of 2020 and two areas were identified where wetlands were proximate to the project components: a wetland complex located just downgradient of the Lenawee Lift bottom terminal and a fen wetland complex located adjacent one of the existing lift towers. The chairlift will be designed to avoid directly or indirectly impacting any adjacent wetlands.

Congressionally Designated Areas

No actions will occur in Congressionally Designated Areas.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

No actions will occur within inventoried Roadless Areas.

Research Natural Areas

No actions will occur within Research Natural Areas.

American Indians Religious or Cultural Sites

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (U.S.C. 470 et seq.) requires Federal agencies take into account the effect of a project on any pre-contact or historic district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in or eligible for, inclusion in the National Register. A cultural resource inventory was performed in the Area of Potential Effect (APE), and no cultural resources were identified within the potential disturbance areas. It has been determined that there will be no adverse effect to historic properties because of the approved projects. If cultural resources are discovered in the project area, additional measures will be employed such that the resources are not impacted.

Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas

Archaeological sites, and historical properties or areas were studied as a part of the cultural resource inventory for this project. No sites were recorded with the APE.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A scoping notice dated February 17, 2021 was sent to 92 members of the public and was published on the WRNF website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59357>). Seven comments were received in response to the scoping notice with five in support of the project. One commenter expressed concerns about safely loading 6-person chairlifts and A-Basin would adhere to all safety guidelines and regulations as dictated by the Colorado Passenger Tramway Safety Board. Colorado Parks and Wildlife submitted a comment regarding potential impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat. An analysis of Federally Proposed, Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate species, as well as Forest Service Sensitive Species is documented in the project file. Minor impacts associated with the approved projects will be addressed through the application of PDC and GDC, established best management practices, and project design. A-

Basin will work cooperatively with CPW to install educational signage to discourage visitors from approaching mountain goats and, to the extent possible, schedule removal of the existing Lenawee Chairlift to focus project implementation near the bottom terminal first in order to minimize early season project activities closer to the mountain goat nursery near the top of the mountain.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

This decision is consistent with the 2002 Forest Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with appropriate Forest Plan standards and guidelines for Management Area 8.25, Ski Areas (Existing and Potential) as well as the 2011 SAROEA.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL

This decision is not subject to appeal or objection. Implementation may occur in accordance with PDC referenced above and GDC included in the project file.

CONTACT PERSON

For additional information concerning this decision contact Sam Massman, White River National Forest, Dillon Ranger District Mountain Sports Administrator, at (970) 309-3268 or samuel.massman@usda.gov.

Scott Fitzwilliams
Forest Supervisor
White River National Forest

Date

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