

July 29, 2015

Mr. Tom Quinn
Forest Supervisor
Tahoe National Forest
631 Coyote Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

Ms. Joanne Roubique
District Ranger
Truckee Ranger District
10811 Stockrest Springs Road
Truckee, CA 96161

Project Proposal for the Alpine Meadows | Squaw Valley Base-to-Base Gondola Project

Dear Tom and Joanne,

Thank you for the time to meet with you and your staff on July 1st to discuss the 2015 Alpine Meadows Resort Master Development Plan (MDP) and our plans to connect Alpine Meadows (Alpine) with Squaw Valley Resort (Squaw). I additionally want to thank you for your correspondence (July 1, 2015) providing conditional acceptance of the Alpine MDP.

As discussed during our meeting, please accept this letter as our formal project proposal and request to initiate the reviews and analysis necessary to complete your obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regarding our proposal to construct and operate a future base-to-base gondola which would connect Alpine with Squaw. The following information is provided for your review of our proposal and to facilitate your subsequent evaluation of consistency with the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

Project Elements

Base-to-Base Gondola

Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC, as holder of a special use permit for Alpine Meadows Ski Area and owner /operator of Squaw Valley on private lands, proposes to install, operate and maintain an aerial ropeway system connecting the Squaw and Alpine base areas. As included within the 2015 Alpine MDP, the proposed lift would be configured as an eight-passenger gondola and have a design capacity of approximately 1400 persons per hour – both directions. In total, the lift would be roughly 14,000 feet in length (based on slope length) of which, approximately 3,500 feet (25 percent) would be sited on National Forest System lands (NFSL) including one mid-station and the Alpine base terminal. Please see figures attached.

The Alpine base terminal would be located on NFSL and situated to the southeast of the Alpine base lodge between the Roundhouse Express and the Hot Wheels Chair. Overall ground disturbance for the Alpine base terminal would be approximately one acre. The Squaw base terminal would be located on private lands between the bottom terminals of the KT-22 and Squaw One express lifts. The gondola would be designed with two mid-stations; one atop the Saddle trail ridgeline approximately 1,100 feet southwest of the KT-22 lift top terminal (the north mid-station on private lands), the other would be about 650 feet north-northwest of *The Buttress* in the northern portion of the Alpine special use permit area (the south mid-station on NFSL). The proposed gondola would transport guest at full capacity in both directions providing a ready transportation connection between the two resorts. During the winter season, guest would embark or disembark at both base stations and/or either of the mid-terminals.

While only one quarter of the proposed lift would be located on NFSL, a segment of the lift would be located on private property running parallel to the Granite Chef Wilderness Area. Extensive effort has been put into the design of the lift to ensure that its location would be as far away from the Wilderness boundary as possible and that no portion of the proposed project would directly affect the Wilderness area. All aspects of the currently contemplated design (including but not limited to the number of lift towers, height of same, et al) have been developed in a manner so to minimize visual impacts for all GCWA users – regardless of time of year. In fact, as it relates to primary and secondary view corridors, the towers and line will be nearly invisible from the GCWA and the Five Lakes portion particularly in the May through October timeframes (those timeframes whereby no gondola cabins will occupy the line).

The gondola is not proposed for summer operation and would be designed to allow all of the gondola cabins to be removed from the line and stored during the summer months. This will have the added benefit of reducing the visible infrastructure from all viewing angles. Similarly, it is possible that the cabins may be stored off the line at night during the winter, particularly during storm or wind events.

Moreover, in construction phase, primary design criteria has included absolute minimal impact to the natural resource on NFSL as well as on all segments as located on private land. To that end, the planned south mid-station would be located on NFSL and have an overall disturbance area of approximately 22,000 square feet. Construction access to this station would be primarily via helicopter or by transporting equipment and materials to the site over-the-snow in the spring prior to construction. While permanent access road to the mid-station is not proposed, it may be possible to take tracked vehicles to the site or to utilize small ATVs for limited access. An excavator would be flown to the mid-station site to assist with construction. Additionally, a “spider excavator” would be used to excavate tower foundations along the line.¹ Installation of electric power line to the south mid-station is not planned. Instead, necessary operating current would be supplied via a “line generator” which uses the moving lift to generate the necessary power and an internal combustion engine powered generator to supply the mid-station equipment electricity.

Gazex Avalanche Mitigation System

Installation of the proposed gondola would necessitate changes to Alpine’s current snow safety and avalanche hazard mitigation program. Specifically, eight current artillery targets and many of the current hand shot placements would no longer be practical due to the location of the proposed gondola equipment. There would be risk of direct artillery, and indirect shrapnel, impact to the gondola and lift towers. As a portion of this project proposal, Squaw Valley Ski holdings proposes the installation, operation and maintenance of up to eight Gazex exploders (seven on NFSL) in the vicinity of The Buttress, Bernie’s Chute, Bernie’s Bowl, North Poma Rocks Gully, Pond Slide, and Poma Rocks. Gazex exploders utilize cached propane and oxygen gas to ignite them in a controlled volume explosion within the Gazex tube creating a concussive blast above the snow surface in key avalanche trigger locations. The ignition is controlled remotely. Installation of the Gazex exploders require two concrete footers (roughly 4’ x 4’ x 4’) for anchoring of each (see typical below). The exploder tubes are roughly 15 to 16 feet in length to ensure the opening remains above the snow surface. Operation of the Gazex exploders would involve location of four shelters which house propane and oxygen tanks. From the shelter, a 1-2 inch diameter high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe transmits the combustible gases (pressure fed) to the exploder. Each shelter is approximately seven feet high by seven feet wide/long and is set on a small

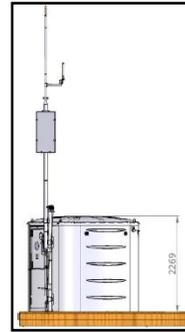
¹ Geotechnical review is presently being undertaken. It is anticipated that several of the lift towers will be secured directly to the extensive rock along the line and would therefore not require foundations or excavations in these locations.

aboveground platform which is anchored for stability. In total, approximately 3,000 feet of 1-2 inch HDPE pipe would be installed aboveground to connect the four shelters with the planned eight exploders. The pipe would be of a dark color and may be sheathed to protect it from rodents, rock fall and snow creep. Alpine would ensure that all combustible gasses are depleted or removed from each shelter at the end of the ski season to diminish wildfire concerns. Resupply would be conducted over-the-snow or via helicopter.

It is important to note, in summary, that these types of avalanche mitigation devices have been deployed successfully across the state of California, many locations in the United States and Canada and in Europe for two decades. This is a proven technology.



Typical Exploder



Typical Shelter

Project Purpose

Squaw Valley Ski Holdings believes there are multiple exciting reasons for this project. In part, it will fulfill a dream held by many long-time locals and community members who have lived near, worked on, and skied both of these adjacent mountains for decades without the ability to connect via skis or a lift.

The proposed gondola will provide an exciting new dimension for guests of both resorts. Lodging guests at Squaw will have lift-served access to Alpine adding tremendous depth and adventure to their skiing day. Additionally, the developed trail network at Squaw is currently 59 percent advanced/expert. The proposed gondola would provide easy access to the intermediate terrain available at Alpine adding variety to the skiing experience for the majority of Squaw guests. This aspect will be of particular benefit during mid-week periods when Squaw tends to be busier with lodging guests and Alpine is less utilized. Similarly, Squaw has fairly limited terrain suitable for beginners and teaching. The planned gondola would allow the ski and snowboard school to access additional suitable terrain at Alpine to provide adventure and variation for their guests. Serving both directions similarly, visitors to Alpine and residents of the valley would have ready access to the terrain and amenities at Squaw.

In a recent survey² conducted at Squaw|Alpine which asked guests how likely they were to utilize the planned gondola to connect and ski between the two resorts on a single day, 53 percent said that they would use it; “all the time” or “most of the time.” In the same survey, 36 percent of respondents said they were likely to begin their day by parking at Squaw to access Alpine during their day. Based on this, and other data, it is estimated that the proposed gondola would reduce daily traffic volumes by approximately 100 vehicles along Highway 89 (between Squaw and Alpine) as well as on Squaw Valley Road.

² LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.

Forest Plan Consistency

The portion of the proposed gondola to be sited on NFSL would be within “Management Area 086 Scott” as identified in the Forest Plan. This prescription area encompasses and guides the management of those portions of the Alpine Meadows Ski Area sited on NFSL operating under special use permit. The Scott Management Area provides emphasis that *“there is an opportunity to further develop mass transit to this area to reduce peak hour traffic congestion.”*³ Further to this point, the Forest Plan states: *“Encourage the ski areas to use mass transit to support further expansion. Encourage the development of overnight facilities at the ski resorts to cut down on peak traffic flows as appropriate.”*⁴

Upon completion of your review, we believe the Tahoe National Forest will find our project proposal to be fully consistent with the direction of the Forest Plan.

Conclusion

As we have discussed, upon review of this letter, and the proposal contained herein, the Forest Service will make a determination as to whether to analyze potential impacts of this project in an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement.

To assist with the ensuing NEPA process, we are prepared to make the services of SE Group, acting as third-party NEPA contractor, available to the Tahoe National Forest. We understand that a Memorandum of Understanding and Cost Recovery Agreement will be necessary prior to initiating the NEPA process.

We look forward to working with you and your staff on this project. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have or if we may provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Andy Wirth
President & CEO
Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC.

³ Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, V-447.

⁴ Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, V-449.