COUNTY OF PLACER
Community Development/Resource Agency

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PLANNING

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HEARING DATE: January 9, 2014
ITEM NO.: 2
TIME: 10:20 AM

TO: Placer County Planning Commission

FROM: Environmental Review Committee

DATE: January 2, 2014

SUBJECT: **DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (DEIR) (PCPA20070056)**
PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT
NORTHSTAR MOUNTAIN MASTER PLAN

GENERAL PLAN: Martis Valley Community Plan

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION: Forest 40 - 60 acre minimum; Medium Density Residential – 5-10 Dwelling Units Acre; Tourist/Resort Commercial; Forest 40-160 Acre Minimum; Public/Quasi-Public; Public Facility and; Low Density Residential 1-5 DU/Acre

ZONING: FOR (Forestry); FOR-B-X-160 (Forestry, combining minimum Building Site of 160 Acres); TPZ (Timberland Production); RM-B-X-20-Ds PD-5.8 (Residential Multi-Family combining minimum Building Site of 20 acres, combining Design Sierra, Planned Residential Development 5.8 Units/Acre); RES-Ds PD-5.8 (Resort combining Design Sierra, Planned Residential Development 5.8 Units/Acre); RES-Ds PD 15 (Resort, combining Design Sierra, Planned Development 15 Units/Acre); RS PD 3 (Residential Single-Family, Planned Residential Development 3 Units/Acre) and; RES-UP-Ds (Resort, combining Use Permit, combining Design Sierra)

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBERS: 080-260-002, -008, -010, -013, -015, -016, -017, 091-100-022, -025, -027, 110-030-069, -078, -080, 110-050-017, -040, -041, -052, -053, -054, -055, -057, -063, -069, -071, -072, -073, -075, 110-070-008, -010, 110-081-004, -012, -014, -015, -017, -021, -022, -034, -041, -043, 110-600-017, -024, 110-660-026, -027, 114-020-004 and 114-040-001

STAFF PLANNER: Gerry Haas, Senior Planner

LOCATION: The project site is located on the west side of State Route 267, approximately six miles southeast of the town of Truckee and five miles northwest of the northern shore of Lake Tahoe.

APPLICANT: Northstar California

PROPOSAL: The Environmental Review Committee requests that the Planning Commission accept public comments on the Draft EIR for the Northstar Mountain Master Plan (NMMP). The project will require approval of a Conditional Use Permit, Zoning Text Amendment, Martis Valley Community Plan Amendment and a Rezone to allow for a plan that will guide development of the mountain resort for the next two decades. The project proposes an expansion of the existing ski

terrain and new and improved ski lifts and associated facilities, as well as new winter and summer recreational opportunities for visitors. The project does not propose the development of new residential or lodging units.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:
The Northstar Mountain Master Plan (NMMP) proposes on-mountain resort expansion and improvements including new ski lifts and trails, upgrades to existing ski lifts, widening of existing ski trails; and infrastructure to accommodate these improvements including on-mountain skier service facilities and upgrades, snowmaking facilities, utilities, and maintenance/access roadways. In addition, the NMMP includes other recreation components such as camping and relocation of cross-country ski facilities. The NMMP has been designed utilizing guidelines and management measures established within the Northstar Habitat Management Plan (HMP).

The proposed project includes improvements at various stages of design that will occur over a 20-year period. Improvements anticipated to be constructed in the near term, and for which entitlements are currently being requested, are considered "project-level" and include sufficient detail to be analyzed with specificity. Other improvements are only conceptually designed at this time, with further details to be added in the future. These improvements are considered "program-level." The following is a list of the specific project and program level entitlements being requested:

PROJECT LEVEL ENTITLEMENTS:
Additional ski trails and the modernization of ski trails and snowmaking through widening of runs adjacent to the Vista, Rendezvous, Arrow, Comstock and Backside lifts. Upgrades and replacement of existing lifts is also proposed.

Additional ski lifts designated as C, J, V, W, and Z lifts and associated terrain, snowmaking, fuel tanks and standby engines, and necessary utilities and seasonal spur roads to operate and maintain the lifts. The relocation of cross-country ski trails would be necessary with the construction of the C lift and trails.

Skier service site improvements – The skier service sites would provide for improved food service, restroom facilities, and seating areas offered on-mountain. The project-level sites include improvements to the existing Summit Deck and Grille facility located on the top of Mt. Pluto and a new warming hut with deck located on the Backside (the portion of the project site generally west of the Mt. Pluto summit, east of Sawtooth Ridge, and south of the Lookout Mountain summit), directly adjacent to the Promised Land Express bottom terminal.

Martis Valley Community Plan Amendment to relocate an existing Tourist/Commercial land use designation currently located at the Backside campsite area to the proposed cross-country center/skier services/campsite area at the bottom of the proposed C lift. In addition to exchanging the land use designations, each of the small land use squares (approximately one to two acres in size) would be adjusted southward and uphill from their present locations.

Rezone to align the FOR (Forestry) zone district with the relocated MVCP land use designation squares mentioned above.

Zoning Text Amendment to allow for the development of ski lift facilities and ski runs in the Timberland Production Zone (TPZ) district, except where TPZ land exists within the Tahoe Basin.

PROGRAM LEVEL ENTITLEMENTS:
The Q lift and associated terrain, snowmaking, fuel tank and standby engine, and necessary utilities and seasonal spur roads to operate and maintain the lift.

The Castle Peak Parking Area Gondola – new alignment, fuel tank and standby engine, and necessary utilities and seasonal spur roads to operate and maintain the lift.

Skier access from the top of Lookout Mountain to the W lift bottom terminal.

Three program-level skier service sites:
Two of the skier service sites would provide restrooms and food service facilities. The first program-level skier service site would be located at the top of the C lift, while the second program-level skier service site would be located near the top of the existing Lookout Link and Martis Camp Express lifts.

The third skier service site consists of relocating the existing cross-country ski center at mid-mountain on the south side of Sawmill Reservoir. A campsite is proposed in this same area. The existing Reservoir maintenance road would be improved to provide access to the skier service site and campground, a limited new roadway would be constructed, a small 20-space parking lot would be installed and relocated cross-country ski trails would be necessary to provide connectivity with existing ski trails to the relocated cross-country center lodge.

Remote campsite located in the Backside area to the west of Lookout Mountain that would offer a variety of summer and winter camping opportunities. Access to this site would be by van via the existing 900 road to the 705 road in the summer and by snowcat in the winter.

Additional non-skiing recreation activities that are centered in the mid-mountain area.

PUBLIC NOTICES AND REFERRAL FOR COMMENTS:
Public notices were mailed to property owners of record within 300 feet of the project site and all those individuals or entities specifically requesting notice of this proposed project. Placer County Air Pollution Control District, the North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council (NTRAC) and all other responsible agencies were transmitted copies of the Notice of Availability of the DEIR for review and comment. The DEIR was filed with the State Clearinghouse on November 26, 2013 (State Clearinghouse Number 2012112020). Public comments will be received during the comment period, which extends from November 26, 2013 until January 13, 2014.

BACKGROUND:
CEQA Guidelines Section 15087 (i), Public Review of Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), states: "Public hearings may be conducted on the environmental documents, either in separate proceedings or in conjunction with other proceedings of the public agency. Public hearings are encouraged...as part of the CEQA process."

As part of the County's environmental review process, a public hearing on the Draft Environmental Impact Report is held during the 45-day public review period to encourage public comment and community participation. The public hearing provides surrounding residents and concerned citizens with an opportunity to provide comments on the Draft EIR. The 45-day public review period for this project ends January 13, 2014.

It is important to note that the purpose of this meeting is to receive comments on the Draft EIR. To this end, the County's EIR consultant will be present at this meeting to record comments. This meeting is not an opportunity to discuss the merits of the project, as that discussion will occur at a subsequent hearing on the project entitlements.

All parties who attend the Draft EIR public comment hearing may provide verbal or written comments. Parties submitting comments during the hearing or within the comment period will receive a written "Response to Comments" that is contained in the Final EIR. These same persons will also receive notification of the subsequent hearing to be held on the discretionary permit application.

SCOPE OF THE DRAFT EIR:
The Environmental Review Committee (ERC) prepared and circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for this Draft EIR. The Notice of Preparation provides a preliminary evaluation of possible environmental impacts resulting from development and operation of the proposed project. This Draft EIR presents information concerning the environmental setting of the project area, identifies the project's potential impacts to the environment and recommends mitigation measures to reduce these impacts.

The DEIR found that project impacts to the following environmental resource area would be less than significant without mitigation:

- Hazardous Materials and Hazards (Chapter 15)

The Draft EIR has identified potentially significant project impacts to the environmental resource areas noted below. These project impacts would be less than significant levels with implementation of mitigation measures identified in the Draft EIR. A summary of the impacts and mitigation measures can be found in *Chapter 2, Executive Summary.*

- Land Use and Agriculture (Chapter 4)
- Population, Housing, and Employment (Chapter 5)
- Biological Resources (Chapter 6)
- Cultural Resources (Chapter 7)
- Traffic and Circulation (Chapter 9)
- Noise (Chapter 11)
- Geology, Soils, and Paleontology (Chapter 12)
- Hydrology and Water Quality (Chapter 13)
- Public Services (Chapter 14)
- Greenhouse Gas and Climate Change (Chapter 16)
- Other CEQA Sections – Cumulative, Growth Inducing and Irreversible Impacts (Chapter 18)

The following resource areas would be potentially impacted by the project as proposed and analyzed. These impacts would remain significant and unavoidable even with implementation of recommended mitigation measures.

- Visual Resources (Chapter 8)
- Air Quality (Chapter 10)

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS REQUIRING MITIGATION:
Provided below is an overview of the environmental resource areas that were identified as having the potential to be significantly impacted by the project as well as the mitigation measures developed to reduce those impacts to a less than significant level.

Land Use and Forestry Resources
The project site is located within the Martis Valley Community Plan area, and is surrounded by forested land, ski terrain, ski facilities (lifts, restaurants, warming huts), and existing resort and residential development (Northstar Village, Northstar Highlands, Sawmill Heights, the Northside and

Martis Camp). The Martis Valley Community Plan designates the project site as Forest 40–60 acre minimum, Tourist/Resort Commercial, and Public/Quasi-Public. These land use designations allow for the project and program level improvements proposed as part of the NMMP. In addition, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Plan Area Statement 15 (Northstar) allows recreational facilities in the project area. As shown on Tables 4-1 and 4-2 in the DEIR, the project and program level proposals are consistent with the Placer County General Plan and the Martis Valley Community Plan.

However, expansion of ski trails and other recreation facilities onto lands that are zoned Timberland Production Zone (TPZ) would require a Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA). Activities within the TPZ are limited to the growing and harvesting of timber, though recreational uses are also allowed. In order to accommodate ski facilities in areas of the project site that currently have this land use designation, the project proposes a limited countywide Zoning Text Amendment to allow ski lifts, trails and related facilities in areas currently designated TPZ and located within the boundaries of land owned and/or operated by existing ski resorts as of March 15, 2012.

Several comment letters received during the NOP scoping period expressed concern that TPZ land within the Tahoe Basin could potentially be impacted by the proposed ZTA. Although no TPZ land within the Tahoe Basin is proposed for development by the NMMP, in response to these comments, the language of the ZTA has been modified to exclude any TPZ land that is located within the Lake Tahoe Basin boundary. Following the Zoning Text Amendment, both project and program level components would be allowed within the TPZ and would be consistent with zoning requirements.

The proposed NMMP also includes the relocation of the Tourist/Resort Commercial land use designation from its current location on the west side of Northstar to the proposed relocated cross-country center, skier service site and campsite area at the bottom of the proposed C lift. To achieve this trade of land use designations, a Martis Valley Community Plan Amendment is proposed. The reason for this shift is that the existing Tourist/Resort Commercial land use designation at the proposed Backside campsite is not necessary for the installation of the campsite, and the campsite would be more consistent with the surrounding Forestry land use designation. Conversely, the bottom of the proposed C lift, which is currently designated Forestry, is planned to be developed at the program level with a commercial use (skier service site), which would require a Tourist/Resort Commercial land use designation, and would be located in an area where skier-supportive facilities would not conflict with existing land uses. Figures 3-5 and 3-12 in the DEIR illustrate the proposed relocation and trade of land use designations.

In both locations where the MVCP land use designation trade would occur, the resultant land use designation areas would each be adjusted slightly southward and uphill from where they presently exist. The reason for this shift is to allow for the installation of the campsite and the skier service site to areas in which they are geographically and topographically best suited. It is important to note that the project proposes only the relocation of an existing land use designation and not the creation of a new Tourist/Resort Commercial land use area within the Martis Valley Community Plan. Thus, no impact from this land use designation change would occur.

A rezone is also proposed in order to align two small (1-2 acres each) Forestry zoning squares with the adjusted MVCP land use designation squares mentioned above. The zoning squares exist within large (several hundred acre) TPZ zone district fields. The rezone, therefore, would not result in the loss of TPZ but simply a relocation of another zone district within the TPZ areas. The Forestry zoning squares would, like the land use designation squares, also be adjusted slightly southward and uphill from their present location. Because the rezone does not result in a loss of TPZ land or function, the impact is less than significant.

Population, Housing and Employment

The project will not directly result in population growth as no new residential dwellings or lodging is proposed. However, the project level components would create 65 full-time winter jobs and four full-time year-round jobs and the program level components will create an additional 37 full-time winter jobs and one additional year-round job. While these new jobs will improve the jobs to housing ratio in the Martis Valley, the Placer County General Plan Housing Element (policy C-2), requires new resort projects in the Sierra Nevada to provide 50 percent of the new employee housing demand. Mitigation Measure 5-3 offers four potential methods of meeting this requirement on or off-site. With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts to housing an employment would be less than significant.

Biological Resources

The Northstar Habitat Management Plan (HMP) was completed in 2009 and is included in the DEIR as Appendix 3.3 for the document. As described in Section 3.0, Project Description, the purpose of the HMP is to maintain and enhance the natural resource values of Northstar, while allowing for current and planned future land uses (including the proposed NMMP) in a manner that is compatible with those values. The HMP provides a programmatic framework for the long-term management, conservation and monitoring of biological resources at Northstar. Implementation of the HMP is intended to minimize the biological and water quality impacts of development. It divides Northstar into Resource Management Zones that are associated with the identification of Target Habitats (i.e., old-growth forest and riparian/aquatic) and Focal Species (species associated with Target Habitats).

The Resource Management Zones are identified alphabetically, in ascending order of sensitivity, as Zone A through Zone E, with Zone A (Developed Community) being the most heavily developed and impacted and Zone E (Habitat Conservation Area) being the most pristine and valuable in terms of biological function. For example, most of Zone A is the developed portion of the Northstar Village area and the entire Mid-Mountain terrain, while Zone E occurs around the perimeter of the site, is entirely undeveloped and includes a significant amount of natural, old-growth forest.

Because the NMMP has been guided by the HMP, the development of the project will be characterized by a lower level of biological impacts than might be expected for new or expanded ski resort activities. For example, the most sensitive habitat areas (Zone E) would generally be avoided or only minimally impacted, while the bulk of the widened trails, new lifts and skier service sites are proposed within Zones A through D.

The impact assessment included in Section 6.0, Biological Resources, evaluates both the physical impacts of construction and the operational effects of all components of the NMMP on special-status species and associated habitat. The assessment concludes that, through a series of mitigation measures to ensure protection of species, such as pre-construction surveys, avoidance measures, access and seasonal use restrictions and general compliance with the HMP, impacts to special status plant and animal species will be less than significant. These measures are identified as Mitigation Measures 6-1 through 6-8.

Similarly, potential impacts to sensitive habitats of all types can be reduced through compliance with the HMP with Mitigation Measures 6-9 and 6-10. These two mitigation measures require replacement of impacted forests, riparian habitat and wetlands. In particular, all habitat loss that would occur in HMP Zones C, D or E will be mitigated through the creation of a mitigation enhancement area at a 1:1 ratio of habitat loss to habitat enhancement. The habitat in the mitigation enhancement area will be similar to the habitat where removal or conversion is conducted (i.e., conifer forest, old growth forest, or riparian habitat) and will occur in HMP Zone E in order to provide a larger contiguous habitat area. Compliance with these mitigation measures will be provided with the phased implementation of improvement plans, grading permits, and/or building permits for each

project component that results in habitat loss. The mitigation enhancement area will also be permanently protected from development with a conservation easement or similar mechanism.

Cultural Resources

The DEIR cultural resources analysis relies on the *Cultural Resources Baseline Data for Northstar-at-Tahoe* prepared by KEA Environmental in 2001. This report documents two groups of known resources which include logging roads, cabin sites, railroad grades, log chutes and mining features that are located within the project boundaries and nearby proposed improvements. Although the project components have been designed to avoid all of the known resources, an inadvertent discovery of a previously unknown resource could occur during construction of any of the phases of development. Mitigation Measure 7-1 will ensure that no impacts will occur to known cultural, prehistoric and historic resources through implementation of protocol to protect these resources throughout construction. Mitigation Measures 7-2 and 7-3 address protection of potentially unknown resources that could be discovered during construction and these measures reflect standard county conditioning for inadvertent discoveries. The Cultural Resources chapter concludes that impacts related to the disturbance or destruction of known and unknown cultural or historical/prehistoric resources on the project site would be less than significant with mitigation monitoring and conditioning of the improvements.

Traffic and Circulation

The NMMP proposes an expansion of on-mountain ski facilities, ski terrain, and infrastructure to serve these improvements, as well as new and expanded on-mountain recreational features and attractions. The expansion of the resort is intended to address an existing and growing deficiency in the on-mountain ski capacity and recreational opportunities. It is not intended to create new demand or increase visitor use of the mountain. To this end, no new parking would be constructed aside from the small (20 space) program-level parking lot proposed at the Sawmill Reservoir campsite. Instead, the mountain expansion will provide new terrain for the growing base of destination skiers, those who will reside in new and future residences being constructed at the base of the mountain. Northstar Highlands, Martis Camp, the Northside and other residential development at the base of the mountain have been adding, and will continue to add, destination skiers and snowboarders to the mountain. These projects have been approved in recent years and the traffic impacts and required mitigation for each of these projects has been analyzed in prior environmental documents. These new destination skiers and snowboarders will visit the mountain without the need for additional parking, as the parking is being provided concurrent with each new residential unit.

SUMMARY OF APPROVED LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN NORTHSTAR

Project Name	Approved Residential Development
Northstar Village Expansion	213 dwelling units
Northstar Highlands	1,546 dwelling units
Northside	137 dwelling units
The Retreat Subdivision	18 dwelling units
Martis Camp[1]	726 dwelling units

1. Martis Camp has access to the resort through the Martis Camp Express lift terminal within Martis Camp.

The environmental effects of these development projects have been addressed in the following EIRs:

- Northstar Village EIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2001012081)
- Northstar Highlands EIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2003012086)
- Northside EIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2004112009)

- Retreat Subdivision (State Clearinghouse No. 2003032042)
- Siller Ranch (now known as Martis Camp) EIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2003022122)

These EIRs have contemplated that on-site day skier parking would not be added and that increased utilization at Northstar would come about primarily as a result of an increased bed-base. Associated traffic and parking impacts were evaluated for each of these projects.

The analysis contained in Section 9.0, Traffic and Circulation, relies on the *Northstar Mountain Master Plan Transportation Impact Analysis*, prepared by LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. on September 16, 2013. The analysis assumes that, because no new dwellings, lodging units or parking spaces are proposed, the improvements are intended to accommodate the recreational demands internal to the Northstar California resort area, including the separately approved residential units mentioned above. Although the project is not intended to increase the skier base, improvements to skier facilities would increase the overall employment and therefore the site trip generation during the winter. During the summer, the level of visitor activity would increase, as well as employment. While increased summer traffic can be accommodated by existing unused parking spaces, additional parking for the employees during the winter months would be necessary. As the golf course parking lot (99 spaces) is not used during the winter, that lot can provide sufficient parking for the increase in employees.

The traffic analysis concludes that the total number of trips generated by the project would not significantly impact the area traffic flow, as evidenced by the fact that no single intersection would experience a Level of Service decline as a result of the project improvements. Mitigation measures requiring payment into the Tahoe Capital Improvement Program will fund, among other things, widening of Northstar Drive as well as State Route 267/Northstar Drive intersection improvements.

Payment of the traffic impact fees will reduce both short term and cumulative traffic impacts resulting from the project to a less than significant level.

Noise

The Noise section of the DEIR describes the existing noise environment in the project vicinity, identifies potential impacts related to the construction and operation of the proposed project and provides mitigation measures to reduce these impacts. The analysis of project noise found that noise impacts from new traffic will be less than significant and no mitigation is necessary to achieve that level. The proposed snowmaking and slope grooming activities, as well as the construction of the various improvements would be significant, but can be reduced to a less than significant level through incorporation of mitigation measures identified in the DEIR relative to the placement and operation of these activities. Cumulative impacts associated with an increase in noise levels in the project vicinity were also determined to be less than significant.

Geology and Soils

The Geology and Soils section describes the geologic and soil characteristics of the project site and evaluates the extent to which implementation of the proposed project could be affected by seismic hazards such as ground shaking, liquefaction, and expansive soil characteristics. The analysis is based entirely on the Geotechnical Investigation Report prepared by Marvin E. Davis & Associates on June 10, 2008. This section of the Draft EIR concluded that impacts resulting from avalanche hazard or volcanic eruption would be less than significant. The risks associated with slope instability, soil erosion and/or sedimentation, and risks to people and structures associated with seismic activity, including surface rupture, seismic shaking and subsidence were found to be potentially significant. Compliance with the County's Grading Ordinance and the preparation of a final geotechnical report represent some of the measures that would reduce these impacts to less significant levels.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The Hydrology and Water Quality section relies on a preliminary drainage report, prepared by Auerbach Engineering (2013a), which analyzes the complete range of proposed improvements in terms of their potential impact on drainage (including storm water and snow melt), surface and groundwater quality, groundwater supplies, and the potential alteration of floodplain conditions. In addition to the Auerbach report, the analysis also relies on the Martis Valley Groundwater Management Plan (TDPUD 2013), the Northstar Highlands Draft EIR (2003) and the Northstar-at-Tahoe Mountain Improvements Project Draft EIR (2004). Furthermore, in response to comments received during the NOP comment period by Stoel Rives, LLP., on behalf of the Aspen Grove Owners Association, additional review has been provided by an associated addendum memorandum entitled *NMMP-Drainage Influence on Aspen Grove Condominiums.*

Through the combination of reports and analyses specific to the NMMP, the Hydrology and Water Quality section has found that impacts to all environmental resource areas identified in this section (aside from groundwater supplies) would be potentially significant unless mitigated. The section concludes that appropriate mitigation measures, such as construction-level water quality controls, grading restrictions and Best Management Practices will reduce construction activity impacts to a less than significant level. With respect to the operational impacts, mitigation measures include construction of water quality treatment facilities, preparation, review and approval of final drainage reports and drainage improvements to ensure no increase in flows. In particular, to address concerns expressed by the Aspen Grove Owners Association about potential increases in downstream impacts, the project will be required to provide a four-year storm water monitoring program for the Village Drainage system to ensure no additional flows into the system.

With incorporation of all proposed mitigation measures identified in Section 13.0, potential impacts to hydrology and water quality throughout the entirety of the project site, as well as downhill/downstream locations will be less than significant.

Public Services

This chapter of the Draft EIR describes the public service systems and facilities within the project area, including water; wastewater; solid waste; gas and electricity; fire protection and emergency medical services; law enforcement and; parks and recreation. The analysis of impacts on these systems showed that the project would not significantly impact fire protection, law enforcement, water service and supplies, wastewater treatment, solid waste disposal, and foresees adequate gas and electricity/cable/telephone services. However, the project would result in a potentially significant impact to parks and recreation because the precise alignment of the program-level Castle Peak Parking Gondola is not known, but conceptually proposed. Mitigation for this potential impact requires a final design of the gondola to avoid existing recreational facilities, such as the West Martis Creek Hiking Trail and the Northstar Property Owners Association Recreation Center.

Like all sections in the DEIR, Section 14.0 also describes the NMMP consistency with all applicable goals and policies contained in the Placer County General Plan and the Martis Valley Community Plan. In regard to the provision of recreational facilities that are typically required for new development, the DEIR concludes that the NMMP does not include new development that would increase the demand for recreational facilities because no new residences or lodging would be constructed by the project as proposed. Furthermore, as indicated in the DEIR, several trails already exist at Northstar that are generally consistent with the trail alignments called for in the Martis Valley Community Plan. As referenced in the DEIR appendices, Northstar supports the Martis Valley Trail currently planned for Phase I construction in 2014. Major portions of segments 2, 3 and 4 of this trail are proposed on Northstar property and will require dedication of rights-of-way and associated Northstar cooperation which is provided in a 2014 letter by Andrew Strain, Vail Resorts. Public access to this trail will be provided in the Castle Peak parking lot and the Northstar Village parking lot, both owned and operated by Northstar California.

Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change

Section 16.0, Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change, identifies the project's potential contribution to global climate change and/or conflict with any applicable plan, policy or regulation of an agency adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases. The analysis relies on meeting a threshold of significance adopted by the San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District. The threshold is based on a finding that projects which contribute less than 1,100 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions annually (1,100 MT CO_{2e}/yr) are considered less than significant contributors to climate change globally, and will not conflict with any plans or policies adopted for the purpose of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) that was prepared for the project found that operational emissions would exceed the 1,100 MT threshold unless mitigated.

Section 16.0 includes a menu of mitigation options to reduce this impact. These include reforesting areas that have been disturbed by wildfire or development, relying on the newly planted trees' ability to sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, updating and upgrading on-site equipment to reduce electrical demand, implementation of additional traffic management strategies to reduce vehicle trips to the site and several other options.

In the event the above-mentioned options fail to demonstrate the required reduction in greenhouse gases prior to approval of the improvement plans for each phase of development, the applicant will be required to purchase carbon offset credits from the Climate Action Reserve. These actions, taken collectively, will reduce the project impacts to climate change to a less than significant level.

Cumulative, Growth Inducing and Irreversible Impacts

Section 18.0 analysis of the project's potential to result in cumulatively significant impacts relied on the analyses provided in each of the respective environmental resource sections found elsewhere in the DEIR. The section concludes that, beyond the individual mitigation measures identified to reduce specific impacts in the various resource areas, no additional measures are required to reduce cumulative or growth inducing impacts as these are all found to be less than significant.

SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

The discussions regarding Visual Resources (Chapter 8) and Air Quality (Chapter 10) identified the following as significant and unavoidable impacts:

Visual Resources

This Visual Resources section of the DEIR describes existing visual features and characteristics of the Northstar area, particularly when viewed from public vantage points along the major roadways in the vicinity. The section then identifies all potential changes to the existing features that could result from the project as proposed and assesses the significance level of the changes. For the most part, views of the mountain will be impacted slightly and will not exhibit significant, visible changes. The new ski lifts, runs and other improvements will create additional open areas within the forested landscape and these will be visible but not easily detectable. As a result, the majority of the improvements will result in a less than significant impact to visual resources.

The view of Lookout Mountain and portions of the Sawtooth Ridge from a segment of State Route 89 will experience the greatest level of visual impact from proposed improvements. The project level construction of the W and V Lifts, in conjunction with the program level construction of the Q Lift and its associated terrain, will be visible from the highway and the extent of the impact is demonstrated on Figure 8-4 in the DEIR. This impact is considered significant and unavoidable. Mitigation Measure 8-2 requires design of the Q, W and V Lift ski trails to blend in with natural conditions and utilize tree islands, existing open spaces and varying trail widths to minimize impacts. However, this mitigation measure will fail to reduce the visual resource impact to a less than significant level.

Air Quality

The Air Quality section of the Draft EIR addresses the potential impacts of the proposed project on local and regional air quality by describing existing air quality, construction-related air quality impacts resulting from grading and equipment emissions, direct and indirect emissions associated with the proposed project and the impacts of these emissions on both the local and regional levels.

The analysis concluded that long term operation of the project would not conflict with any applicable air quality plan, nor would it violate an adopted air quality standard. Further, the analysis found no potential for an increase in long-term emissions of criteria air pollutants or impacts to nearby sensitive receptors from odors associated with the project.

Temporary construction emissions associated with the use of heavy equipment and grading would result in a short term increase in several criteria pollutants. However the only pollutant to reach a level of significance would be nitrogen oxides (NOx). NOx emissions are typical for grading activities and, because the construction season is so brief in the mountain regions, the NOx emissions will remain significant even after implementation of several construction-time mitigation measures to reduce the levels of other criteria pollutants. Therefore, the temporary and intermittent increase in NOx, which would occur during the grading phase of several of the project improvements, would be a significant and unavoidable short-term impact.

ALTERNATIVES:

This section presents a summary of the evaluation of alternatives considered for the proposed project, which include the following:

- Alternative 1 – No Project Alternative;
- Alternative 2 – Reduction of Program Components; and
- Alternative 3 – Reduced Expansion of New Ski Terrain

No Project Alternative

CEQA requires the evaluation of the comparative impacts of the "No Project" alternative (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6[e]). Analysis of the No Project Alternative "[...] shall discuss [...] existing conditions [...] as well as what would be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services." (*Id.*, subd. [e][2]) "If the project is other than a land use or regulatory plan, for example a development project on identifiable property, the 'no project' alternative is the circumstance under which the project does not proceed. Here the discussion would compare the environmental effects of the property remaining in the property's existing state versus environmental effects that would occur if the project were approved." (*Id.*, subd. [e][3][B])

Alternative 1 is the "No Project" alternative for the NMMP project. Evaluation of the No Project alternative is required by CEQA. By definition, the No Project alternative assumes that none of the improvements identified in the NMMP would occur on the project site. None of the project impacts would occur with implementation of the No Project alternative. The site is assumed to remain in its existing condition with current ski lifts, trails, and skier services as well as improvements that have been approved prior to this project. Overall, this alternative would result in fewer environmental impacts compared to the project.

Reduction of Project Components

Alternative 2 would consist of the NMMP project as proposed with the following program-level components eliminated:

- The Q lift and associated terrain, snowmaking, fuel tank and standby engine, and necessary utilities and maintenance/access roadways to operate and maintain the lift

- The Castle Peak Parking Lot Transport Gondola
- The campsite located in the Backside area to the west of Lookout Mountain

All other proposed NMMP project- and program-level components would remain. With this alternative, some environmental resource areas would see a reduced level of impacts, and some areas would be comparable to the project.

Reduced Expansion of Ski Terrain
Alternative 3 would consist of the NMMP project as proposed with the following ski terrain expansion features eliminated. This alternative is intended to reduce the extent of ski terrain expansion to areas immediately adjacent to existing ski terrain.

- Additional ski lifts designated as W and Z and associated terrain, snowmaking, fuel tanks and standby engines, skier bridge, and necessary utilities and maintenance/access roadways to operate and maintain the lifts

This alternative, like Alternative 2, would result in a mix of comparable and reduced impact levels to various resource areas. The chart below provides a summary of Section 17.0 in the DEIR and identifies the level of impacts associated with each of the alternatives when compared directly with the project as proposed. The letter "B" signifies that the impacts to the specified environmental resource areas are better, or less significant, than those that would exist for the proposed project. The letter "S" indicates that the impacts resulting from the specified alternative are similar to, or the same as, the impacts associated with the proposed project.

COMPARISON OF PROJECT WITH ALTERNATIVES

Environmental Topic	Proposed Project	Alternative 1 – No Project	Alternative 2 – Reduction of Program Components	Alternative 3 – Reduced Expansion of New Ski Terrain
Land Use and Forestry Resources	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	S	S
Population, Housing, and Employment	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	B	B
Biological Resources	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	B	B
Cultural Resources	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	S	B
Visual Resources	Significant and Unavoidable	B	B	B
Traffic and Circulation	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	B	B
Air Quality	Significant and Unavoidable	B	B	B
Noise	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	S	S
Geology and Soils	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	B	B
Hydrology and Water Quality	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	B	B

Environmental Topic	Proposed Project	Alternative 1 – No Project	Alternative 2 – Reduction of Program Components	Alternative 3 – Reduced Expansion of New Ski Terrain
Public Services	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	B	B
Hazardous Materials and Hazards	Less Than Significant	S	S	S
Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change	Less Than Significant With Mitigation	B	B	B

Environmentally Superior Alternative

To determine the environmentally superior alternative, all alternatives were evaluated with respect to their ability to avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of the proposed project. The significant environmental effects that would be caused by each alternative and significant environmental effects that would be caused by the proposed project were considered. CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2) indicates that an environmentally superior alternative must be identified in an EIR. State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126(d)(2) states that if the environmentally superior alternative is the No Project alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative from among the other alternatives.

Based on the summary of information presented in the above table (Table 17-1 in the DEIR) the environmentally superior alternative to the proposed project is Alternative 1, the No Project alternative. Alternative 1 generally has fewer adverse impacts on the environment than the proposed project. After the No Project alternative (Alternative 1), Alternative 3 (Reduced Expansion of New Ski Terrain) would be the environmentally superior alternative.

TIME FRAMES:

The 45-day public comment period for the Northstar Mountain Master Plan Draft EIR will close at 5:00 PM on January 13, 2014.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Environmental Review Committee recommends the Planning Commission receive public comments on the Draft EIR and direct staff to respond to all written and oral comments in the Final EIR.

Respectfully submitted,

Gerry Haas, Chairperson
Environmental Review Committee

Attachments:

Northstar Mountain Master Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report (under separate cover)

cc: EIR file
Pat Angell, PMC Consulting
Jerusha Hall, Northstar California (Vail Resorts)
Michael Johnson, Agency Director
Paul Thompson, Deputy Planning Director
George Rosasco, Supervising Planner
Karin Schwab, County Counsel
EJ Ivaldi, Environmental Coordinator
Phil Frantz, Engineering and Surveying
Amber Conboy, Public Works
Justin Hansen, Environmental Health Division
Angel Green, Air Pollution Control District
Andy Fisher, Parks Department
Christina Hanson, Facilities Services
Andrew Darrow, Flood Control District
North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council
NOP commenters