

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Additional project information is available on the Placer County project website (<http://placer.ca.gov/departments/communitydevelopment/envcoordsvcs/eir/squawvalleygondolaproject>) and the Forest Service project website (<http://squawalpinegondola-eis.com/>).

What is the purpose of the project?

Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows each offer a different winter sports and resort amenity experience. Among the two ski areas, Squaw Valley has a higher percentage of advanced/expert terrain and a majority of resort amenities (e.g., accommodations, restaurants, shopping, and entertainment). Alpine Meadows, however, has more beginner and intermediate terrain, but limited amenities. A shuttle bus currently provides roadway access between the ski areas throughout the day. This intra-resort access is often considered inconvenient, as it requires skiers/boarders to exit the mountain, walk with their equipment to the shuttle stop, wait up to 30 minutes for the shuttle, and travel approximately 15 minutes to the shuttle stop at the other ski area. The project is being proposed to enhance the visitor experience at both the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas by providing more direct access to existing ski terrain and/or resort amenities via a gondola lift system providing limited waiting time to board and a 16-minute transit time. The more direct access would also allow the Squaw Valley ski and snowboard schools improved access to the beginner terrain at Alpine Meadows.

What type of lift is proposed? What infrastructure would be required and what are the specifications?

The lift is proposed as an eight-passenger gondola with a design capacity of approximately 1,400 persons per hour in each direction. In total, the lift would be roughly 13,000 feet in length, of which approximately 3,300 feet would be sited on NFS lands. The lift would require two base terminals and two mid-stations. The Alpine Meadows base terminal would be located on NFS lands adjacent to the Alpine Meadows base lodge. The Alpine Meadows mid-station would be located on NFS lands near *The Buttress*. The Squaw Valley mid-station would be located on private lands along the ridgeline southwest of the KT-22 top terminal. The Squaw Valley base terminal would be located on private lands between the bottom terminals of the KT-22 and Squaw One express lifts. Skiers could load and unload at each of these terminals and mid-stations. While the final design is still being developed, it is anticipated that the gondola would require approximately 37 towers, of which approximately 11 would be located on NFS lands. The ride time from one base area to the other would be approximately 16 minutes. The gondola would only operate during the ski season during daylight hours (during the summer, cabins would be stored off the line at the base terminals). No new ski terrain is included in this project, but grooming would be performed for access to each base terminal and mid-station. Tree removal would be required within the lift corridor.

What infrastructure is proposed for avalanche mitigation?

The project includes the installation of eight Gazex exploders (seven on NFS lands) to perform avalanche mitigation in the vicinity of the gondola, particularly the area known as *The Buttress*. Gazex exploders utilize cached propane and oxygen gas to ignite 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. Gazex exploders have been deployed successfully across the state of California, the United States, Canada, and Europe for several decades. There is currently a Gazex exploder in operation at Squaw Valley, visible from the Headwall lift. These devices would replace the use of remote artillery for avalanche mitigation in this area (hand shot explosives could still be used) because such practices could endanger the lift infrastructure. The Gazex exploders could be used at night, although this would be infrequent.

CEQA AND NEPA PROCESS

General Process

What is the environmental review process?

The Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project (aka B2B) is undergoing environmental review by Placer County under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and by the U.S. Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest, under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Placer County will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze the environmental effects of the project. The analyses, documents and decisions are separate and distinct from one another, but the processes as a whole will be highly coordinated between the two reviewing authorities. Additional information about each process is provided below.

What is the expected timeline for analysis of the project? For construction?

A typical environmental review process (including both CEQA and NEPA) could take approximately one to two years from the start of public scoping (i.e. April 2016). The Forest Service Record of Decision is estimated to be completed in summer/fall 2017. The Placer County decision is estimated for spring/summer 2017. Construction could begin in summer 2017 and is anticipated to take approximately 6 months.

When will I have opportunities to comment? Do I need to comment on both CEQA and NEPA processes separately?

This scoping meeting (May 9, 2016) is the **one time** that your public comment can be submitted for consideration by both agencies simultaneously. In order to have your comment formally considered by both agencies, you must either submit your comment today and/or submit to **both** agencies at a future date. The agencies will make concerted efforts, however, to share the general nature of public comments throughout their respective review processes. Instructions for submitting scoping comments are provided.

How to Comment:

Placer County CEQA Process	Forest Service NEPA Process
Verbal comment at May 9, 2016 scoping meeting	Verbal comment at May 9, 2016 scoping meeting
Written comment form at May 9, 2016 scoping meeting	Written comment form at May 9, 2016 scoping meeting
Via Email to: cdraecs@placer.ca.gov	Project Website: http://squawalpinegondola-eis.com/comment/ Via Email to: scoping_comment@squawalpinegondola-eis.com
Shirlee Herrington, Environmental Coordination Services Community Development Resource Agency 3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190 Auburn, CA 95603	Eli Ilano, Forest Supervisor c/o NEPA Contractor P.O. Box 2729 Frisco, CO 80443
NOP Due Date: May 23, 2016	NOI Due Date: May 31, 2016

Comments on the Placer County CEQA process will be accepted during several designated public comment periods; one during scoping (anticipated to end on May 23, 2016), and again following publication of the draft EIR. Additionally, interested parties will have the opportunity to provide input when the Planning Commission considers certification of the EIR and project approval.

Comments on the Forest Service NEPA process will be accepted during several designated public comment periods; one during scoping (anticipated to end on May 31, 2016), and again following publication of the draft EIS. Additionally, interested parties will have the opportunity to object to the draft Record of Decision (per 36 CFR 218).

Because the separate CEQA and NEPA documents will likely be released at different times, the public can expect to receive separate notices related to the availability of documents and opportunities to comment. Each notice should be treated separately and comments provided to the respective agencies per directions in each notice.

CEQA/Placer County Review Process

What is the role of Placer County in analyzing the project?

The project applicant is requesting the following actions and approvals from Placer County for the proposed gondola project:

- Amendment of the Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance;
- Conditional Use Permit; and
- Further analysis will determine if a Parking Variance is required.

The County must complete the CEQA environmental review process prior to considering these actions and approvals. The County has determined that an EIR is the appropriate environmental review document for compliance with CEQA.

NEPA/Forest Service Review Process

What is the role of the Forest Service in analyzing the project?

Alpine Meadows Ski Area operates on National Forest System (NFS) lands under an existing Special Use Permit (SUP) issued by the Tahoe National Forest. Implementation of the proposal would require an amendment to this SUP and would result in activity on NFS lands. Therefore, the Forest Service is obligated to analyze this project under NEPA prior to issuing a decision and has determined that an EIS is the appropriate environmental review document. The Forest Service decision maker will be the Tahoe National Forest Supervisor.

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

General

What will be studied as part of the environmental documents (EIR and EIS)?

While the areas of study will be further informed by this public scoping process, it is anticipated that potential impacts to the following key resources will be analyzed in the environmental documents: Traffic and Parking, Socioeconomics, Recreation, Land Use, Scenery, Air Quality, Climate Change, Cultural Resources, Noise, Utilities, Water Supply, Drainage, Water Quality, Wetlands, Wildlife, Botany and Vegetation, Avalanche Risks, and Geology and Soils. Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts will be assessed.

Transit/Transportation

Will the Squaw Valley to Alpine Meadows shuttle continue to operate?

It is anticipated that the shuttle would continue to operate, although the frequency may change depending upon demand.

Wilderness

Will the gondola be located in the Granite Chief Wilderness area?

A segment of the lift would cross through the congressionally designated boundary of the Granite Chief Wilderness (GCW) that is located on private property. Because it is on private property, the Wilderness Act does not apply. This private property is not managed, maintained, or considered part of the GCW. No project facilities would be located on NFS lands within the GCW. Potential visibility of the project from the GCW and Five Lakes Trail will be analyzed in the EIR and EIS.