

1 INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 2

This final environmental impact statement/environmental impact report (EIS/EIR) has been prepared by the U.S. Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest (Forest Service) and Placer County (County) in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Forest Service is the lead agency under NEPA and the County is the lead agency under CEQA. This Final EIS/EIR has been prepared to respond to comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR for the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project, which includes a proposed gondola connecting Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, with two mid-stations and multiple towers along the alignment in Placer County, California.

The Forest Service and the County considered the comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR. The comments received did not warrant substantive changes in the Draft EIS/EIR. Therefore, the Final EIS/EIR consists of the entire Draft EIS/EIR, as revised (Volume 1), and the comments and responses to comments (Volume 2).

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE FINAL EIS/EIR

Both NEPA and CEQA require a lead agency that has completed a Draft EIS or EIR to consult with and obtain comments from public agencies that have legal jurisdiction with respect to the proposed action, and to provide the general public with opportunities to comment on the Draft EIS or EIR. This Final EIS/EIR has been prepared to respond to comments received from agencies and the public on the Draft EIS/EIR for the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project.

1.2 NEPA AND CEQA REQUIREMENTS FOR RESPONDING TO COMMENTS

NEPA requires that the Final EIS include and respond to all substantive comments received on the Draft EIS (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1503.4). Lead agency responses may include the need to:

- ▲ modify alternatives including the proposed action;
- ▲ develop and evaluate alternatives not previously given serious consideration by the agency;
- ▲ supplement, improve, or modify its analyses;
- ▲ make factual corrections; or
- ▲ explain why the comments do not warrant further agency response, citing the sources, authorities, or reasons that support the agency's position and, if appropriate, indicate those circumstances that would trigger agency reappraisal or further response.

The State CEQA Guidelines state that written responses to comments received on the Draft EIR must describe the disposition of significant environmental issues. In particular, the major environmental issues raised when the lead agency's position is at variance with recommendation and objections raised in the comments must be addressed. (See State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15088, 15132.)

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME OF THE FINAL EIS/EIR

This Volume of the Final EIS/EIR is organized as follows:

Chapter 1, “Introduction,” provides an introduction and overview of the Final EIS/EIR, describes the background and organization of the Final EIS/EIR, and lists all parties who submitted comments on the Draft EIS/EIR during the public review period. Additionally, this chapter presents minor modifications to and clarifications of the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project as a result of ongoing planning and design refinements since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR; and summarizes revisions to the Draft EIS/EIR text made in response to comments, or to amplify, clarify or make minor modifications or corrections. Finally, this chapter concludes with a set of master responses that were prepared to comprehensively respond to multiple comments that raised similar issues. A reference to the master response is provided, where relevant, in responses to individual comments.

Chapter 2, “Response to Comments on the Draft EIS/EIR,” contains copies of the comment letters on the Draft EIS/EIR received during the public review period, a copy of the transcript from the May 24 public hearing, and responses to the comments. Eight comment letters were received within two weeks of the close of the public review period are also included and responses to those letters are provided. An additional letter was received in December 2018, more than 6 months after the end of the comment period, and is not responded to in this Final EIS/EIR.

Chapter 3, “References,” lists the documents used to support the comment responses.

1.4 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

1.4.1 Scoping

The Forest Service and Placer County used several methods to solicit input on the Draft EIS/EIR, including distribution of a notice of preparation (NOP) on April 22, 2016, and publication of a notice of intent in the *Federal Register* on April 29, 2016, to inform agencies and the general public that an EIS/EIR was being prepared and to invite comments on the scope and content of the document. The Forest Service distributed a scoping package to interested individuals and organizations. Placer County prepared the CEQA Initial Study Checklist for the project, which was posted on the County’s website and mailed to individuals and organizations on the mailing list. Two joint Forest Service and Placer County public scoping meetings were held on May 9, 2016 at the Resort at Squaw Creek. Following the close of the public scoping period, the Forest Service and Placer County decided to combine the NEPA/CEQA processes and produce a joint EIS/EIR. The Forest Service and Placer County announced this change through a press release and revised NOP published on September 2, 2016, and Placer County accepted additional scoping comments until October 3, 2016.

1.4.2 Public Review of the Draft EIS/EIR

On April 27, 2018, the Draft EIS/EIR was released for a 45-day public review and comment period that ended on June 11, 2018. The Draft EIS/EIR was submitted to the State Clearinghouse; posted on the project website and the County’s website (Initially posted at:

<https://www.placer.ca.gov/departments/communitydevelopment/envcoordsvcs/eir/squawvalleygondolaproject>; currently available at: <https://www.placer.ca.gov/2680/Squaw-Valley-Alpine-Meadows-Base-to-Base>); and was made available at the Tahoe City and Truckee libraries, Placer County offices in Auburn and Tahoe City, and the Tahoe National Forest offices in Nevada City and Truckee. In addition, a notice of availability (NOA) of the Draft EIS/EIR was published in the *Federal Register* on April 27, 2018. Finally, notice of the

Draft EIS/EIR was published in *The Tahoe World* (part of *The Sierra Sun*) on April 27, 2018 and *The Union* on April 28, 2018; and distributed directly to public agencies (including potential responsible and trustee agencies), interested parties, and organizations.

A public hearing was held on May 24, 2018, to receive input from agencies and the public on the Draft EIS/EIR. The hearing was held during the regular meeting of the Placer County Planning Commission at 10 a.m. The hearing was recorded and a transcript was prepared. A Forest Service open house was conducted on May 22, 2018 at the Truckee Ranger District Office in Truckee, CA.

1.5 LIST OF COMMENTERS

Table 1-1 indicates the author of each comment letter received on the Draft EIS/EIR, the numerical designation for the comment letter, and the date of the comment letter. In summary, one letter was received from a federal agency, two letters were received from state agencies, 13 letters were received from organizations, 174 letters were received from individuals, various commenters provided verbal comments on the public hearing, and eight letters were received after the close of the public comment period, but within two weeks after the close. An additional letter was received in December 2018, more than 6 months after the end of the comment period, and is not responded to in this Final EIS/EIR.

Commenter	Letter #	Date of Comment
Federal Agencies		
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region IX Kathleen Martyn Goforth, Manager, Environmental Review Section (ENF-4-2)	0109	6/8/2018
State Agencies		
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board Liz van Diepen, North Basin Regulatory Unit	0185	6/11/2018
California Department of Transportation, District 3 Kevin Yount, Branch Chief	0200	5/21/2018
Organizations		
Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows (SVAM) Adrienne L. Graham, Environmental and Planning Consultant	0064	6/8/2018
Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows (SVAM) Michael J.P. Hazel and Andrew L. Spielman of WilmerHale	0071	6/11/2018
Granite Chief Protection League Daniel D. Heagerty, Director	0072	6/11/2018
Center for Biological Diversity Jennifer L. Loda, Staff Attorney, and Holly Ingram, Law Clerk	0097	6/11/2018
North Fork Association Richard Mackey, DVM, President	0104	6/11/2018
Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) Plan Review Team	0127	6/11/2018
Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) Plan Review Team	0135	5/7/2018
Friends of the West Shore Judith Tornese, President, Laurel Ames, Conservation Chair, and Jennifer Quashnick, Conservation Consultant	0144	6/9/2018

Table 1-1 List of Commenters

Commenter	Letter #	Date of Comment
Sierra Watch Amy J. Bricker and Laurel L. Impett, AICP of Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP	0166	6/8/2018
Sierra Watch Attachment A Michael D. White, PhD	0167	6/6/2018
Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows (SVAM)	0175	Not dated
Squaw Valley Lodge Owners Association David Walters, President, and Steven Arns, B2B Committee Chair	0176	6/5/2018
Pacific Crest Trail Association Connor Swift, Northern Sierra Regional Representative	0179	6/7/2018
Truckee River Watershed Council Lisa Wallace, Executive Director, and Matt Freitas, Program Manager	0189	6/1/2018
Individuals		
Anderson, Nick	0001	5/22/2018
Anon, Anon	0002	5/20/2018
Anon, Anon	0003	6/11/2018
Asher, Tyler	0004	5/21/2018
Ayers, Michael	0005	5/18/2018
Bakker, Elena	0006	5/22/2018
Baldassare, Daniel	0007	6/11/2018
Ball, Jeff	0008	4/30/2018
Ball, Jeff	0009	6/10/2018
Baumgartner, Walter F.	0011	5/18/2018
Bemus, Steve	0012	6/4/2018
Bennett, Mary	0013	6/5/2018
Benson, Derik	0014	5/18/2018
Benton, Steven	0015	6/5/2018
Beverstein, Roxanne	0016	5/22/2018
Blakeney, Marc	0017	6/11/2018
Borhani, Maya Tracy	0018	6/10/2018
Borhani-Bakker, Petra	0019	5/22/2018
Bourke, David	0020	6/3/2018
Bridges, Steve	0021	6/5/2018
Bruner, Judy	0022	6/10/2018
Bryce Thayer, Jonathan	0023	5/18/2018
Buffington, Laurie	0024	6/11/2018
Caldwell, Troy	0025	Not dated
Carter, Tom	0026	6/10/2018
Casaudoumecq, John	0027	6/6/2018
Casini, Madona	0028	6/11/2018
Chador, Sharla	0029	6/5/2018
Chadwick, Mitchell	0030	6/11/2018

Table 1-1 List of Commenters

Commenter	Letter #	Date of Comment
Chatten-Brown, Justin	0031	5/18/2018
Cornew, Dan	0033	5/21/2018
Crawford, Ken	0034	5/22/2018
Cutrano, Chance	0035	6/11/2018
Davis, Warren	0036	5/18/2018
Doherty, David	0037	5/15/2018
Dombroski, Caryn	0038	6/5/2018
Downs, Bill	0039	5/12/2018
Downs, Bill	0040	6/9/2018
Downs, William	0041	5/12/2018
Duggan, Theresa May	0042	6/7/2018
Durham, Jr., Robert J.	0043	6/7/2018
Egger, Chris	0044	6/11/2018
Ehring, Jill	0045	5/23/2018
Elliott, Bryan	0046	6/11/2018
Elrod, Nancy	0047	6/7/2018
Ephraim, Gary	0048	5/18/2018
Evan	0049	5/20/2018
Farrow, Roy	0050	6/5/2018
Fisher, Mark	0051	6/11/2018
Flores, Victor A.	0052	6/7/2018
Fulda, Don	0053	6/10/2018
Gaffney, M.D., Robb	0054	6/10/2018
Gaffney, Scott	0055	5/22/2018
Gallant	0056	6/2/2018
Ganong, Travis	0057	5/13/2018
Gardner, Mike	0058	5/21/2018
Gellerman, Eric	0059	5/22/2018
Goldman Schuyler, Kathryn	0061	5/21/2018
Gonsalves, Bill	0062	5/18/2018
Graf, Susan	0063	6/8/2018
Green, Kate	0066	4/29/2018
Grossman, Adam	0067	6/5/2018
Hamilton, Craig	0068	5/23/2018
Hamilton, Susan	0069	5/23/2018
Hanshew, Jon	0070	5/21/2018
Hendricks, John	0073	5/23/2018
Heneveld, Ed	0074	6/10/2018
Heykes, James	0075	5/24/2018
Hinkel, Chris	0076	5/21/2018

Table 1-1 List of Commenters

Commenter	Letter #	Date of Comment
Hirsbrunner, Caspar and Ursula	0077	Not dated
Hover-Smoot, Katy	0079	6/11/2018
Hudson, Dan	0080	5/11/2018
Irby, Sereena	0081	6/11/2018
Irby, Sydne	0082	6/11/2018
Jager, Bill	0083	5/4/2018
John, John	0084	5/6/2018
Johnson, Carrie	0085	5/26/2018
Keniston, Ann	0086	6/11/2018
Kennedy, Derek	0087	5/18/2018
Kennerley, Gary	0088	5/22/2018
Kessler, Shawn	0089	5/18/2018
Knight, Stan	0090	5/18/2018
Lane, Tom	0091	6/1/2018
Larsen, Nils	0092	6/11/2018
Larsen, Sondrea	0093	6/11/2018
Larson, Mitchell	0094	6/1/2018
Lee, Dennis	0095	5/22/2018
Levin, Barbara	0096	5/21/2018
Lowis, Ross	0098	Not dated
Lund, June	0099	5/1/2018
Lura, Gavin	0100	6/11/2018
Lyons, John	0101	6/11/2018
Mancusuo, Ciro	0105	5/30/2018
Maner, Doug	0106	5/23/2018
Manzi, Edward	0107	5/23/2018
Manzi, Edward	0108	5/3/2018
Mazerall, Carol	0110	6/10/2018
McCarty, Cheri A	0112	5/2/2018
Menlove Chador, Sharla	0113	6/6/2018
Meyer, Haley	0114	5/21/2018
Miles, Roger D.	0115	5/10/2018
Mirczak, Jareb	0116	6/7/2018
Mixon York, Christine	0117	Not dated
Mounier, Jaques	0118	5/26/2018
Murray, Jill	0119	5/28/2018
Murray, Peter	0120	5/28/2018
Nashner, Michael	0121	6/11/2018
Nelson, Walter	0122	5/18/2018
Nogueeira, Francisco	0123	5/18/2018

Table 1-1 List of Commenters

Commenter	Letter #	Date of Comment
Ogden, Barb	0124	6/8/2018
Owen, Graham	0125	5/18/2018
P, Carolyn	0126	5/12/2018
Padla, Dennis	0128	5/18/2018
Parrott, Greg	0129	6/11/2018
Patrick, Scott	0130	6/5/2018
Pavese, Robert	0131	5/19/2018
Pearson, Lara	0132	6/11/2018
Peltier, Michelle	0133	6/8/2018
Peters, Evan	0134	5/20/2018
Pilcher, Eric	0136	6/11/2018
Pitbladdo, Karen	0137	5/10/2018
Pollock, Carol	0140	5/22/2018
Pollock, Carol	0141	5/22/2018
Poulsen, Eric	0142	6/11/2018
Quinn, Pamela	0145	6/11/2018
Reams, Russell	0146	6/11/2018
Reams, Rusty	0147	6/11/2018
Reed, Susan	0148	6/7/2018
Reed, Susan A.	0149	6/7/2018
Riddle, Roxanne	0150	5/22/2018
Roghers, Helga	0151	6/10/2018
Rules, Driver	0152	5/26/2018
Russell, Bill	0153	5/19/2018
Samowitz, MD, Harvey	0155	5/23/2018
Sansone, Glenna	0156	6/8/2018
Schmid Maybach, Catherine	0157	6/8/2018
Schmid-Maybach, Ulrich	0158	6/1/2018
Schneider, Dana	0159	6/11/2018
Schneider, David	0160	6/11/2018
Scoglio, Ron	0161	5/25/2018
Self, Michael	0162	5/18/2018
Seybold, Bruce	0163	6/10/2018
Shannon, Dane	0164	6/11/2018
Shellito, Jeff	0165	6/10/2018
Smith, Evan	0168	5/30/2018
Smith, Jimmy	0169	6/3/2018
Smith, Joe	0170	6/1/2018
Speizer 1, Linda	0171	6/5/2018
Speizer 2, Linda	0172	6/5/2018

Table 1-1 List of Commenters

Commenter	Letter #	Date of Comment
Spent, James	0173	5/22/2018
Spent, Jim	0174	5/24/2018
Stach, Greg	0177	6/11/2018
Strauss, Aurthur	0178	6/5/2018
Tetrault, Robert	0180	6/11/2018
Topping, Phillip	0181	5/19/2018
Tornese, Judith	0182	6/8/2018
Tuscany, Roy	0183	Not dated
Tweddale, Jeff	0184	5/23/2018
Vanpernis, Jessica	0186	5/18/2018
Vastine, Tricia	0187	5/30/2018
Vaupen, Scott	0188	5/31/2018
Waller, Ellie	0190	5/24/2018
Walters, David	0191	5/10/2018
Wertheim, Rick	0192	5/18/2018
Wetheim, Andy	0193	5/22/2018
Wexler, Ryan	0194	Not dated
Wilcox, John	0195	5/10/2018
Willette, Carolyn	0196	6/5/2018
Willis, Marilyn	0197	5/25/2018
Wirth, Russell	0198	5/18/2018
Yoder, Robert	0199	5/4/2018
Ziegler, David	0201	Not dated
Ziegler 2, David	0202	6/11/2018
Public Hearing on the Draft EIS/EIR		
Various commenters at the Placer County Planning Commission Hearing	0138	5/24/2018
Late Comments		
Ballard, Annie	0010	6/12/18
Chillemi, Megan	0032	6/22/18
Gentry, Judi	0060	6/19/18
Grassi, Sally	0065	6/12/18
Hodges, Mitzi	0078	6/12/18
Mackenstadt, Barbara	0102	6/12/18
Poulsen, Glen	0143	6/13/18
Sajdak, Jim	0154	6/13/18

Chapter 2 contains the comment letters received during the public review period for the Draft EIS/EIR (as well as those received within two weeks of the close of the public review period), including transcribed comments received during the May 24, 2018 public hearing, and the responses to those comments. In conformance with NEPA and CEQA, written responses were prepared addressing comments on environmental issues received from reviewers of the Draft EIS/EIR.

The comment letters and verbal comments made at the public hearing are reproduced in their entirety and are shown on the left-hand side of the page. Responses are shown on the right-hand side of the page. Where a commenter has provided multiple comments, each comment is indicated by a line bracket and an identifying number in the margin of the comment letter.

1.6 PROJECT MODIFICATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

This section presents minor modifications to and clarifications of the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project as a result of ongoing planning and design refinements since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR. The information contained within this section clarifies and expands on information in the Draft EIS/EIR and does not constitute “significant new information” requiring recirculation.

1.6.1 Gazex Avalanche Mitigation System – Removal from Project

Since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, the originally proposed Gazex avalanche mitigation has been removed from all action alternatives for this project. Instead, the applicant proposes a continuation of the existing avalanche mitigation system already in use in the project vicinity, which includes the use of hand-charges, Avalaunchers, and Gazex facilities at Squaw Valley; and the use of hand-charges, Avalaunchers, Gazex facilities, and 105-millimeter (mm) howitzer artillery at Alpine Meadows. Each of these avalanche hazard mitigation methods is described in Section 4.6, “Public Safety,” of the Draft EIS/EIR. For further discussion regarding why Gazex was removed from the project, see Section 1.8, “Master Responses,” below.

The primary environmental resources affected by this project change are public safety and noise.

While the removal of Gazex from the project would not introduce any new public safety concerns, this change would result in the alteration of NEPA effects conclusions provided for Impact 4.6-1 (Health and Safety) and 4.6-2 (Operations Efficiency) for all action alternatives. These changes are summarized below:

- ▲ NEPA effects conclusions provided for Impact 4.6-1 (Health and Safety) were changed from “minorly beneficial” to “no effect” for all action alternatives. These changes were made because the Gazex facilities would have allowed for avalanche hazard mitigation work to be performed remotely, thereby reducing the risk to snow safety personnel associated with the use of hand-charges; however, snow safety personnel at Alpine Meadows remain more than capable of effectively conducting avalanche hazard mitigation with existing technologies and training, as has historically occurred at the two resorts. The CEQA conclusions were not changed: this impact would be less than significant for all action alternatives.
- ▲ NEPA effects conclusions provided for Impact 4.6-2 (Operations Efficiency) were changed from “minorly beneficial” under Alternative 2 and “beneficial” under Alternatives 3 and 4 to “minorly adverse” for all action alternatives. These changes were made because the Gazex facilities would have allowed for remote avalanche hazard mitigation work to be performed during the night and inclement weather cycles, which may have resulted in the more timely, consistent, and cost-effective opening of avalanche prone terrain at Alpine Meadows. Without Gazex, however, Alpine Meadows snow safety personnel would lose certain 105-mm howitzer shot placements as options for avalanche hazard mitigation with *the Buttress* area, because fragmentation resulting from the impact of artillery shots could potentially damage proposed gondola infrastructure, creating potential health and safety and operational issues. To ensure that these potential issues would not arise, implementation of any of the action alternatives would require the elimination of these 105-mm howitzer shot placements as options for avalanche hazard mitigation within *the Buttress* area (7 shot placements would be eliminated under Alternative 2; 2 shot placements would be eliminated under both Alternatives 3 and 4). Even with the elimination of these 105-mm howitzer shot placements, avalanche hazard mitigation would still be effectively

accomplished with existing technologies. No CEQA conclusions were made for this impact as it is specific to a NEPA analytical indicator and is not responsive to a CEQA threshold of significance.

The removal of Gazex would not appreciably change the generation of noise or vibration during project construction (Impacts 4.9-1 and 4.9-2). Operational noise would be reduced because noise would not be generated by the Gazex exploders; however, operational noise would still be generated from the proposed gondola and associated equipment (Impact 4.9-3) and transportation noise sources (Impact 4.9-4). Overall, the noise impacts and mitigation needs (including Resource Protection Measures [RPMs]) identified for the project as a whole in the Draft EIS/EIR remain essentially the same.

Because this Final EIS/EIR did not result in the identification of any new significant environmental impacts or a substantial increase in the severity of an environmental impact, this Final EIS/EIR does not contain “significant new information,” and recirculation of the Draft EIS/EIR is not required prior to approval.

1.6.2 Proposed Red Dog Terminal Location

This section clarifies the location of the existing Red Dog lift terminal and the proposed Squaw Valley base terminal under Alternative 4.

EXISTING TERMINAL LOCATION

Chapter 2, “Description of Alternatives,” of the Draft EIS/EIR (see page 2-27) describes that under Alternative 4, the proposed Squaw Valley base terminal and the existing Red Dog lift terminal would be located at the same site, which could require an alteration:

...The Squaw Valley base terminal would be located in a slightly different location than the other alternatives, on or adjacent to the existing Funitel terminal (see Exhibit 2-17). The alignment of the existing Red Dog lift terminal may need to be altered to accommodate the Squaw Valley base terminal...

This text has been modified in the Final EIS/EIR to better reflect the Alternative 4 proposal and now reads:

...Under Alternative 4, the Squaw Valley base terminal would be located in a slightly different location than under the other action alternatives (see Exhibit 2-15). The Red Dog lift terminal and the Squaw Valley base terminal would be co-located in the same disturbance area as shown in Exhibit 2-15....

The applicant has confirmed that this co-location can be achieved within the “Squaw Valley Base Terminal Disturbance Area” shown on Draft EIS/EIR Exhibit 2-17 (now numbered Exhibit 2-15 in the Final EIS/EIR) and used in the Draft EIS/EIR analysis. Thus, the disturbance area described and analyzed in the Draft EIS/EIR is correct, and no expansion or modification of this area is needed.

While the co-location of these terminals has not yet been designed, the applicant has reviewed the information that is currently available and has confirmed that whether the terminals are “stacked” or installed side-by-side, co-location is technically feasible and within the identified disturbance area.

PROPOSED MODIFICATION

The Draft EIS/EIR identifies the Squaw Valley Red Dog Lift Replacement in the list of cumulative effects projects (see Table 3-3 and Exhibit 3-1). This project would include replacing the existing Red Dog triple chairlift with a high-speed, detachable, 6-person chairlift. The project was approved in 2013, but was on hold (as of Draft EIS/EIR publication).

Since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, the applicant has submitted an application to the County for a modification to the conditional use permit that proposes to relocate the bottom terminal and tower alignment to the east. This is a separate permit/approval that may be put before, and decided upon, by the Placer County Planning Commission following release of the Final EIS/EIR.

1.7 SUMMARY OF REVISIONS TO THE DRAFT EIS/EIR

This section summarizes the revisions to the Draft EIS/EIR text made in response to comments, or to amplify, clarify or make minor modifications or corrections. The information contained within this section clarifies and expands on information in the Draft EIS/EIR and does not constitute “significant new information” requiring recirculation.

Changes made to the Final EIS/EIR after publication of the Draft EIS/EIR include but are not limited to:

- ▲ the removal of Proposed Action text identifying and explaining the Gazex facilities component of the project, as well as any mention of new Gazex facilities throughout the resource analysis sections;
- ▲ the modification of effects analysis that was initially conducted with the assumption that Gazex facilities would be included in the proposal;
- ▲ clarification and enhancement of several RPMs reflecting input provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the Tahoe National Forest’s Endangered Species Act consultation for Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog;
- ▲ various edits made in response to detailed public comments submitted during the Draft EIS/EIR public comment period; and
- ▲ other, minor edits related to syntax or grammatical errors throughout the document.

Identifying revisions with vertical lines in the margin was not possible for exhibits, so this paragraph summarizes the revisions made to the exhibits. The primary reason for revising exhibits was to remove reference to Gazex exploders and their related features. Exhibit 2-7, “Typical Gazex Exploder,” and Exhibit 2-8, “Typical Gazex Shelter,” were removed, and the remaining exhibits in Chapter 2 were renumbered accordingly. The following exhibits were retained, but elements and text referring to Gazex exploders and related features were removed (numbering reflects removal of Exhibits 2-7 and 2-8):

- ▲ Exhibit 1-2, “Gondola Alignments Associated with Each Alternative”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-1, “Topographic Map of Gondola Alignment Associated with Each Action Alternative”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-2, “Overview of Gondola Alignment and Construction Access Route under Alternative 2”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-3, “Close-up of Alpine Meadows Base Terminal under Alternative 2, along with Tower Zones A and B”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-4, “Close-up of Alpine Meadows Mid-Station under Alternative 2, along with Tower Zones B and C”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-7, “Overview of Gondola Alignment and Construction Access Route under Alternative 3”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-8, “Close-up of Alpine Meadows Base Terminal under Alternative 3”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-11, “Overview of Gondola Alignment and Construction Access Route under Alternative 4”
- ▲ Exhibit 2-12, “Close-up of Alpine Meadows Base Terminal under Alternative 4”

- ▲ Exhibit 3-1, “Cumulative Projects”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.2-3, “Viewpoint Locations”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.3-1, “Tower Construction Overview”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.4-1, “Forest Plan Management Areas in the Project Area, including Management Area 086 – Scott (Scott Management Area)”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.4-2, “Existing Local Land Use Designations”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.4-3, “Existing Local Zoning Designations”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.9-1, “Existing Noise and Vibration Sensitive Land Uses and Proposed Project Components”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.14-1, “Aquatic Resources in the Study Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.14-2, “Sierra Nevada Yellow-Legged Frog Critical Habitat in the Study Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.15-1, “Wetland Habitats”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.16-1, “Topography of Project Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.16-3, “Geology of Project Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.16-4, “Soils of Project Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.17-2, “Hydrology Features”

1.8 MASTER RESPONSES

Several comments raised similar issues. Rather than responding individually, a master response has been developed to address the comments comprehensively. A reference to the master response is provided, where relevant, in responses to the individual comment.

1.8.1 Gazex Removal

The Gazex avalanche mitigation system was included as part of all action alternatives as presented in the Draft EIS/EIR. However, since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, the Gazex avalanche mitigation system has been removed as a component of any of the action alternatives for this project. Specifically, Squaw Valley Ski Holdings LLC (SVSH) has withdrawn their proposal to install/operate Gazex infrastructure for avalanche/snow safety mitigation at Alpine Meadows. At this time, the installation of the proposed gondola connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base areas is the highest priority for SVSH. The analysis provided in the Final EIS/EIR reflects this change in the proposal.

Existing avalanche/snow safety mitigation techniques, utilized by snow safety personnel at Alpine Meadows, including use of hand-charges, avalaunchers, protected ski cutting, and the 105-mm Howitzer, provide effective and efficient means for reducing avalanche risk at the resort to a level that is effective and efficient. Omission of the originally proposed Gazex facilities from the overall project proposal will not create operational inefficiencies for snow safety personnel at Alpine Meadows.

Implementation of the action alternatives will result in the need to modify the use of the existing 105-mm Howitzer because shell detonations at some of the existing shot placement sites could risk damage to the gondola. For Alternative 2, there are seven existing 105-mm howitzer shot placements at Alpine Meadows where fragmentation resulting from the impact of artillery shots would potentially damage proposed gondola infrastructure. To ensure that no damage from fragmentation would occur, implementation of Alternative 2 would require the removal of these seven existing 105-mm howitzer shot placements as options for avalanche mitigation at Alpine Meadows. With these seven 105-mm howitzer shot placements removed, and Gazex not included as part of the project, avalanche mitigation under Alternative 2 would be accomplished at these locations through the use of hand charges and avalaunchers, which are authorized under the current Ski Area Permit and the Alpine Meadows Operating Plan.

For Alternatives 3 and 4, two existing 105-mm howitzer shot placements (the same two for both alternatives) could result in artillery shot fragmentation that could potentially damage proposed gondola infrastructure. Like for Alternative 2, implementation of Alternative 3 or 4 would require the removal of these two existing 105-mm howitzer shot placements as options for avalanche mitigation at Alpine Meadows. With these two 105-mm howitzer shot placements removed, and Gazex not included as part of the project, avalanche mitigation under Alternatives 3 and 4 would be accomplished at these locations through the use of hand charges and avalaunchers, which are authorized under the current Ski Area Permit and the Alpine Meadows Operating Plan.

1.8.2 Improvements to Existing Shuttle System Alternative

Several comments express a preference for improvements to the existing Squaw to Alpine intra-resort shuttle system rather than construction of a gondola. Section 2.3.2.1, “Improvements to Existing Shuttle System Alternative,” in the Draft EIS/EIR evaluates a potential alternative to the project that would involve improving the existing shuttle system and expanding it to provide enhanced access between the ski resorts. Comments also request further analysis of this alternative, or question the conclusions in the EIS/EIR related to this alternative.

The Improvements to the Existing Shuttle System Alternative is evaluated in Section 2.3.2.1 of the Draft EIS/EIR. Under this alternative, the fleet of shuttle vehicles would be expanded (types, sizes, fuel sources, user amenities) and the timing, location, and scheduling of the route could potentially be changed and shortened. This alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis in the EIS/EIR because it would not adequately meet the purpose and need. As described in Section 1.3.1, “Forest Service Purpose and Need,” project need is based on improving connectivity between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. Based on the low existing shuttle system use, continuing to rely on a shuttle system would not achieve the desired improvements in connectivity. A review of intra-resort shuttle ridership data for the 2011/2012 to 2016/2017 winter seasons indicates that, on average, 41,675 persons rode the shuttle one-way each season. When accounting for roundtrip ridership, the average over these five seasons is approximately 21,880 guests per season. This represents about 2.7 percent of total downhill snowsports visits during a given season at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, combined. As identified on page 4.17-14 of the Draft EIS/EIR, the shuttle operates daily during the winter, every 20 minutes, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. This provides 24 round trip shuttle trips a day, or approximately 720 trips a month and 2,880 trips over four months (an abbreviated winter season). These conservative assumptions result in an average of approximately 7.6 passengers per trip, well below the 20+ passenger capacity of the shuttle busses; indicating that current shuttle capacity far exceeds demand.

This particularly low shuttle usage is an indicator that guests do not presently find it convenient and/or effective to shuttle between the two resorts (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018). Similar patterns of resort shuttle use are observed throughout the ski industry. Guests do not perceive time spent riding a shuttle bus to be part of their recreation experience, whereas, time spent on a lift, even if the lift is simply a transit conveyance, is perceived to be part of their skiing day. Therefore, an improved shuttle system would not

achieve meaningful increases in ridership, and therefore, would not achieve the purpose of improving connectivity between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley.

The Improvements to Existing Shuttle System Alternative also would not meet the CEQA objectives of reducing visitor and resort shuttle system travel on roadways between the resorts; providing opportunities for skiers to offload at mid-stations to provide easier access to existing skiable terrain; and providing a gondola system where segments could be operated independently and function as a ski lift if the remainder of the gondola is not operational because of weather, maintenance, or other factors.

In addition, implementation of the Improvements to Existing Shuttle System Alternative is functionally identical to the No Action Alternative, as this alternative would require no analysis or permitting by the Forest Service or Placer County. SVSH is presently in a position to make any operational changes to the resort shuttle system it might deem appropriate. Therefore, considering this alternative as an action alternative in the Final EIS/EIR is not necessary.

Some comments also expressed the opinion that the inclusion of the Existing Shuttle System Alternative in the category of “alternatives considered but not evaluated further” was indicative of an overall deficiency in the consideration and evaluation of alternatives in the Draft EIS/EIR. In September 2015 and October 2015, the Forest Service and County, respectively, accepted applications from SVSH, the project proponent, to install, operate, and maintain an aerial ropeway system (gondola) connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. The Forest Service needs to respond to SVSH’s land use application, which proposes amendment of its special use permit to improve connectivity between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. Placer County’s responsibility under CEQA is predicated upon the review of an application for a conditional use permit and *Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance* amendment. Thus, this applicant-proposed NEPA/CEQA analysis process is driven by the Proposed Action put forth by SVSH, as described in Section 2.2.2 of the Draft EIS/EIR. In response to issues identified internally by the Forest Service and Placer County, and externally by the public during the scoping process, a reasonable range of feasible alternatives was developed to meet most of the basic project objectives. The EIS/EIR analyzes in detail the No Action Alternative and three action alternatives. Additionally, four alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis. Strong indicators of impact differences between the action alternatives (Key Issues) are discussed in Section 2.4.1 of the Draft EIS/EIR. Section 2.3 provides additional information on alternatives considered but not evaluated further, including potential Improvements to the Existing Shuttle System. The Draft EIS/EIR provides an evaluation of alternatives that meets the requirements of both NEPA and CEQA.

1.8.3 Vehicle Trip Reduction Measures

Several comments on the Draft EIS/EIR addressed the topic of reducing vehicle trips to further mitigate project impacts related to traffic and transportation. Comments both questioned the effectiveness of mitigation provided in the EIS/EIR and provided additional suggestions for trip reduction measures. It was suggested that Mitigation Measure 4.7-11 does no more than provide a list of existing or planned trip reduction strategies, and that there are no identified performance standards that must be achieved. Additionally, it was stated that not all possible strategies to reduce impacts were considered as part of Mitigation Measure 4.17-11 (including additional funding for transit services).

Mitigation Measure 4.7-11 provides a performance standard in that it requires compliance with the Placer County Trip Reduction Ordinance. Although the Ordinance does not provide a specific trip reduction requirement, it does require that sufficient trip reduction measures be implemented to meet County standards.

The Draft EIS/EIR provides numeric performance standards in instances where project activities could be regulated in a way to achieve certain desired outcomes (e.g., the performance standards described on page 4.7-48 for construction impacts). Regarding the statement that “every available action must be implemented,” this is not accurate. Both NEPA and CEQA identify that actions to reduce environmental

effects must be feasible (e.g., CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4). Comments suggested the idea of fixed route transit service to Alpine Meadows as a trip reduction measure; however, further analysis, which is described below, found this concept to be infeasible and therefore it should not be implemented, and funding towards its implementation should not be collected.

While it may be physically possible for Tahoe Area Rapid Transit (TART) service to be expanded to include a stop at Alpine Meadows Ski Area, such a diversion would add considerable travel time to the TART SR 89 route, which could potentially make the route less desirable for riders to use. As described by staff from the Placer County Department of Public Works (Garner, pers. comm., 2018), the TART Highway 89 Route operates with two buses on an hourly headway. Scheduled running times have each bus operating on a 2-hour cycle time. There is layover time built into the route to accommodate delays, which are commonplace in the winter.

The route makes timed connections on both the north and south terminus with other TART routes. Adding Alpine Meadows to the route would add approximately 4.2 miles on each run to drive up, and back down, Alpine Meadows Road. Alpine Meadows Road has a posted speed limit of 40 miles an hour, requiring a minimum of 13-15 additional minutes of running time under ideal conditions with no traffic or weather delays. Under heavy traffic or inclement weather conditions, travel times up and down Alpine Meadows Road could be substantially longer. In addition to making existing ride times unreasonably long, the added service would require the addition of another bus in service on the Highway 89 Route, which would be far more costly than the potential new ridership could justify. It also needs to be considered that the longer ride times will decrease ridership on the existing route for passengers currently travelling between Tahoe City, Squaw Valley, and Truckee. The 2016 *Systems Plan Update for the Tahoe Truckee Area Regional Transit in Eastern Placer County* (Placer County 2016) does not include any plans or proposals for TART service up Alpine Meadows Road.

Therefore, although physically possible, the adverse consequences of providing fixed route transit service to Alpine Meadows make it an undesirable measure and, therefore, infeasible.

Further, as noted on page 4.7-45 of the Draft EIS/EIR, any project-generated skiers that choose to ride TART to the Squaw Valley Ski Area could then ride the gondola to reach the Alpine Meadows Ski Area. In this scenario, the Gondola acts as a supplement to the existing fixed route transit service to Squaw Valley, providing those skiing at Squaw Valley/Alpine Meadows a “transit” connection between TART service to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. For the reasons described above, expansion of transit to Alpine Meadows is not recommended as a mitigation measure in the EIS/EIR.

A comment suggests as a method to reduce gondola generated vehicle trips various potential strategies included in a mitigation measure to reduce criteria pollutant emissions from the Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan (VSVSP) EIR (Mitigation Measure 10-2 from the VSVSP EIR). These strategies generally consist of: free/discounted transportation between the project site and the Amtrak Station in Truckee, discounted overnight/meal accommodations for travelers arriving by train or bus, free/discounted bicycle rentals, shuttle service to other key destinations in the region, covered bicycle parking, subsidized car-sharing service for resort employees or patrons, “end-of-trip” facilities for employees who bike to work, free/reimbursed transit passes, weather-protected bicycle lockers for employees, and providing virtual/real-time information in employee areas regarding carpool opportunities. The comment states that the above measures have been determined to be feasible; therefore, the County must require the applicant to adopt and implement enough of them to ensure that the gondola project’s impacts would be mitigated to a less than significant level.

It is important to note that no agency purports, and the VSVSP EIR does not purport, that the entire list of emission reduction options is feasible in all circumstances. The VSVSP EIR provides the list of emission reduction options, and identifies that it is feasible to implement sufficient options, as selected by the applicant and approved by the County, to reach criteria pollutant emission reduction objectives. Although some, or all, of the emission reduction options may prove to be feasible if the applicant chooses to attempt to

implement them; there is nothing in the record for the VSVSP EIR indicating that every emission reduction option provided to the applicant in Mitigation Measure 10-2 is feasible in all circumstances.

Furthermore, at this time, there is no way of knowing which of the options provided in Mitigation Measure 10-2 of the VSVSP EIR may be implemented by the applicant if/when the VSVSP moves forward. Therefore, there is no way of knowing if any of the measures would be “available” for the Gondola. If, for example, with implementation of the VSVSP, free, shared, or discounted rental bicycles are offered to all visitors staying in the hotel or resort residential units as a method to reduce criteria pollutant emissions, the mitigation benefit attributed to this action would be attributed to the VSVSP and not be available to the gondola project. It cannot be assumed that emission reduction actions listed in Mitigation Measure 10-2 are “available” for other projects or purposes. In fact, consistent with the Placer County Trip Reduction Ordinance, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows already implement several actions consistent with those listed in VSVSP EIR Mitigation Measure 10-2 including incentives for employees to use transit and providing local and regional shuttle services.

While some of the identified mitigation strategies in Mitigation Measure 10-2 appear to be potentially feasible, they are directed at reducing criteria pollutant emissions and their ability to actually mitigate traffic impacts is uncertain. Recommendations (and their corresponding expected degree of reductions in vehicle trips and vehicle miles of travel) from the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA) are very general in nature, and lack context for their effectiveness in rural, recreational settings.

A comment questions whether Mitigation Measure 4.7-11 from the Gondola Draft EIS/EIR applies to the project because the Mitigation Measure references a Plan, and the gondola project is not a Specific Plan or other “plan”. Mitigation Measure 4.7-11 includes several transportation demand management (TDM) strategies that the project would implement on peak ski days to reduce vehicle trips. Mitigation Measure 4.7-4 begins with the statement “Prior to Improvement Plan approval, the applicant shall provide...”. The “Improvement Plan” is part of the Placer County permitting process. Many of the RPMs provided in Appendix B of the Draft EIS/EIR also reference the Improvement Plan, typically in the context of timing (i.e., prior to submittal of the Improvement Plan), or content (i.e., the Improvement Plan shall include). In the case of Mitigation Measure 4.7-11, the Improvement Plan is referenced to guide the timing of implementation of the Mitigation Measure; before Placer County can approve the Improvement Plans and allow the project to move forward, the necessary evidence identified in the mitigation measure must be provided to Placer County.