

2 RESPONSE TO COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT EIS/EIR

This chapter 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, 2018, public hearing, and responses to the comments. Comments received within 2 weeks of the close of the public review period are also included, along with responses to those letters.

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. Letter numbers (e.g., 0109, 0185) correspond to the letter numbers provided in Table 1-1, “List of Commenters.”

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0109



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
 REGION IX
 75 Hawthorne Street
 San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

JUN 08 2018

Eli Ilano, Forest Supervisor
 Tahoe National Forest
 631 Coyote Street
 Nevada City, CA 95959

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report for the Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project, Tahoe National Forest. (EIS No. 20180070)

Dear Mr. Ilano:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project. Our review is provided pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. EPA supports the Forest Service and Placer County's decision to produce a combined EIS/EIR to facilitate efficiency of the public comment and decision-making process.

0109-1

Based on our review of the DEIS, we have rated all Alternatives as *Lack of Objections (LO)* (see enclosed "Summary of Rating Definitions"). The document is well written and provides useful analyses of impacts to important resources in the project area. We suggest that the Final EIS provide more information about the cumulative impacts associated with the planned Rollers Chair ski lift, as it is a reasonably foreseeable project under Alternative 2. Specifically, we suggest that the Forest Service disclose the impacts of new lift and trail construction, grading, tree removal, and associated snowmaking on south-facing slopes in the proposed 110 acres of lift-accessible terrain in the Estelle area, particularly with respect to the potential for erosion and other water quality impacts.

EPA appreciates the opportunity to review this DEIS. When the FEIS is released, please send one CD to the address above (mail code: ENF-4-2). If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 972-3521, or contact Stephanie Gordon, the lead reviewer for this project, at 415-972-3098 or gordon.stephanies@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Martyn Goforth, Manager
 Environmental Review Section (ENF-4-2)

Enclosure: Summary of the EPA Rating System

cc via email: Joe Flannery, Tahoe National Forest jflannery@fs.fed.us

0109-1, Cumulative Effects (CE)

The lead agencies appreciate the thorough review of the Draft EIS/EIR provided by the U.S. EPA and acknowledge their comments.

The Rollers lift is a planned, but unpermitted and unimplemented, chairlift (proposed as part of the Alpine Meadows Master Development Plan). Its bottom terminal would be near the Alpine Meadows mid-station under Alternative 2 (meaning that under Alternative 2, skiers could exit the gondola at the Alpine Meadows mid-station and ski/walk to the Rollers lift). The Rollers lift is included in the Draft EIS/EIR's list of cumulative projects (see Table 3-3 and Exhibit 3-1; see Alpine Meadows Master Development Plan, map label 1). Cumulative effects of the project in connection with other probable future projects (including the Rollers lift) are evaluated in Sections 4.1 through 4.17 in the Draft EIS/EIR. Specifically, potential cumulative impacts related to erosion and water quality are discussed in Sections 4.16.4.2 and 4.17.4.2, respectively. However, the cumulative effects analysis prepared for all environmental topic areas consider all applicable cumulative projects listed in Table 3-3 of the EIS/EIR. As the Rollers Lift is, at this time, simply a planned project included in the Alpine Meadows Master Development Plan, little detail regarding the project is available. To create a detailed project plan would require considerable speculation. At this time, it would be pre-mature to provide additional detail regarding topics such as grading, tree removal, and snowmaking that could be associated with the Rollers Chair. However, this does not affect the adequacy of the cumulative effects analysis provided in the EIS/EIR.

SUMMARY OF EPA RATING DEFINITIONS*

This rating system was developed as a means to summarize the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) level of concern with a proposed action. The ratings are a combination of alphabetical categories for evaluation of the environmental impacts of the proposal and numerical categories for evaluation of the adequacy of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE ACTION

"LO" (Lack of Objections)

The EPA review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

"EC" (Environmental Concerns)

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce the environmental impact. EPA would like to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EO" (Environmental Objections)

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EU" (Environmentally Unsatisfactory)

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potentially unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

ADEQUACY OF THE IMPACT STATEMENT

Category "1" (Adequate)

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis or data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

Category "2" (Insufficient Information)

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

Category "3" (Inadequate)

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the NEPA and/or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

*From EPA Manual 1640, Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment.

0185

Will Hollo

From: vanDiepen, Elizabeth@Waterboards <Elizabeth.vanDiepen@waterboards.ca.gov>
Sent: Monday, June 11, 2018 5:31 PM
To: cdraecs@placer.ca.gov; Scoping Comments
Cc: Judge, Brian@waterboards; Tucker, Robert@Waterboards
Subject: Comments on the Squaw Valley/Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project Draft EIS/EIR

Dear Ms. Herrington,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Squaw Valley/Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project Draft EIS/EIR in Placer County's April 27, 2018 public notice. The Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper water resource allocation and efficient use, for the benefit of present and future generations. Squaw Valley Ski Holdings (SVSH) is proposing to construct a gondola connecting the base areas of Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley including two mid-stations and a terminal at each base. SVSH also proposes to install eight Gazex avalanche mitigation exploders and four shelters. In addition to the Water Board's comments on the project scoping document, see comments below.

401 Water Quality Certification

- 0185-1 | - As noted in the Draft EIR, Squaw Creek is on the 303(d) list as impaired due to sedimentation. Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) has been established, and all loads are currently allocated. Any additional sediment load would be unacceptable. See Section 4.13-17 of the Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Region (Basin Plan) for details.
- 0185-2 | - The Basin Plan includes in Section 4.1-16 a prohibition of waste discharge to surface waters of the Truckee River Hydrologic Unit, which includes all surface waters within the project study area. In order to permit discharge of waste to any surface waters within the project area, we would need to meet exemption criteria and make findings.
- 0185-3 | - Wetlands should be avoided to the extent feasible. If impacts to wetlands are unavoidable, SVSH shall minimize impacts as much as possible. All unavoidable impacts must be mitigated. Due to the high functional value of upper-elevation wetlands, higher mitigation ratios would be required. Mitigation should be on-site and in-kind. Success criteria would be critical to approval of permittee-responsible mitigation.

NPDES Statewide Construction General Permit

- 0185-4 | - The statewide construction general permit (and associated monitoring requirements) would remain active until final stabilization is achieved. Risk Level should be calculated to include time taken to achieve final stabilization.
- 0185-5 | - Construction season at high elevations is dependent on weather and soil saturation. Soil disturbance could last longer than the anticipated one season. The draft EIR cites the end of the grading season on October 15 but fails to mention a May 1 start.
- 0185-6 | - Grading should be scheduled to minimize the area of disturbed soil at any given time. All disturbed areas should have effective soil cover within 14 days of inactivity or upon finished grading.

General Comments

- 0185-7 | Exhibit 4.12-1 does not clearly show activity associated with each alternative.

Please let me know if you have any questions on the comments above.

Best Regards,
 Liz van Diepen
 North Basin Regulatory Unit

0185-1, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

This comment give the regulatory requiremetns associated with the Squaw Creek TMDL. Potential sediment loading from the project is analyzed in Section 4.17 of the EIS/EIR. These impacts identify the requirement to conform with regulatory requirements of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), and federal NPDES programs established under Section 401 and 402 of the CWA. Construction or development is not precluded if such development remains compliant with the appropriate standards, in this case the Squaw Creek TMDL.

The impact analysis in Section 4.17 also identifies necessary compliance with other USFS and Lahontan requirements, as well as Resource Protection Measures (RPMs) proposed by the applicant. The provisions of the RPMs are sufficiently effective at preventing sedimentation to be consistent with the TMDL standard for Squaw Creek.

0185-2, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

This comment refers to page 4.1-19 of the Lahontan Basin Plan, which identifies that no discharge of waste or deleterious substance is permitted into the Truckee River Hydrologic Unit without an exemption. The project does not propose any discharges of waste or deleterious substance to the Truckee River or tributaries. The RPMs are designed to minimize the potential for releases of sediment, waste or other substances.

0185-3, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

0185

This comment states that wetlands should be avoided, but that if it is not feasible to do so, wetland replacement must occur with high replacement ratios due to the sensitivity of the high alpine environment in which this project is located, and that mitigation must be on-site and in-kind.

Section 4.15, "Wetlands," of the Draft EIS/EIR details specific regulatory requirements and protections that the applicant has committed to regarding wetland replacement and compensation. Specifically, page 4.15-11 states, "RPM BIO-26 requires that aquatic habitats are avoided to the extent feasible, and if they cannot be avoided, a delineation report be prepared to quantify the aquatic habitats in the area to be disturbed. All permanent impacts will be mitigated according to USACE's no-net-loss policy (i.e., no net loss in both function, value, and quantity). The mitigation ratios required by the USACE when mitigating high value wetlands typically require mitigation ratios above 1 -to-1. RPM BIO-35 requires that a wetland report is submitted to USACE and CDFW for verification. RPM BIO-36 requires that compensation for loss of wetlands shall be provided by purchase of mitigation credits at a qualified mitigation bank, or constructed and/or restored at an off-site location acceptable to the regulatory agencies, or a combination thereof, and such that the constructed or restored wetland meets the no-net-loss requirement." The comment's prioritization of wetland avoidance is consistent with the project implementation approach in the Draft EIS/EIR, and the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (LRWQCB) can further express priorities as far as mitigation for unavoidable wetland effects through required permitting processes.

0185-4, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

0185

This comment identifies the provision of the statewide construction general permit that requires coverage until final stabilization of the site. The project would proceed in compliance with all provisions of all applicable permits or other project-related authorizations, including the provision of the General Permit for Storm Water Discharges Associated with Construction Activity (General Permit) that identifies that a project site is subject to the provisions of the General Permit until final stabilization is complete. Note that various RPMs provide monitoring of revegetation/stabilization efforts to confirm that success criteria are met, including RPMs BIO-32, BIO-39, SOILS-4, and SOILS-9.

0185-5, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

This comment states that despite the construction season window of May 1 to October 15, that construction operating periods may be further limited depending on conditions, and that it is possible for project construction to last for more than one season. The Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), prepared for compliance with the General Permit, would contain provisions that limit the maximum duration of the construction season to between May 1 and October 15, contingent on weather conditions. While the anticipated construction period for the project would be the period between May 1 and October 15, these dates serve as sideboards for the typical dry season, and construction may be further limited depending on weather and soil saturation, as the comment suggests. Various RPMs acknowledge and respond to the fact that changing weather and soil conditions may limit the ability to implement construction activities including RPMs SOILS-5 and SOILS-10,

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which specifically references LRWQCB criteria. Also, not all construction activity need be limited to the period between May 1 and October 15 to be protective of water quality; for example, work on interior walls of base-terminals. Therefore, the language of the RPMs focusses on ground disturbing activities to make a distinction between construction activities that may affect water quality, and those that would not. The project applicant has committed to completing all ground disturbance in a single construction season, as identified and required in RPM MUL-7. On multiple occasions the applicant has expressed confidence in being able to successfully meet this requirement.

0185-6, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

This comment states that during grading, the area of disturbance should be minimized, and that upon completion of grading, effective soil cover should be replaced on the area of disturbance within 14 days.

Appendix B of the Draft EIS/EIR includes RPM REV -2, which states that, "the plan or SWPPP shall also include a list of applicable permits directly associated with the grading activity, including, but not limited to the State Water Board's Construction General Plan, State Water Board 401 Water Quality Certification, U.S. Army Corps 404 permit, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife 1600 Agreement. The applicant shall submit evidence to the County that all permits directly associated with the grading activity have been obtained prior to Improvement Plan Approval." The applicant would adhere to all provisions of the abovementioned permits, and all other permits issued for the project, including those that are related to grading. In addition, beyond the references in various RPMs to

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complying with LRWQCB permits and standards identified previously, RPMs REV-3, BIO-26, BIO-35, WQ-1, and WQ-18 each require either coordination with or authorization from LRWQCB or compliance with LRWQCB permits or standards.

0185-7, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

This comment states that Exhibit 4.12-1 does not clearly show the area of activity under each alternative. The Draft EIS/EIR does not contain an Exhibit 4.12-1. The alternatives are described in Section 2.2, and Table 2-2 gives estimated ground disturbance by alternative. Sections 4-15, 4-16, and 4-17 provide additional information on disturbance to wetlands, soils, and ground disturbance. Estimated construction disturbance areas are shown in Exhibit 4.15-1, "Wetland Habitats." The legend in this exhibit has been updated to better indicate that construction disturbance areas, rather than survey areas or alignment corridors, are shown.

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
2501 Lake Tahoe Boulevard
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0200

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

EDMUND G. BROWN Jr., Governor

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

DISTRICT 3
703 B STREET
MARYSVILLE, CA 95901
PHONE (530) 741-4286
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TTY 711
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May 21, 2018

GTS# 03-PLA-2018-00207
03-PLA-089 PM Var
SCH# 2016042066

Shirlee Herrington
Placer County
3091 County Center Drive
Auburn, CA 95603

Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project

Dear Shirlee Herrington:

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental/application review process for the project referenced above. The mission of Caltrans is to provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability. The Local Development-Intergovernmental Review (LD-IGR) Program reviews land use projects and plans through the lenses of our mission and state planning priorities of infill, conservation, and travel-efficient development. To ensure a safe and efficient transportation system, we encourage early consultation and coordination with local jurisdictions and project proponents on all development projects that utilize the multimodal transportation network.

The project includes installation, operation, and maintenance of a winter-time only/ski season only gondola connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. The eight-passengers-per-cabin gondola would have a design capacity of approximately 1,400 persons per hour in each direction. Travel time between the ski areas is approximately 16 minutes. In total, the lift would be approximately 13,000 ft in length (based on slope length). Two base terminals, two mid-stations, and 37 towers would be installed. The project would also include the installation, operation, and maintenance of an avalanche control system within proximity to the Alpine Meadows portion of the gondola alignment. The avalanche control system would consist of remotely operated gas-activated exploders (Gazex exploders). The following comments are based on the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) received.

Encroachment Permit

Any project or mitigation along or within the State's Right-of-Way (ROW), including above and below, requires an encroachment permit that is issued by Caltrans. To apply, a completed

0200-1

"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated, and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability!"

0200-1, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

At this time, a Caltrans encroachment permit is not anticipated to be required for project implementation. Encroachment permits from the Placer County Department of Public Works and Facilities, however, would be required (see Mitigation Measures 4.7-2, 4.7-7, and 4.7-9 in the Draft EIS/EIR). The project applicant will coordinate as needed with Caltrans regarding any necessary authorizations.

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0200-1 cont'd, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic
and Parking (T&C/T&P)

0200-1
cont'd

Ms. Shirlee Herrington, Placer County
May 21, 2018
Page 2

encroachment permit application, environmental documentation, and five sets of plans clearly
indicating State ROW must be submitted to:

Moe Azar
California Department of Transportation
District 3, Office of Permits
703 B Street
Marysville, CA 95901

Please provide our office with copies of any further actions regarding this project. We
would appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on any changes related to this
development.

If you have any question regarding these comments or require additional information,
please contact David Smith, Intergovernmental Review Coordinator for Placer County, by
phone (530) 634-7799 or via email to david.j.smith@dot.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



KEVIN YOUNT, Branch Chief
Office of Transportation Planning
Regional Planning Branch—North

*"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated, and efficient transportation
system to enhance California's economy and livability"*

0064

June 8, 2018

U.S. Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest, Truckee Ranger District
c/o NEPA Contractor
P.O.Box 2729
Frisco, CO 80443

Placer County Community Development Resources Agency
3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190
Auburn, CA 95603
Attn: Shirlee Herrington, Environmental Coordination Services

SUBJECT: Comments on the SVAM Base-to-Base Gondola Project DEIS/EIR

The following comments are submitted on behalf of Squaw Valley/Alpine Meadows (SVAM), the applicant for the proposed SVAM Base-to-Base Gondola project.

0064-1

The Draft EIS/EIR contains a thorough, detailed and conservative analysis of the impacts of the SVAM Base-to-Base Gondola (project) under both NEPA and CEQA. In some cases, the DEIS/EIR is so conservative that it leaves the reader with the sense that the magnitude of certain impacts would be more severe than is actually likely to be the case. For example, the use of the terms **adverse** and **minutely adverse** does not appear to be applied uniformly. There are a number of impacts that are described as "minimal" or "minor" or that would be well below established standards, yet they are characterized as **adverse** rather than **minutely adverse**. A few examples include:

- Under the **NEPA Effects Conclusion** of Impact 4.9-3 (pages 4.9-23 for Alternative 2 and 4.9-34 for Alternative 4), the operational noise impact is found to be **adverse**, although "any increases in noise levels would be minor and would be consistent with the existing noise environment."
- Even more surprising, traffic noise is found to be **adverse**, even though "these increases would be below 0.5 dBA and *would be inaudible* (emphasis added) (Impact 4.9-4 on pages 4.9-24 and -25).
- Similarly, vibration from noise is found to be **adverse** in Impact 4.9-2, even though blasting activities would be temporary, would occur during times of day when people would be less likely to be disturbed, and *blasting locations would not be close to any existing residences* (page 4.9-20 for Alternative 2). Further, it states that all of the locations where blasting would occur for Alternative 2 would be more than 230 feet from existing residences, the threshold identified for vibration levels (page 4.9-20). In fact, residences are much farther than 230 feet from the potential blasting sites (see page 4.9-17, "two residential structures are located 750 feet east and 1,800 feet east of the proposed gondola alignment."). Similarly, under Alternatives 3 and 4, ground vibration levels from blasting would not exceed the thresholds (pages 4.9-28 and page 4.9-33). Because blasting would occur intermittently over a single season and would not exceed the

ADRIENNE L. GRAHAM
Environmental and Planning Consulting Services
4533 Oxbow Drive, Sacramento, CA 95864

0064-1, NEPA/CEQA Process (NCP)

Because the Draft EIS/EIR is a joint document, both NEPA and CEQA conclusions were provided for each impact/effect. For NEPA, effects are described as "adverse" for detrimental or negative effects, "beneficial" for positive effects, and "no effect" for no change. As stated in the Draft EIS/EIR on page 3-6, "[f]or some NEPA effects conclusions, "minutely" is used to characterize adverse and beneficial effects (i.e., minutely adverse or minutely beneficial), in an effort to further distinguish the effects of the action alternatives." The comment is correct in that use of the word "minutely" may have been used inconsistently at times, as shown in the examples provided. As noted above, however, the main purpose of this impact conclusion is to distinguish the effects between the action alternatives, both for the readers and the decision-makers. Importantly, regardless of a "minutely adverse" or "adverse" impact conclusion, RPMs are identified to reduce these effects and, where RPMs would not be adequate to reduce the effects, additional mitigation measures are provided. In summary, all effects, regardless of the exact wording used for the effects conclusions, have been properly disclosed and mitigated as required by NEPA and CEQA. A summary of the effects conclusions (both before and after mitigation) of the alternatives is provided in Table ES-3 in the EIS/EIR.

0064-1
cont'd

established threshold for vibration, this impact should be considered only **minutely adverse**.

- Impact 4.10-3 states that mobile source CO emissions would be **adverse**, even though no violations of CO thresholds are anticipated, and the study intersections would be very far below the vehicle volumes necessary to create such an impact. According to the DEIS/EIR, the SMAQMD uses a screening threshold of 31,600 vehicles per hour at a single intersection for CO emissions. The study intersections for the Gondola would not have more than 3,000 vehicles per hour in any peak hour, or less than 10% the volume needed to warrant consideration of CO violations. Similar to the GHG analysis (Impact 4.11-1), this conclusion under NEPA should be **minutely adverse** (or even **no effect**).
- A similar argument applies to the construction and operational air emission impacts, which would both be well below the applicable Air District thresholds (Impacts 4.10-1 and 4.10-2).
- Impact 4.12-1 addresses the loss of common vegetation, and states that this would be an **adverse** impact, even though the total acreages to be permanently lost would be small, and "would not substantially reduce the size, continuity, or integrity of any common vegetation or habitat type" (page 4.12-20). Given the abundance of these common habitat types, and the small acreages that would be affected by the alternatives, a finding of **minutely adverse** is more appropriate.
- Similarly, Impact 4.13-1 states that the disturbance of special-status botanical species would be **adverse**, even though none of these species were detected during protocol-level surveys, potential suitable habitat is very limited in amount and quality, and disturbances to these species, if present, would be minor both locally and regionally (page 4.13-13). The potential habitat that could be removed or disturbed is very small, particularly for Alternatives 2 and 3 (less than 0.5 acres).
- Impact 4.14-4 would have only a "slightly" adverse effect, and Impact 4.14-5 would be "minimal". Yet both of these impacts are designated **adverse** rather than **minutely adverse**.
- With respect to construction-related water quality impacts (Impact 17-1), as stated on page 4.17-29, there are "multiple layers of regulatory protections that the applicant and contractor(s) must abide by when executing construction activities." These regulations would minimize the likelihood of erosion and construction-related water quality degradation, even without the identified RPMs. Again, this impact should be considered **minutely adverse**.

By not using the term **minutely adverse** more consistently, the DEIS/EIR leaves the impression that the extent of many of the environmental effects are far greater than the actual analysis indicates. This is borne out by the CEQA conclusions, which clearly state when impacts would be less than significant or reduced to a less-than-significant level by RPMs and/or identified mitigation. For the CEQA analysis, almost every impact would be less than significant and/or mitigated to a less-than-significant level. This accurately reflects the magnitude of the project impacts relative to the identified thresholds.

We understand that there are differences between NEPA and CEQA, and between the approaches taken by the USFS and Placer County, that can lead to legitimate

0064

SVAM Gondola DEIS/EIR Comments
June 6, 2018
Page 3

0064-1
cont'd

differences in conclusions regarding the severity of impacts. Ideally, everyone would read through the entire text of an impact to fully understand its magnitude, and the extent to which RPMs and mitigation would offset the severity of an impact. But because not everyone has the time to read the full document, **bold** conclusions take on more weight, particularly in the summaries that appear after every impact statement.

0064-2

In addition, the summaries of direct and indirect effects at the end of each section in Chapter 4 report the significance finding prior to consideration of RPMs and mitigation, which leaves the reader with the sense that there are many more adverse impacts than would actually be the case. A more thorough and accurate approach is taken in Table ES-3, which indicates which adverse and minorly adverse impacts would be considered "mitigated".

0064-3

There are also several instances where specific impact analyses are overly conservative, and/or thresholds appear to be mis-applied, particularly with regard to changes in views, construction noise, traffic and avalanche risk, as discussed below.

4.2 Visual Resources

0064-4

The Exhibits 4.2-4, 4.2-5 and 4.2-6 provide the "viewsheds" that are considered for each alternative. The text on page 4.2-14 explains that these viewsheds include all areas from which there could be a line of sight based solely on topography (obtained from LiDar). The text further explains that the viewshed analysis does not incorporate "potentially obscuring" features such as vegetation or existing structures. A viewshed analysis based on topography only would be a legitimate method of identifying potential areas for more detailed analysis, such as selecting locations for visual simulations. However, the viewsheds in the DEIS/EIR exhibits are overly conservative and, therefore, could be considered misleading when used to assess the magnitude of an impact and/or to compare the impacts of the alternatives. As evidenced by satellite imagery (cf, Google Earth), there are mountains and quite a bit of vegetation within the areas designated "visibility" on the exhibits, particularly in the Congressionally-mapped Granite Chief Wilderness.

Exhibit 4.2-7, View of Alternative 4 from Lake Tahoe, demonstrates how "existing vegetation could greatly reduce the actual visibility" of Alternative 4 (page 4.2-42). Presumably, forested areas could obscure views of the alternatives from other sites within the "viewshed" area. A good example of how treed areas can obscure views are the photosimulations from Location 8, in which the gondolas for Alternative 4 seem to disappear into the forested area, in part because of a couple of relatively tall trees in the foreground. And, vegetation does not necessarily have to be very tall to obscure views. Trees and shrubs that are close to a viewer (e.g., along a trail), need only be 6 feet or taller to obscure views of anything beyond the vegetated area. Therefore, it is not accurate to say that, for example, Alternative 2 would be visible from approximately 17.99 square miles in the surrounding area (page 4.2-29) or compare the quantified "viewshed" area as a means to assess the relative effect on views of the alternatives (cf., page 4.2-36, "Visual impacts from these locations associated with Alternative 3 are less than those associated with Alternative 2; as indicated by the viewshed analysis, the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would be potentially visible from approximately 16.04 square miles within the surrounding area..." [emphasis added]). The misleading use of the viewshed "area" is especially unnecessary given the use of

0064-1 cont'd, NEPA/CEQA Process (NCP)

0064-2, NEPA/CEQA Process (NCP)

The comment is correct in that the summary tables of direct and indirect effects located in Sections 3.1 through 3.17 identify the NEPA effects determinations before mitigation. Table ES-3 identifies the NEPA effects determinations and CEQA impact conclusions both before and after mitigation. Also, see response to comment 0066-1, above, regarding impact conclusions.

0064-3, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided below. See responses to the detailed comments below.

0064-4, Visual Resources (VR)

The 21 visual simulations created for each alternative allow for a qualitative analysis of the visual changes that are anticipated to occur with implementation of any of the action alternatives. These 21 visual simulations were created from a selection (16) of representative locations, which were initially selected from hundreds of viewpoints evaluated. Five of these (one site along Alpine Meadows Road, two sites at the Alpine Meadows base terminal, and two sites along Squaw Valley Road), experience widely varying conditions between the winter and summer months. They are also visible to a greater number of people traveling along the roads or from the base terminal. As a result, these five viewpoint locations were simulated during both winter and summer conditions, which

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resulted in the creation of a total of 21 visual simulations for each alternative. The objective of creating visual simulations is to characterize the appearance of the action alternatives if constructed, rather than to provide a comprehensive view of the project from all possible locations in the project area; therefore, not all locations could be, or were required to be, simulated for the purposes of this EIS/EIR. Instead, highly frequented or prominent public areas and visually sensitive vistas were selected for simulation. To account for the visual impacts that may occur outside of the immediate project area, a viewshed analysis of the regional visibility of the project was conducted. The viewshed analysis provides a quantitative assessment of the visual impacts associated with the project using the best available data at the time of analysis. The viewshed analysis accurately accounts for topographic features, but does not incorporate potentially obscuring features such as vegetation or built structures. It is expected that existing vegetative screening would have the effect of considerably reducing the overall potential visibility of the project, dependent on the specific location and vantage of the viewer. Because it does not take into account potentially obscuring features, the viewshed analysis is a conservative approximation of the Zone of Potential Visibility. For additional information, refer to Visual Resources Analysis Methods discussed in EIS/EIR section 4.2.2.

0064

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0064-4
cont'd

multiple photosimulations, and the qualitative evaluation of how the alternatives would affect views of ridgelines.

0064-5

4.7 Traffic

As discussed in more detail in the attached memorandum from Gordon Shaw of LSC (Attachment A), we have several concerns with respect to the transportation analysis. In summary:

- The methodology that yields the conclusion that 34 percent of additional exiting skier traffic exits during the Sunday PM peak-hour (see page 4.7-21) is overly conservative, so that the PM peak-hour traffic impacts could be too high by approximately 21 percent.
- The standards of significance for several intersections do not reflect the adopted Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan (VSVSP) Policy CP-1, which states that during peak periods, LOS F is acceptable within the VSVSP area. Using the County's general standard of LOS C is conservative, particularly given that the VSVSP is currently under litigation. However, the DEIS/EIR should also recognize that the adopted standard for three intersections is LOS F.
- Similarly, the significance standards for traffic growth do not recognize that LOS F is acceptable in the Tahoe Basin within Town Center boundaries, pursuant to Tahoe Basin Area Plan policy.
- The discussion of transit impacts (Impact 4.7-6 and 4.7-14) does not consider the beneficial impacts that the Gondola could have on the regional transit system, which could allow skiers and employees to conveniently walk from the nearby TART stop to the Squaw Valley Gondola terminal to access Alpine Meadows.

4.9 Noise

0064-6

Impact 4.9-1 states that "construction could occur during times of day, or in a manner, outside those identified in the Placer County Noise Ordinance" (pages 4.9-15, 4.9-18, et al, but does not provide any evidence to support this statement. To the contrary, construction of the Gondola would be conducted in accordance with the applicable County ordinances.

Typically, the applicable standards of the governing jurisdiction are used to determine if a noise impact would be significant. Page 4.9-11 states that the County Code exempts construction noise performed between certain hours from its noise standards, and Impact 4.9-1 states that, "With implementation of these RPMs, construction activities would occur during times, and in a manner, consistent with the Placer County Noise Ordinance construction exemption" (page 4.9-18). The DEIS/EIR then goes on to conclude that helicopters used in construction would have a significant impact. As noted in the analysis, all construction would occur within a single season and helicopters would be used for 20 days at most. Further, unlike equipment used to construct a single building, the helicopters used during Gondola construction would not be operating for long periods of time in a single location. Therefore, sensitive receptors would be

0064-4 cont'd, Visual Resources (VR)

0064-5, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

The first three bullet items in the comment provide a summary of detailed comments provided as Attachment A to this comment letter. See responses to comments 0064-18 through 0064-20, below, for detailed responses to these items.

Regarding the fourth bullet item, the comment is correct, the proposed Gondola could provide a mechanism for those taking transit (TART) to the existing stop at Squaw Valley to, in effect, use the Gondola as an extension of mass transit to access Alpine Meadows, which currently does not have a TART stop. Although having a more convenient connection between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows via the Gondola could conceivably provide an incentive for increased transit use to Squaw Valley, any increases in transit use attributable to this mechanism could not be easily quantified at this time. In addition, this potential mechanism for increased TART ridership would not alter impact conclusions in the EIS/EIR.

0064-6, Noise (N)

The comment suggests that the conclusion of the construction noise analysis on page 4.9-19 of the Draft EIS/EIR should be less than significant because helicopter use would be intermittent and temporary. However, helicopter flight paths and proximity to existing receptors were not known at the time of the analysis and will not be finalized until an alternative has been selected and a project design

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has been completed. Therefore, although helicopter use would be temporary, the helicopter does represent the loudest construction activity, as shown in Table 4.9-11, and due to the uncertainty of location and specific daily operations, could result in substantial noise levels at existing receptors. For these reasons, temporary construction noise was identified as a significant and unavoidable impact. No changes are necessary.

0064

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0064-6
cont'd

exposed to helicopter noise only intermittently on the days that helicopters are used. For these reasons, the County Code exemption for construction should be applied to the helicopter use, and this impact should be less than significant, particularly after consideration of the applicable RPMs.

4.15 Wetlands

0064-7

The DEIS/EIR states in Table 4.12-1, under "Freshwater Pond", a category that includes constructed facilities, such as Cushing Pond, Caldwell Pond, and detention ponds in Alpine Meadows, that "freshwater ponds qualify as waters of the State and potential waters of the U.S." (page 4.12-6). This is not necessarily the case for all constructed ponds. A wetland delineation has been prepared for Cushing Pond (see Attachment B), and the US Army Corps of Engineers has confirmed that Cushing Pond is not a Water of the US (see Attachment C). Cushing Pond was constructed as an ornamental pond and occurs in a landscaped setting. It is lined and periodically drained for maintenance. As such, it is very unlikely to qualify as a water of the State.

Therefore, the filling of this pond would not contribute to the loss of wetlands identified in Impact 4.15-1 for Alternative 2.

Please also note that the delineation prepared for Cushing Pond states that the pond is 0.20 acres, not 0.25 acres as stated on page 4.15-10 and elsewhere.

4.16 Geology, Soils and Seismicity

0064-8

Impact 4.16-2 finds that the increased exposure of people and structures would be an **adverse** and **significant impact** prior to application of the RPMs. However, essentially the same impact in Section 4.6, Public Safety (changes to the level of avalanche risk and avalanche mitigation protocols, and potential changes to avalanche risk resulting from climate change) is **minutely beneficial** and **less than significant**. Given that the "existing Squaw Valley Avalanche Mitigation Program that has maintained a high level of public safety would continue to operate for Alternative 2" (page 4.16-21), that any construction in a PAHA must be constructed to withstand a design avalanche (page 4.16-22), and that active management of ski slopes and implementation of avalanche hazard mitigation contributes beneficial effects related to the magnitude and frequency of future avalanches (page 4.16-22), the increased risk of exposure to avalanches would be **beneficial** or, to be conservative, **minutely adverse**, and **less than significant**. The statement that there could be tree clearing or other conditions that could change avalanche run out zones is speculative. Further, the steps identified in Mitigation Measure 4.16-2 are already required and/or in place, including coordinating avalanche response with the fire departments, closing avalanche areas to the public during periods of risk, continuing avalanche mitigation programs, and incorporating structural specifications to address avalanche risk in PAHAs.

Appendix B, Resource Protection Measures

0064-9

For the most part, the RPMs are reasonable and effective means of reducing the impacts of the project. Many are similar or identical to the Conditions of Approval typically applied to lift projects. There is one RPM that we respectfully request be revised:

0064-6 cont'd, Noise (N)

0064-7, Vegetation (V)

The text referenced in Table 4.12-1 has been modified to read as follows:

Freshwater ponds may qualify as waters of the state and potential waters of the United States and are addressed in Section 4.15, "Wetlands," under the lacustrine category. Ponds constructed in uplands may not fall within federal jurisdiction but would could still qualify as waters of the state.

In addition, the fourth sentence in the first paragraph of the discussion of Impact 4.12-1 (Alt. 2) (Draft EIS/EIR page 4.12-20) has been modified to read as follows:

Mountain alder thicket, freshwater emergency wetland, some freshwater ponds, and riverine habitats are wetlands or waters, as defined under state or federal statute...

The same change is made to the first paragraph of the discussion of Impact 4.1-2 (Alt. 2) (Draft EIS/EIR page 4.12-22). These edits make all occurrences of "freshwater pond" in Section 4.12, "Vegetation" consistent with the input provided by the comment.

Section 4.15, "Wetlands" acknowledges that delineations of jurisdictional features may modify acreage values provided in the section. As stated on Page 4.15-1 of the Draft EIS/EIR:

"Exhibit 4.15-1, and acreage values provided in Table 4.15-1 and elsewhere in this section, correspond to an initial estimate of the portions of aquatic habitats in the survey area that may be

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subject to Section 404 of the CWA, the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, and/or California Fish and Game Code Section 1602. A formal delineation of jurisdictional features associated with each action alternative has not been conducted to confirm the precise boundaries of waters and wetlands consistent with the criteria provided in each of these laws. Such a delineation would be conducted after a single alternative is approved to focus the effort on a limited number of aquatic features. The surveys that have been performed provide sufficient information, however, to determine the presence and extent of these features, and to determine whether the action alternatives will significantly affect those features. A formal delineation, and appropriate verification, may result in refinement of the locations of where these features are present."

This text also justifies continuing to base the acreage of Cushing Pond on the field surveys conducted in support of preparation of the EIS/EIR, and not the additional information provided by the commenter. In addition, the 0.05 acre difference in acreage between the 0.25 acres identified in the EIS/EIR, and the 0.20 acres identified in the comment, would not alter impact conclusions in the Draft EIS/EIR.

As also identified in the paragraph from page 4.15-1 of the Draft EIS/EIR, Section 4.15, "Wetlands" also considers habitats that may fall under the jurisdiction of California Fish and Game Code Section 1602. So, although Cushing Pond may not fall under the jurisdiction of Section 404 of the CWA, or the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, it is still appropriate to include Cushing Pond in this section in case it falls under the jurisdiction of Section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code.

0064

The description of "Lacustrine Habitats" on page 4.15-3 of the Draft EIS/EIR has been modified as follows to further clarify this point:

The constructed ponds include Cushing Pond at Squaw Valley, Caldwell Pond on private property, and a detention pond near the based of Alpine Meadows. Although it is unlikely that constructed ponds, particularly Cushing Pond, would fall under the jurisdiction of Section 404 of the CWA or the Porter-Cologne Waer Quality Control Act, they are included in this section using an abundance of caution, and because they could also fall under the jurisdiction of Section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code. Naturally occurring ponds...

0064-8, Soils/Geology/Seismicity (SGS)

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. See the Master Response on this topic in Section 1.8, "Master Responses," for more information on the removal of Gazex from the project. With removal of Gazex, the impact analyses in Section 4.6, "Public Safety" and for Impact 4.16-2 have been modified to reflect this change in avalanche mitigation approach. The changes to these impact discussions are too long to repeat in this response. Refer to the text of the Final EIS/EIR where the key points of this comment are reflected in the impact discussions related to avalanche risk.

0064-9, Resources Protection Measures/Mitigation Measures (RPM/MM)

0064

RPM MUL-5, as written in Appendix B of the Draft EIS/EIR, requires environmental monitors to be onsite during all construction activities. The comment requests that this RPM be revised to limit environmental monitoring to only those activities and/or times where environmental resources could be adversely affected. The lead agencies agree that not all construction activities would have the potential to affect sensitive resources or result in adverse environmental effects (e.g., interior, electrical work).

In response to this comment, RPM MUL-5 is revised as follows:

At least one environmental monitor, as specified by Placer County, Forest Service or other permitting authority requirements, will be on-site during all construction activities where environmental resources could be adversely affected. The project applicant shall work with Placer County and the Forest Service to identify the specific construction activities that may not require environmental monitoring (e.g., electrical work inside base -terminals). Environmental monitors will be qualified to address the environmental resources being protected (e.g., biological, cultural) per the requirements of each applicable RPM and approved by the Forest Service and Placer County. Unless specified otherwise in other RPMs, monitors will be allowed to cover up to 0.75-mile of the project area at once to allow multiple crews to work in close proximity to each other at the same time. Environmental monitors will have the authority to stop work or direct work in order to help ensure the protection of resources and compliance with all permits

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0064-9
cont'd

MUL-5 requires at least one environmental monitor to address protection of biological and cultural resources, with multiple monitors required in some instances. This RPM appears to require that the environmental monitor(s) be present during all construction activities. However, the resources that require protection would be affected primarily by activities involving heavy equipment and ground disturbance, such as vegetation clearing and excavation. There will be construction-related activities that would not disturb any ground or be likely to have any affect on a cultural or biological resource (e.g., painting base terminals). We respectfully request that the requirement for environmental monitors be limited to those activities and/or times where environmental resources could be adversely affected.

Additional Clarifications/Corrections

0064-10

The following clarifications and corrections are intended to clarify the analysis, but would not alter the significance conclusions of the DEIS/EIR.

Page 1-15 Section 1.10, Other Necessary Permits, Licenses, and/or Consultation: Would a Timber Harvest Plan approved by CalFire be required for the three action alternatives?

0064-11

Page 4.4-14 In the last full paragraph, it states that because the action alternatives would generate 10 new Full Time Equivalent Employees (FTEE), housing would need to be provided for five employees. This is in error, because eight of the employees would be seasonal, rather than year-round. As stated on page 4.5-10, the alternatives would result in six FTEEs, and would therefore need to provide housing for three employees.

0064-12

Page 4.6-13 Impact 4.6-2, Operations Efficiency, states that installation of the Gazex would result in the loss of a form of redundancy because the 105-mm howitzer would no longer be used. But there would still be two forms of avalanche mitigation available—the Gazex and hand charges.

0064-13

Page 4.7-66 The last line of Table 4.7-22, SR 28 east of SR 89, should not be shaded and the F should not be bold, because LOS F is the standard for this segment, according to the text on page 4.7-33.

0064-14

Page 4.14-100 Impact 4.14-6 on this page addresses Alternative 4, but the text refers to Alternative 3.

0064-15

Page 4.16-9 The discussion of the current avalanche management programs is out of date. A more accurate discussion is provided on pages 4.6-1 and 4.6-2 of the Section 4.6, Public Safety.

0064-16

Page 4.16-10 Exhibit 4.16-5 appears to conflate the Heywood and Wilson PAHAs, and therefore overstate the actual paths. The Heywood PAHAs developed in 2014 for the VSVSP should be used for those PAHAs in Squaw Valley, because they better reflect existing conditions. Also, the paths depicted

0064-9 cont'd, Resources Protection
Measures/Mitigation Measures (RPM/MM)

0064-10, Project Description (PD)

A Timber Harvest Plan would be required for timber removal occurring on SVSH lands. This Timber Harvest Plan would require review and approval by several agencies, including but not limited to CalFire.

0064-11, Land Use (LU)

The comment accurately identified an error in the Draft EIS/EIR, which has been corrected in the Final EIS/EIR.

0064-12, Public Safety (PS)

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. See the Master Response on this topic in Section 1.8, "Master Responses," for more information on the removal of Gazex from the project.

0064-13, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

The comment is correct. The Final EIS/EIR no longer shows the referenced cell in Table 4.7-22 as shaded, and the "F" in the cell is no longer bolded. No other changes in text or tables are needed to

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make the necessary correction.

0064-14, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

The comment is correct, and references to Alternative 3 on pages 4.14-100 through 4.14-102 should read Alternative 4. The text has been revised in the Final EIS/EIR. However, the analysis and conclusion remain the same.

0064-15, Soils/Geology/Seismicity (SGS)

In response to this comment, the discussion of the current avalanche management programs in the third full paragraph on page 4.16-9 of the Draft EIS/EIR is revised as follows:

~~Active avalanche mitigation involves frequently triggering small slides to help reduce the potential buildup of enough snow to result in large avalanches. Passive avalanche mitigation or protection involves avoidance of avalanche areas or construction of snow stabilizing, resisting, or deflecting structures. Because of the potential for avalanches, the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows Ski Patrols routinely perform avalanche control operations including clearing the area of avalanche hazard. The primary methods of active avalanche control are detonation of "hand charges" placed by ski patrol staff and triggering of avalanches by firing artillery at Alpine Meadows. There is also one Gazex exploder (the same device included as part of the proposed project) used at Squaw Valley.~~

Current avalanche management is described on pages 4.6-1 and 4.6-2 of Section 4.6, "Public Safety"

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(under the heading "Existing Avalanche Control Protocol"). At Squaw Valley, mountain operations personnel use hand-charges, Avalaunchers, and Gazex facilities for avalanche mitigation; at Alpine Meadows, mountain operations personnel use hand-charges, Avalaunchers, Gazex facilities, and 105-millimeter (mm) howitzer artillery. Each of these avalanche risk reduction methods is described in Section 4.6, "Public Safety."

0064-16, Soils/Geology/Seismicity (SGS)

Exhibit 4.16-5 combines data from Wilson 1982, Heywood 2014, and Mears 1987 to provide a comprehensive representation of avalanche risk for the entire project area, as none of these sources alone covers the entire project area. Exhibit 4.16-5 represents a concerted effort to present the best information available, using different sources that, in some cases, are not 100% in agreement. Although the result of this consolidation data may overestimate the extent of avalanche risk areas in some locations, this does not affect the impact analysis or conclusions in the EIS/EIR. No edits have been made to Exhibit 4.16-5.

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0064-16|
cont'd

in Exhibit 4.16-5 appear to be slightly off (see for example the Ski Jump PAHA).

0064-17|

As stated previously, we believe the Draft EIS/EIR analyzes the impacts of the proposed Gondola project and alternatives thoroughly and in ample detail.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the above comments.

Sincerely,



Adrienne L. Graham
Environmental and Planning Consultant

0064-16 cont'd, Soils/Geology/Seismicity (SGS)

0064-17, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided above. See responses to the detailed comments above.

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Attachment A
LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. Memorandum



**TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND
TRAFFIC ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS**

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MEMORANDUM

To: Adrienne Graham

From: Gordon Shaw, PE, AICP, LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.

Date: June 4, 2018

RE: Review of *Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project Draft EIS/EIR*

Per your request, this memo presents our review of the Transportation/Circulation Section of the Gondola DEIS/EIR (April 2018).

- The methodology that yields the conclusion that 34 percent of additional exiting skier traffic generated by the gondola exits during the Sunday PM peak-hour (see page 4.7-21) is questionable for two reasons. As shown in the table on page 64 of Appendix E (Volume, Squaw Valley Road West-Of SR 89), the analyst factors the eastbound Squaw Valley Road counts by a set of hourly "% Skiers" factors without supporting justification. First, no skiers are assumed to have left prior to 11AM, which is not consistent with a common pattern among local season pass holders of skiing only for an hour or two in the morning. This results in parking turnover around 11AM. Secondly, the analyst assumes that 63 percent of eastbound SVR vehicles are skiers in the 1PM hour, 100 percent in the 2 PM hour, and 63 percent in the 3 PM hour (even though overall traffic is higher in the 3 PM hour). In other words, the analysis assumes that every last vehicle eastbound in the 2 PM hour is assumed to be a skier and no one drives eastbound out of the valley during this hour for any other purpose. This factor substantially overstates the impact in the peak-hour. If a more reasonable figure for the PM hour of 75 percent is used, the proportion of all new trip generation in the peak hour would be reduced to 28 percent. This in turn would indicate that the PM peak-hour traffic impacts are too high by a factor of roughly 21 percent.

0064-18, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

The comment suggests that the project's Sunday PM peak hour vehicle trip generation has been overestimated by 21 percent based on a detailed review of page 64 of the Appendix E. The comment concludes that this approach likely overstates project impacts.

Page 4.7-21 of the Draft EIS/EIR describes the analysis approach undertaken to estimate that 34 percent of all Sunday skier visits would leave the Squaw Valley Ski Area during the Sunday afternoon peak hour (i.e., 2 to 3 PM). The commentor suggests that departures would be more dispersed throughout the day, citing parking turnover at the resort that occurs around 11 AM. The commentor suggests that it would be more reasonable to assume that 75 percent of all exiting traffic on eastbound Squaw Valley Road is associated with departing skiers from Squaw Valley Ski Area instead of the assumed 100 percent.

According to Exhibit 4.7-2, 866 vehicles traveled eastbound on Squaw Valley Road through the Christy Hill Road/Far East Road intersection during the Sunday PM peak hour. A total of 879 vehicles were then measured on the eastbound Squaw Valley Road approach to SR 89. Given the lack of sizeable turning movements entering/exiting Squaw Valley Road (aside from Squaw Creek Road) between these intersections, it can be concluded that the vast majority of eastbound trips during the Sunday PM peak hour on Squaw Valley Road originate from the Squaw Valley Ski Area. The precise number (which cannot be calculated because it would require origin-destination survey data) is likely closer to 100 percent than 75 percent.

0064-18

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Hence, the assumption of 100 percent was made to ensure a conservative analysis. Testing was performed to assess the sensitivity of the estimated number of skiers that exit prior to 11 AM. Because total outbound flows were relatively modest, a change in this assumption would not materially affect the project's trip generation. In summary, the project's Sunday PM peak hour trip generation is considered reasonably conservative and appropriate for the EIS/EIR analysis.

0064-19

- The LOS standards cited on Page 4.7-33 do not reflect the adopted *Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan* (VSVSP) Policy CP-1, which states that during peak periods, LOS F is acceptable within the VSVSP area. This includes the intersections along Squaw Valley Road at Chamonix Place, Village East Road, and Far East Road / Christy Hill Road. An LOS F should have been identified as acceptable for these intersections. Because LOS F is acceptable, adding additional traffic (e.g., increasing Volume-to-Capacity ratio by more than 0.05 or increasing ADT by more than 100) should not be identified as a significant impact at any of these intersections. Therefore, Impact 4.7-2 (Alt. 2), impacts on Placer County intersections, should not be considered significant. In addition, Impact 4.7-10, cumulative impacts on Placer County intersections, should not be significant regarding the Chamonix Place intersection (although it would still be significant for the Squaw Creek Road intersection).

0064-20

- Similarly, the *Tahoe Basin Area Plan* adopted by Placer County in 2017 includes the following policy:

T-P-6 -- Maintain consistency with Level of Service (LOS) and quality of service standards identified in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), with the exception of intersections and roadway segments within the Town Center boundaries where LOS F is acceptable during peak periods.

While this is cited in the DEIS/EIR (page 4.7-17), the discussion of potential significance of impacts associated with traffic growth on page 4.7-33 does not reflect the nuance that an increase within the Town Center boundaries of any amount should not be considered significant. In this instance, this would not alter the conclusions of the analysis.

0064-19, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

The comment states that the significance criteria in the vicinity of Squaw Valley should reflect the adopted Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan (VSVSP) Policy CP-1, which allows LOS F within the VSVSP area during peak periods. At the time the Draft EIS/EIR for the Gondola was being prepared, the EIR for the VSVSP was part of ongoing litigation. Therefore, taking a conservative approach, Placer County directed the project team to assume that Policy CP-1 was not in effect when defining the significance criteria. Placer County has made the decision to continue this conservative approach in the Final EIS/EIR.

0064-20, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

The comment suggests that the discussion of potential significance of impacts should disclose that the growth in traffic within Town Center boundaries (as defined by the Tahoe Basin Area Plan) of any amount should not be considered significant, though it is noted that this would not alter the conclusions of the analysis.

Page 4.7-17 of the Draft EIS/EIR indicates that LOS F is considered acceptable within the Tahoe City Town Center. Page 4.7-33 reiterates this significance criterion. It also includes a criterion pertaining to worsening 'unacceptable' operations to a significant degree. But since operations on the segment of SR 28 east of SR 89 are considered acceptable in the LOS F range, there is no condition in which an unacceptable condition would result, which would trigger this criterion

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relating to exacerbation of unacceptable operations.

Attachment B
Wetland Delineation for the 2.8-Acre Squaw Valley Terminal
Study Area

0064

WETLAND DELINEATION
FOR THE
**±2.8-ACRE SQUAW VALLEY TERMINAL
STUDY AREA**
SQUAW VALLEY, PLACER COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



Prepared for:
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FEBRUARY 2016

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- Appendix A: Wetland Data Sheets
- Appendix B: Plant Species Observed
- Appendix C.: Completed Aquatic Resources Excel Spreadsheet

**WETLAND DELINEATION
FOR THE
±2.8-ACRE SQUAW VALLEY TERMINAL**

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of Squaw Valley Ski Corporation, Salix Consulting delineated waters of the United States on the approximate 2.8-acre Squaw Valley Terminal study area (study area) in eastern Placer County, CA. The study area is located in Olympic Valley, almost two miles west of Highway 89. The location corresponds to portions of Section 31 of Township 16 North and Range 16 East on the 7.5 minute Tahoe City USGS (United States Geological Survey) quadrangle (Figure 1). The latitude and longitude of the approximate center of the site are 39° 11' 44" North and 120° 14' 13" West.

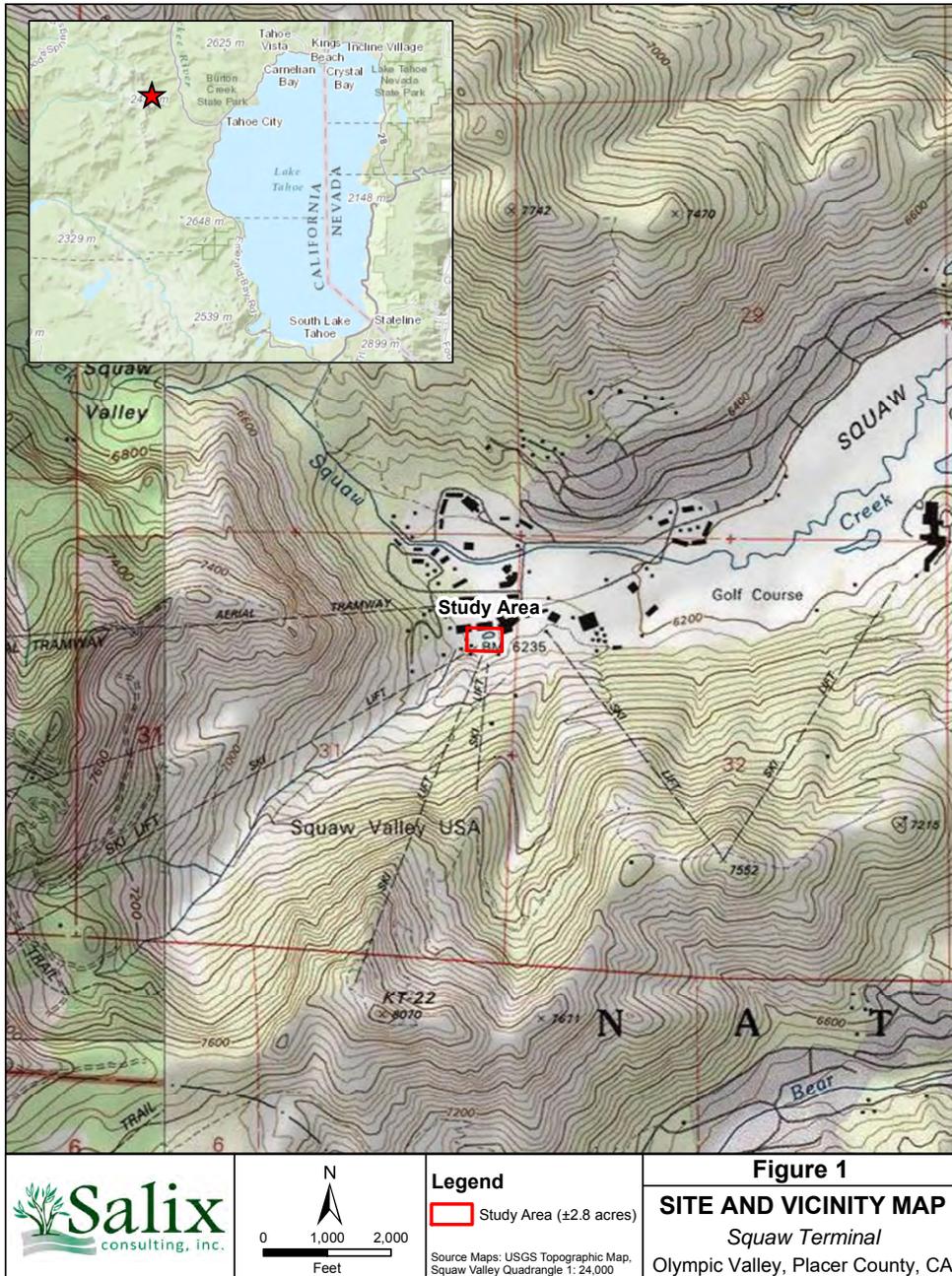
The study area is situated in the northeastern Sierra Nevada, within the Squaw Valley Resort area. It is just east of the Pacific Crest and is bounded to the north, west, and south by moderately-steep, rocky slopes. The approximate elevation of the study area is 6,233 feet. The study area has a man-made, decorative pond (Cushing Pond), two ski lift terminals, a small outdoor amphitheater, condominiums, and much of it is landscaped with turf or ornamental shrubs (Figure 2).

The study area and areas surrounding the study area have been evaluated by Jeff Glazner on numerous occasions since October 2012. Changes to the Squaw Valley Village proposed project footprint were made in 2013, eliminating the Cushing Pond area from the larger project. The study area discussed in this report is now being considered for a new ski terminal.

Cushing Pond History and Management

Cushing pond is a man-made feature located in a developed portion in the southwest area of Squaw Valley Village. The pond is approximately 0.2 acre in size, generally oval shaped, and has a maximum depth of approximately seven feet. It was constructed in an upland area after the 1960 Olympics as a landscape amenity for new development.

Prior to the 1960 Olympics, the south fork of Squaw Creek flowed through the area where Cushing Pond now sits. In the late 1950s the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) rerouted the Creek to create dry space for the 1960 Winter Olympics. The area created was used for the Olympics, and after that, the area had several uses. Old-timers in the Valley indicate that there were tennis courts at the same location in the 1960's. In the later 1960s or 1970s, condominiums were built, and the ornamental pond, Cushing Pond, was created. The pond is primarily a visual amenity for the local area, and is occasionally used for recreation such as the annual "Lake Cushing Crossing," an event in which participants attempt to cross the cold waters of Cushing Pond on skis, a snowboard, or any ski or snowboard-based vessel including creative pond-skimming



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contraptions. It is currently surrounded by turf and landscaping, condominiums, a ski lift, and other ski-related facilities.

Cushing Pond is not a remnant of the old channel; it was created years after the channel was moved. Historic USGS maps show Cushing Pond but provide no evidence that the pond is related to the former alignment of the south fork of Squaw Creek.

At some point, in the late 1960's, the pond was dug to its current dimensions and lined with black plastic. Water level is managed by visual observation with a nearby valve on an as-needed basis. Because the pond is lined, it does not require constant input; the valve is turned on and off as needed to maintain a full pond. However, water was shut off to the pond during this past summer and the pond is now dry. Local watershed input is minimal as water is diverted to other drainages. The plastic liner covers the entire bottom of the pond, thus only minimal percolation occurs. The condition of the liner is not currently known as it is mostly covered with sediment.

When Cushing pond is full, it does not exceed its banks because the full-water elevation is the point at which runoff will flow through the constructed spillway into a nearby vertical culvert, which carries the water to the storm drain system and eventually into Squaw Creek about 1000 feet away.

Directions to the Site

Interstate 80 east to Truckee, south on State Route 89, east on Squaw Valley Road for two miles to Squaw Valley Village. Site located near the K-22 Express Ski Lift. The site is accessible to the public.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Property Owner:	Delineator:
Squaw Valley Ski Corporation	Jeff Glazner
P.O. Box 2007	Salix Consulting, Inc.
Olympic Valley, California 96146	12240 Herdal Drive, Suite 14
Contact: Chevis Hosea	Auburn, California 95603
	Phone: (530) 888-0130
	jglazner@salixinc.com

METHODS

The delineation was conducted September 24, 2015 by Jeff Glazner according to the 1987 Corps Manual (Environmental Laboratory 1987) and the Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast Region. Information about vegetation, soils, and hydrology was recorded at two data point locations. Data sheets are located in Appendix A.

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Plants observed on the subject parcel during the field evaluations are provided in Appendix B, along with the scientific name and the wetland indicator status of each species listed. Where a plant species observed has a wetland indicator status (not UPL), plant nomenclature follows Lichvar et.al. (2014). Otherwise, species names are aligned with The Jepson Manual (Baldwin et.al. 2012) or Calflora, if there have been recent nomenclatural changes.

General soils information was obtained from the Soil Survey, Tahoe National Forest Area (USDA/NRCS). In the field, a Munsell Color chart was used to determine moist soil colors.

A Trimble GeoXH GPS was used to obtain location information for three parameter data points, stream edges areas, and other pertinent features. Photos showing the intermittent stream (Figure 4a) and Cushing Pond (Figure 4b) are included. A recent aerial photograph was used as the photo base in ArcGIS 10 to create the wetland delineation map.

RESULTS

Climate

Climate summary information for Olympic Valley was obtained from Weatherbase, which utilizes data from NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (formerly the National Climatic Data Center).

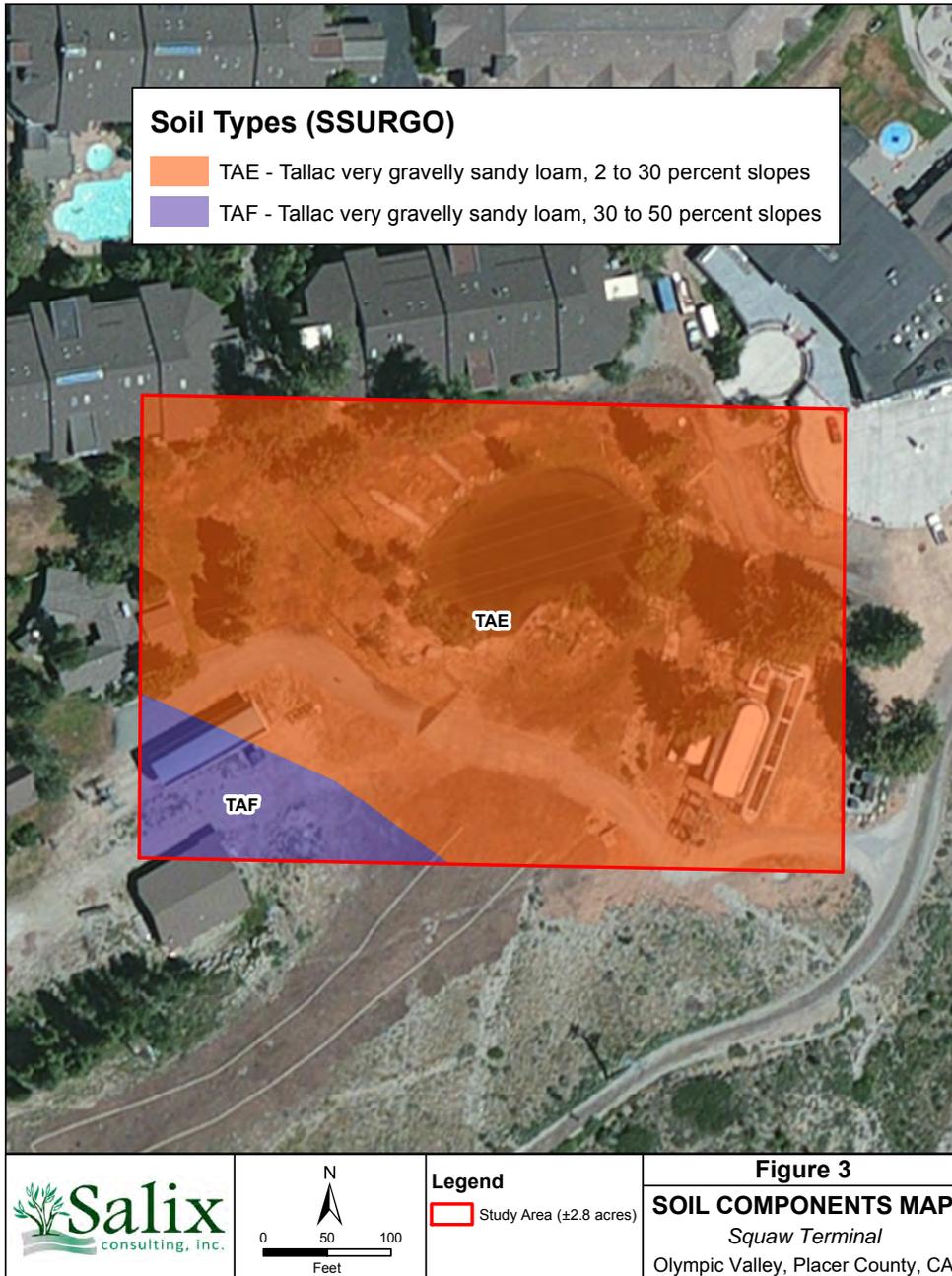
The average temperature for the year in Olympic Valley is 43.3°F, with an average high temperature of 56°F and an average annual low of 30.5°F. The warmest months, on average, are July and August (approximately 77°), and the coldest months on average are December, January, and February (19° to 20°).

The average amount of precipitation for the year in Olympic Valley is 31.5", much of which falls December through March as snow. The months with the least precipitation on average are July and August, with averages of 0.2" and 0.3" respectively. Precipitation occurs, on average, 77.0 days of the year. The average annual snowfall is 191.0". The month with the most snow is usually January with an average of 45.9" of snow.

Soils

Regional geologic maps indicate that the project site is underlain by various age volcanic rocks, granitic rocks, alluvial and glacial deposits (Saucedo, G.J., 2005). Glaciation is responsible for shaping much of the Olympic Valley area and depositing sediments on the valley floor. Two soil units have been mapped on the site (Figure 3):

- Tallac very gravelly sandy loam, 2 to 30 percent slopes
- Tallac very gravelly sandy loam, 30 to 50 percent slopes



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The Tallac series consists of deep and very deep moderately-well and well-drained soils that formed in material weathered from glacial deposits. Tallac soils are on glacial moraines and outwash plains and have slopes of 0 to 75 percent. The parent material consists of glaciofluvial deposits. Depth to a root restrictive layer, duripan, is 41 to 60 inches. Water movement in the most restrictive layer is moderately low. Available water to a depth of 60 inches (or restricted depth) is very low. Shrink-swell potential is low. This soil is not flooded or ponded. A seasonal zone of water saturation is at 51 inches during March, April, and May. Organic matter content in the surface horizon is about 6 percent. These soil units do not meet hydric criteria.

Hydrology

The study area is located within the Truckee Watershed (Hydrologic Unit Code 16050102 (HUC-8)). This watershed drains to the Truckee River, which is not a Traditional Navigable Waterway (TNW).

The study area is situated just north of a ski run and east of a developed gentle slope. One drainage flows through the study area, a cobble-lined seasonal drainage (an intermittent stream) in the eastern area (Figure 4a). The intermittent stream flows from the south and collects local water from the adjacent ski slope. Water flowing through the intermittent stream enters a vertical culvert and is carried through the storm drain system and eventually outfalls into Squaw Creek, approximately 1000 feet to the northeast.

Cushing Pond is a man-made, entirely controlled water feature. It is lined with black plastic and receives water through a three-inch PVC pipe originating from a valve box west of the pond (shown on the Wetland Delineation map). Water in Cushing pond is kept at spillway elevation, except for times of maintenance, when the pond is drained. Figure 4b shows Cushing Pond empty, during a maintenance period.

When Cushing Pond reaches capacity, it spills through a narrow cobble-lined conveyance on the east side of the pond into the adjacent constructed rock-lined drainage (mapped as an intermittent stream).

No surface drainages feed Cushing Pond. The surface watershed for Cushing Pond is small and most of the water flowing toward the pond is intercepted by storm drains, ditches, or other landscaped features such as french drains and rocked or graveled areas. Only the immediate area around the pond (about 100 feet) contributes rain and snow runoff, conveyed through sheet flow, to the pond.

Vegetation

The study area would fall into a vegetation category of “disturbed” or “developed.” It contains turf, pavement, gravel, landscaping, structures, and other minor components of a developed landscape. Natural vegetation includes cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), one-seeded pussypaws (*Calyptridium monospermum*), mountain tarweed (*Madia glomerata*),



Looking upslope along rocky intermittent stream, from near Cushing Pond. *Photo date 9-24-15.*



Looking over intermittent stream at vertical culvert that carries water into storm drain system. *Photo date 9-24-15.*



Looking downstream along rocky intermittent stream. Cushing Pond on left. *Photo date 9-24-15.*



Figure 4a

SITE PHOTOS
Squaw Terminal
Olympic Valley, Placer County, CA

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Looking west over Cushing Pond.
Photo date 9-24-15.



Looking east over Cushing Pond.
Photo date 9-24-15.



Looking down into Cushing Pond
and twenty years of sediment
accumulation. *Photo date 9-24-15.*



Figure 4b

SITE PHOTOS

Squaw Terminal

Olympic Valley, Placer County, CA

bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*), thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*), pale mountain monardella (*Monardella odoratissima*), and common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). Woody vegetation includes quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), interior rose (*Rosa woodsii*), lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), and pacific willow (*Salix lasiandra*).

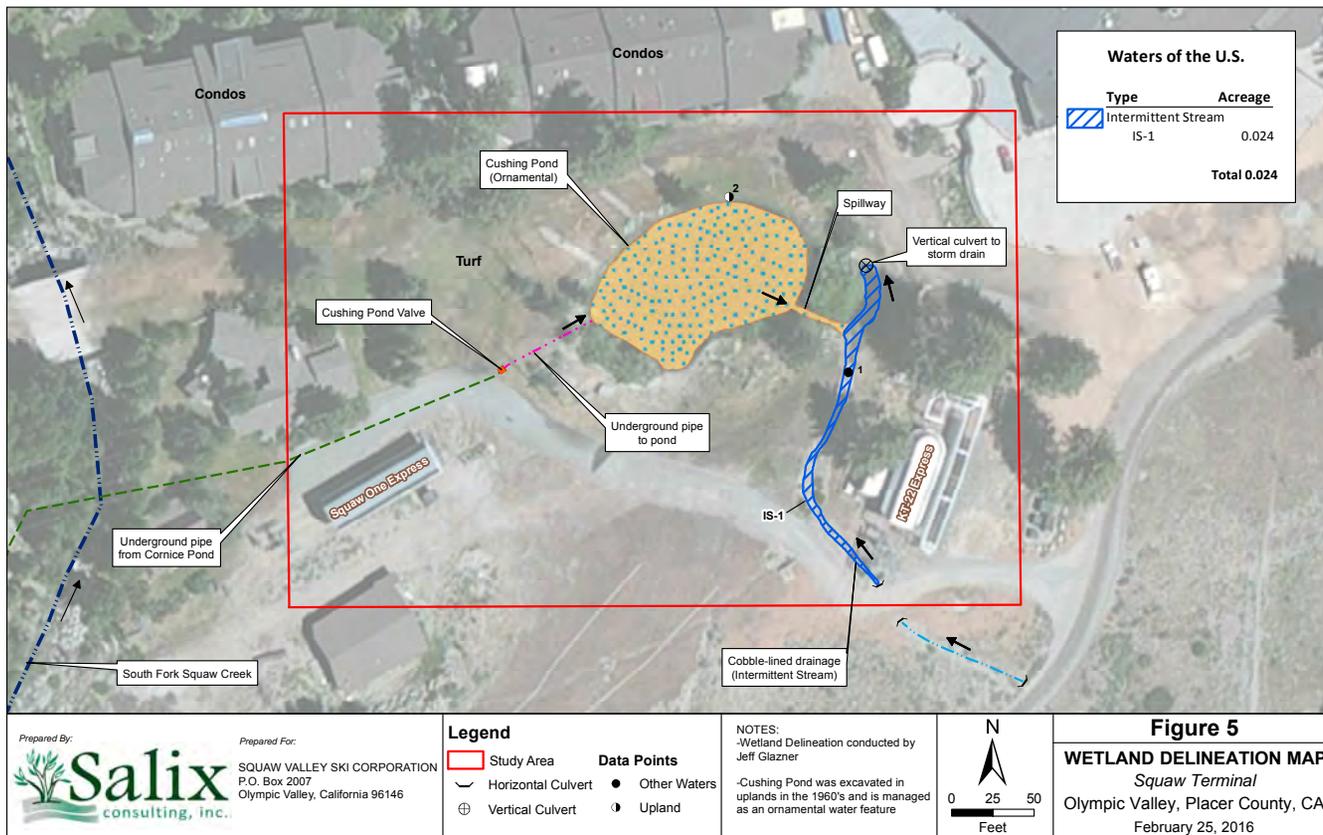
Waters of the United States

One type of waters of the U.S., intermittent stream, has been mapped on the study area for a total of 0.024-acre. The wetland delineation map is presented in Figure 5.

Intermittent Stream

The intermittent stream flows from the south, collecting water from the adjacent ski slope and focusing it into a rock-lined swale that flows into a vertical culvert and into the storm drain system. The mapped area of this curvilinear feature is 0.024 acre (Figure 4a).

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REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES

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- Lichvar, R.W., M. Butterwick, N.C. Melvin, and W.N. Kirchner. 2014. *The National Wetland Plant List: 2014 Update of Wetland Ratings*. *Phytoneuron* 2014-41: 1-42. Wetland Plant List- Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast.
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**Appendix A
Wetland Data Sheets**

WETLAND DETERMINATION DATA FORM – Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast Region

Project/Site: Squaw Valley Terminal 1 City/County: Olympic Valley/Placer Sampling Date: 9-24-15
 Applicant/Owner: Squaw Valley Ski Corporation State: CA Sampling Point: 01
 Investigator(s): J. Flahner Section, Township, Range: T16N R16E Sec 31
 Landform (hillslope, terrace, etc.): hillslope Local relief (concave, convex, none): Concave Slope (%): 3%
 Subregion (LRR): MLRA 22A Lat: 39°11'44" N Long: 120°14'13" W Datum: _____
 Soil Map Unit Name: Tallac Very gravelly sandy loam 2-30% slopes NWI classification: _____
 Are climatic / hydrologic conditions on the site typical for this time of year? Yes No _____ (If no, explain in Remarks.)
 Are Vegetation _____, Soil _____, or Hydrology _____ significantly disturbed? Are "Normal Circumstances" present? Yes No _____
 Are Vegetation _____, Soil _____, or Hydrology _____ naturally problematic? (If needed, explain any answers in Remarks.)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – Attach site map showing sampling point locations, transects, important features, etc.

Hydrophytic Vegetation Present?	Yes _____ No _____	Sampled area is in an other Waters. Is the Sampled Area within a Wetland? Yes _____ No _____
Hydric Soil Present?	Yes _____ No _____	
Wetland Hydrology Present?	Yes _____ No _____	
Remarks: <u>Mapped as an intermittent stream. Feature captures water from nearby ski slope and flows through a constructed rock lined swale.</u>		

VEGETATION – Use scientific names of plants.

Tree Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	Dominance Test worksheet:
1. _____				Number of Dominant Species That Are OBL, FACW, or FAC: _____ (A)
2. _____				Total Number of Dominant Species Across All Strata: _____ (B)
3. _____				
4. _____				Percent of Dominant Species That Are OBL, FACW, or FAC: _____ (A/B)
_____ = Total Cover				
Sapling/Shrub Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	Prevalence Index worksheet:
1. _____				Total % Cover of: _____ Multiply by: _____
2. _____				OBL species _____ x 1 = _____
3. _____				FACW species _____ x 2 = _____
4. _____				FAC species _____ x 3 = _____
5. _____				FACU species _____ x 4 = _____
_____ = Total Cover				UPL species _____ x 5 = _____
_____ = Total Cover				Column Totals: _____ (A) _____ (B)
_____ = Total Cover				Prevalence Index = B/A = _____
Herb Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	Hydrophytic Vegetation Indicators:
1. _____				1 - Rapid Test for Hydrophytic Vegetation
2. _____				2 - Dominance Test is >50%
3. _____				3 - Prevalence Index is ≤3.0 ¹
4. _____				4 - Morphological Adaptations ¹ (Provide supporting data in Remarks or on a separate sheet)
5. _____				5 - Wetland Non-Vascular Plants ¹
6. _____				Problematic Hydrophytic Vegetation ¹ (Explain)
7. _____				¹ Indicators of hydric soil and wetland hydrology must be present, unless disturbed or problematic.
8. _____				
9. _____				Hydrophytic Vegetation Present? Yes _____ No _____
10. _____				
11. _____				
_____ = Total Cover				
Woody Vine Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	
1. _____				
2. _____				
_____ = Total Cover				
% Bare Ground in Herb Stratum _____ = Total Cover				
Remarks: <u>Rocky channel sparsely vegetated with bull thistle, hairy willow herb and thimbleberry</u>				

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WETLAND DETERMINATION DATA FORM – Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast Region

Project/Site: Squaw Valley Terminal City/County: Olympic Valley, Placer Sampling Date: 9-24-15
 Applicant/Owner: Squaw Valley Ski Corporation State: CA Sampling Point: 02
 Investigator(s): J. Glazner Section, Township, Range: T16N R16E Sec 31
 Landform (hillslope, terrace, etc.): Hillslope Local relief (concave, convex, none): none Slope (%): 2%
 Subregion (LRR): MLRA 22A Lat: 39°11'44" N Long: 120°14'13" W Datum: _____
 Soil Map Unit Name: Tallic very gravelly sandy loam, 2-30% slopes NWI classification: _____
 Are climatic / hydrologic conditions on the site typical for this time of year? Yes No _____ (If no, explain in Remarks.)
 Are Vegetation _____, Soil _____, or Hydrology _____ significantly disturbed? Are "Normal Circumstances" present? Yes _____ No
 Are Vegetation _____, Soil _____, or Hydrology _____ naturally problematic? (If needed, explain any answers in Remarks.)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – Attach site map showing sampling point locations, transects, important features, etc.

Hydrophytic Vegetation Present?	Yes _____ No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is the Sampled Area within a Wetland?	Yes _____ No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hydric Soil Present?	Yes _____ No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Wetland Hydrology Present?	Yes _____ No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Remarks: <u>Sample location just above pond in turf.</u>			

VEGETATION – Use scientific names of plants.

Tree Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	Dominance Test worksheet: Number of Dominant Species That Are OBL, FACW, or FAC: _____ (A) Total Number of Dominant Species Across All Strata: _____ (B) Percent of Dominant Species That Are OBL, FACW, or FAC: _____ (A/B)
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	
3. _____	_____	_____	_____	
4. _____	_____	_____	_____	
= Total Cover				Hydrophytic Vegetation Indicators: ___ 1 - Rapid Test for Hydrophytic Vegetation ___ 2 - Dominance Test is >50% ___ 3 - Prevalence Index is ≤3.0' ___ 4 - Morphological Adaptations ¹ (Provide supporting data in Remarks or on a separate sheet) ___ 5 - Wetland Non-Vascular Plants ¹ ___ Problematic Hydrophytic Vegetation ¹ (Explain) ¹ Indicators of hydric soil and wetland hydrology must be present, unless disturbed or problematic.
Sapling/Shrub Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	
3. _____	_____	_____	_____	
4. _____	_____	_____	_____	
5. _____	_____	_____	_____	
= Total Cover				
Herb Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	
3. _____	_____	_____	_____	
4. _____	_____	_____	_____	
5. _____	_____	_____	_____	
6. _____	_____	_____	_____	
7. _____	_____	_____	_____	
8. _____	_____	_____	_____	
9. _____	_____	_____	_____	
10. _____	_____	_____	_____	
11. _____	_____	_____	_____	
= Total Cover				
Woody Vine Stratum (Plot size: _____)	Absolute % Cover	Dominant Species?	Indicator Status	
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	
= Total Cover				
% Bare Ground in Herb Stratum: _____				
Hydrophytic Vegetation Present? Yes _____ No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Remarks: <u>Turfgrass (mowed and not flowering)</u>				

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Sampling Point: 02

SOIL

Profile Description: (Describe to the depth needed to document the indicator or confirm the absence of indicators.)

Depth (inches)	Matrix		Redox Features				Texture	Remarks
	Color (moist)	%	Color (moist)	%	Type	Loc ¹		
3-8	10YR 3/3	100					Coarse loam	

¹Type: C=Concentration, D=Depletion, RM=Reduced Matrix, CS=Covered or Coated Sand Grains. ²Location: PL=Pore Lining, M=Matrix

Hydric Soil Indicators: (Applicable to all LRRs, unless otherwise noted.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Histosol (A1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sandy Redox (S5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Indicators for Problematic Hydric Soils ² :
<input type="checkbox"/> Histic Epipedon (A2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Stripped Matrix (S6)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 cm Muck (A10)
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Histic (A3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Loamy Mucky Mineral (F1) (except MLRA 1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Red Parent Material (TF2)
<input type="checkbox"/> Hydrogen Sulfide (A4)	<input type="checkbox"/> Loamy Gleyed Matrix (F2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Shallow Dark Surface (TF12)
<input type="checkbox"/> Depleted Below Dark Surface (A11)	<input type="checkbox"/> Depleted Matrix (F3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Explain in Remarks)
<input type="checkbox"/> Thick Dark Surface (A12)	<input type="checkbox"/> Redox Dark Surface (F6)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sandy Mucky Mineral (S1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Depleted Dark Surface (F7)	³ Indicators of hydrophytic vegetation and wetland hydrology must be present, unless disturbed or problematic.
<input type="checkbox"/> Sandy Gleyed Matrix (S4)	<input type="checkbox"/> Redox Depressions (F8)	

Restrictive Layer (if present):

Type: _____
 Depth (inches): _____

Hydric Soil Present? Yes _____ No

Remarks:
 Loamy soil, non native profile, in lawn.

HYDROLOGY

Wetland Hydrology Indicators:

Primary Indicators (minimum of one required; check all that apply)	Secondary Indicators (2 or more required)
<input type="checkbox"/> Surface Water (A1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Water-Stained Leaves (B9) (except MLRA 1, 2, 4A, and 4B)
<input type="checkbox"/> High Water Table (A2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Water-Stained Leaves (B9) (MLRA 1, 2, 4A, and 4B)
<input type="checkbox"/> Saturation (A3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Drainage Patterns (B10)
<input type="checkbox"/> Water Marks (B1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Aquatic Invertebrates (B13)
<input type="checkbox"/> Sediment Deposits (B2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Hydrogen Sulfide Odor (C1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Drift Deposits (B3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Oxidized Rhizospheres along Living Roots (C3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Algal Mat or Crust (B4)	<input type="checkbox"/> Presence of Reduced Iron (C4)
<input type="checkbox"/> Iron Deposits (B5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Recent Iron Reduction in Tilled Soils (C6)
<input type="checkbox"/> Surface Soil Cracks (B6)	<input type="checkbox"/> Stunted or Stressed Plants (D1) (LRR A)
<input type="checkbox"/> Inundation Visible on Aerial Imagery (B7)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Explain in Remarks)
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparsely Vegetated Concave Surface (B8)	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturation Visible on Aerial Imagery (C9)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Geomorphic Position (D2)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Shallow Aquitard (D3)
	<input type="checkbox"/> FAC-Neutral Test (D5)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Raised Ant Mounds (D6) (LRR A)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Frost-Heave Hummocks (D7)

Field Observations:

Surface Water Present? Yes _____ No _____ Depth (inches): _____
 Water Table Present? Yes _____ No _____ Depth (inches): _____
 Saturation Present? Yes _____ No _____ Depth (inches): _____
 (includes capillary fringe)

Wetland Hydrology Present? Yes _____ No

Describe Reported Data (stream gauge, monitoring well, aerial photos, previous inspections), if available:

Remarks:
 Upland landscape position just above rim of pond

Appendix B
Wetland Status of Plant Species Observed

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Appendix B - Squaw Terminal Plants Observed with Wetland Status

Taxon	Common Name	Wetland Status
<i>Abies concolor</i>	White fir	UPL
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Common yarrow	FACU
<i>Alnus incana subsp. tenuifolia</i>	Mountain alder	FACW
<i>Amelanchier utahensis</i>	Utah serviceberry	FACU
<i>Artemisia arbuscula subsp. longiloba</i>	Low sagebrush	UPL
<i>Bromus inermis</i>	Smooth brome	FACU
<i>Bromus tectorum</i>	Cheat grass	UPL
<i>Calyptidium monospermum</i>	One-seeded pussypaws	UPL
<i>Carex nebrascensis</i>	Nebraska sedge	OBL
<i>Carex sp.</i>	Sedge	VARIES
<i>Ceanothus cordulatus</i>	Mountain whitethorn	UPL
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Bull thistle	FACU
<i>Cornus sericea</i>	Creek dogwood	UPL
<i>Descurainia sophia</i>	Tansy mustard	UPL
<i>Eleocharis acicularis</i>	Least spikerush	OBL
<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	Squirreltail	FACU
<i>Elymus glaucus</i>	Blue wildrye	FACU
<i>Epilobium ciliatum</i>	Hairy willow-herb	FACW
<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	Common horsetail	FAC
<i>Ericameria nauseosa</i>	Rubber rabbitbrush	UPL
<i>Erythranthe guttata</i>	Common monkeyflower	OBL
<i>Juncus balticus subsp. ater</i>	Baltic rush	FACW
<i>Linum lewisii</i>	Prairie flax	UPL
<i>Madia glomerata</i>	Mountain tarweed	FACU
<i>Monardella odoratissima subsp. pallida</i>	Pale mountain monardella	FACU
<i>Pinus contorta subsp. murrayana</i>	Lodgepole pine	FAC
<i>Pinus jeffreyi</i>	Jeffrey pine	UPL
<i>Poa pratensis subsp. pratensis</i>	Kentucky bluegrass	FAC
<i>Populus tremuloides</i>	Quaking aspen	FACU
<i>Potentilla gracilis</i>	Slender cinquefoil	FAC
<i>Ribes nevadense</i>	Mountain pink currant	FAC
<i>Rosa woodsii subsp. ultramontana</i>	Interior rose	FACU
<i>Rubus parviflorus</i>	Thimbleberry	FAC
<i>Salix lasiandra</i>	Pacific willow	FACW
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Black elderberry	FAC
<i>Senecio integerrimus</i>	Mountain butterweed	FACU
<i>Sorbus californica</i>	California mountain ash	UPL
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Common dandelion	FACU

Taxon	Common Name	Wetland Status
<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>	Meadow salsify	UPL
<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	Woolly mullein	FACU
<i>Wyethia mollis</i>	Mountain mule's-ears	UPL

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Appendix C
Aquatic Resources Spreadsheet

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Waters_Name	Cowardin_Code	HGM_Code	Meas_Type	Amount	Units	Waters_Type	Latitude	Longitude	Local_Waterway
Intermittent Stream 1	R4SB2	RIVERINE	Area	0.024	ACRE	ISOLATE	39.1953	-120.237	Squaw Creek

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Attachment C
US Army Corps of Engineers Letter

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REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, SACRAMENTO DISTRICT
1325 J STREET
SACRAMENTO CA 95814-2922

April 18, 2016

Regulatory Division SPK-2012-00582

Squaw Valley Ski Corporation
Attn: Mr. Chevis Hosea
P.O. Box 2007
Olympic Valley, California 96146-2007

Dear Mr. Hosea:

We are responding to your agent's March 4, 2016, request for a preliminary jurisdictional determination (JD), in accordance with our Regulatory Guidance Letter (RGL) 08-02, for the Squaw Terminal site. The approximately 3-acre project site is located near Squaw Creek, Latitude 39.195471°, Longitude -120.237100°, Olympic Valley, Placer County, California.

Based on available information, **we concur with the amount and location of water bodies on the site as depicted on the enclosed February 25, 2016, Figure 5: Wetland Delineation Map, Squaw Terminal, Olympic Valley, Placer County, CA drawing prepared by Salix Consulting, Inc.** The approximately 0.024 acre of intermittent stream (IS-1) present within the survey area is a potential Water of the United States regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Alternatively, according to Title 33 CFR, Part 328.3[d], dated November 13, 1986, "artificial reflecting/swimming pools or other small ornamental bodies of water created by excavating and/or diking dry land to retain water for primarily aesthetic reasons are generally not considered to be Waters of the United States." Therefore, a Department of the Army Permit would not be required for activities in Cushing Pond. Cushing Pond is a man-made ornamental pond, constructed in the 1960's as a landscape amenity. It is approximately 0.15 acre in size, with a maximum depth of approximately 5 feet. The pond has a plastic liner and is surrounded by turf and landscaping.

Our disclaimer of jurisdiction is only for Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act and does not refer to, nor affect jurisdiction over any waters present on site. Other Federal, State, and local laws may apply to your activities. Therefore, in addition to contacting other Federal and local agencies, you should also contact state regulatory authorities to determine whether your activities may require other authorizations or permits. In particular, your proposed activity may still be regulated by the State of California's Regional Water Quality Control Boards.

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We have enclosed a copy of the *Preliminary Jurisdictional Determination Form* for this site. Please sign and return a copy of the completed form to this office. Once we receive a copy of the form with your signature we can accept and process a Pre-Construction Notification or permit application for your proposed project.

You should not start any work in potentially jurisdictional waters of the United States unless you have Department of the Army permit authorization for the activity. You may request an approved JD for this site at any time prior to starting work within waters. In certain circumstances, as described in RGL 08-02, an approved JD may later be necessary.

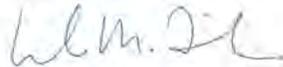
You should provide a copy of this letter and notice to all other affected parties, including any individual who has an identifiable and substantial legal interest in the property.

This preliminary determination has been conducted to identify the potential limits of wetlands and other water bodies which may be subject to Corps of Engineers' jurisdiction for the particular site identified in this request. A Notification of Appeal Process and Request for Appeal form is enclosed to notify you of your options with this determination. This determination may not be valid for the wetland conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985. If you or your tenant are U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program participants, or anticipate participation in USDA programs, you should request a certified wetland determination from the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, prior to starting work.

We appreciate your feedback. At your earliest convenience, please tell us how we are doing by completing the customer survey on our website under *Customer Service Survey*.

Please refer to identification number SPK-2012-00582 in any correspondence concerning this project. If you have any questions, please contact me at our California North Branch Office, Regulatory Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1325 J Street, Room 1350, Sacramento, California 95814-2922, by email at Leah.M.Fisher@usace.army.mil, or telephone at 916-557-6639. For more information regarding our program, please visit our website at www.spk.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory.aspx.

Sincerely,



Leah M. Fisher
Senior Regulatory Project Manager
California North Branch
Regulatory Division

Enclosures

cc: (w/o encls)
Mr. Jeff Glazner, Salix Consulting, Inc., JGlazner@salixinc.com

0071

WILMERHALE

Via electronic mail

June 11, 2018

U.S. Forest Service
 Tahoe National Forest, Truckee Ranger District
 c/o NEPA Contractor
 P.O. Box 2729
 Frisco, CO 80443

Michael Hazel

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**Re: Comments on the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base
 Gondola Project Draft EIS/EIR**

The following comments are submitted on behalf of Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows in response to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement / Environmental Impact Report ("DEIS/EIR") jointly prepared by Tahoe National Forest and Placer County regarding the proposed Base-to-Base Gondola.

0071-1

The Base-to-Base Gondola project proposes to connect Squaw Valley Ski Area to Alpine Meadows Ski Area via a gondola. A portion of the gondola will cross private property owned by Troy Caldwell. Mr. Caldwell's property is adjacent to, but *not* part of, the Granite Chief Wilderness. In fact, no part of the Base-to-Base Gondola would enter or cross Granite Chief under any of the alternatives analyzed in the DEIS/EIR. For that reason, the DEIS/EIR correctly concludes that the project would have "no direct effects" in the wilderness. *See* DEIS/EIR 4.3-1.

Nevertheless, because an aspirational wilderness boundary line encroaching on Mr. Caldwell's property was drawn on a map, there appears to be lingering confusion over (and in some cases attempts to mischaracterize) the proper legal treatment of Mr. Caldwell's property. But this historical anomaly does not change the analysis, and the law is clear: Mr. Caldwell's property is all private land and must be treated as such for purposes of analyzing each of the alternatives.

1. Mr. Caldwell's private property is not part of Granite Chief Wilderness.

0071-2

In the Wilderness Act of 1964, Congress designated certain pristine lands to be set aside as "wilderness areas." According to the statute's unambiguous text, however, only federally owned land was eligible to become wilderness. The law expressly defines the term "wilderness" as "an area of undeveloped *Federal* land." 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c) (emphasis added). And the National Wilderness Preservation System

Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP, 1225 17th Street, Suite 2600, Denver, Colorado 80202

Beijing Berlin Boston Brussels Denver Frankfurt London Los Angeles New York Palo Alto Washington

0071-1, Wilderness (W2)

The comment affirms the content of Section 4.3, "Wilderness," as it pertains to the significance of wilderness designation on private lands contained within or adjacent to designated wilderness areas. No further response is provided.

0071-2, Wilderness (W2)

The comment affirms the content of Section 4.3, "Wilderness," as it pertains to the significance of wilderness designation on private lands contained within or adjacent to designated wilderness areas. No further response is provided.

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0071-2
cont'd

created by the Act is solely “composed of *federally owned* areas.” *Id.* § 1131(a) (emphasis added).

The corollary, of course, is that non-federal land *cannot* be wilderness. Mr. Caldwell’s property is private land, not federal land. It therefore is not and cannot be wilderness.

Granite Chief was designated as a wilderness by the California Wilderness Act of 1984. Like the earlier Wilderness Act, the California Wilderness Act applies only to federal land. It created the Granite Chief Wilderness exclusively from “certain lands within the Tahoe National Forest.” Pub. L. No. 98-425, § 101(a)(10), 98 Stat. 1619, 1620 (1984).

Mr. Caldwell’s private property is not “within the Tahoe National Forest.” It thus could not have been, and in fact was not, included in the National Forest lands that became the Granite Chief Wilderness.

0071-3

2. Mr. Caldwell’s private property is not subject to the land-use restrictions applicable to federally owned wilderness areas.

Even though Mr. Caldwell’s private property is indisputably *not* part of Granite Chief, some continue to argue that it should nevertheless be subject to the same or similar land-use restrictions applicable to federally owned wilderness. There is no legal basis to do so; in fact, any such attempt would raise serious Constitutional questions under the Fifth Amendment’s Takings Clause.

On this point, we have some concern that the DEIS/EIR’s repeated use of the phrase “private lands within the congressionally mapped GCW” could be misleadingly employed by project opponents to suggest that Mr. Caldwell’s property can be treated as anything other than wholly private land. *See, e.g.*, DEIS/EIR 4.3-1. Fortunately, the DEIS/EIR rightly clarifies that “the land use management direction and restrictions imposed by the federal Wilderness Act of 1964 apply only to, and have meaning only upon, federal lands. In other words, the land use restrictions of the Wilderness Act of 1964 do not apply to private parcels, including the Caldwell property.” DEIS/EIR 4.3-2.

This conclusion is consistent with both the Wilderness Act’s and the California Wilderness Act’s recognition and preservation of the rights of existing private landowners. For example, the laws’ land-use restrictions are subject to “existing private rights” and “valid existing rights.” 16 U.S.C. § 1133(c); Pub. L. No. 98-425

0071-2 cont'd, Wilderness (W2)

0071-3, Wilderness (W2)

Regarding the use of the phrase “private lands within the congressionally mapped GCW” in the Draft EIS/EIR, it is important that these private lands be clearly distinguished from National Forest System-GCW lands in this analysis so that proper historical context can be provided regarding the evolution of land use management in the area. Section 4.3, “Wilderness” explains that the Caldwell property is wholly private land, and therefore, is not subject to the land use restrictions established by the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The remainder of the comment affirms the content of Section 4.3, “Wilderness” as it pertains to the significance of wilderness designation on private lands contained within or adjacent to designated wilderness areas.

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0071-3 cont'd, Wilderness (W2)

0071-4, Wilderness (W2)

The comment affirms the conclusions reached in Section 4.3, "Wilderness." No further response is provided.

0071-3
cont'd

§ 103(a). And private inholders are guaranteed rights of access to their properties. 16 U.S.C. § 1134(a); *see also* DEIS/EIR 4.3-5 (describing the Wilderness Act's protection of private-property rights).

Both the Wilderness Act and the California Wilderness Act also encourage the government to attempt to acquire private lands located within a designated wilderness area, either through purchase or exchange. 16 U.S.C. § 1134(a), (b); Pub. L. No. 98-425 § 103(c). This is further evidence that private land cannot be burdened by the same restrictions applicable to federally owned wilderness. If it could, there would be little reason for the government to acquire such private land; it could simply impose the desired limitations without incurring the costs associated with actually purchasing the property.

0071-4

3. Mr. Caldwell's past and current uses of his private property confirm it is not subject to wilderness-like land-use restrictions.

The Wilderness Act describes wilderness as "undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation," which is "untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c). Thus, permanent roads, structures, and motorized transport are generally prohibited in wilderness areas. *Id.* § 1133(c).

No such restrictions apply to Mr. Caldwell's property, which is characterized by permanent roads and structures (including installed lift towers), dwellings, human habitation, and regular motorized transport. Indeed, the DEIS/EIR recognizes that a "road runs through a section of these private lands within the congressionally mapped GCW and is frequently used by the property owner." DEIS/EIR 4.3-2.

No government official has suggested that these activities are prohibited on Mr. Caldwell's property, and any such suggestion would be contrary to well-settled law. Thus, in addition to the fact that Mr. Caldwell's private property is not "Federal land" and thus by definition cannot be wilderness, Mr. Caldwell's past and current uses of his property further confirm that it is not part of Granite Chief—and that the Forest Service has not historically treated it as such, either legally or practically.

0071

0071-5, Wilderness (W2)

The comment affirms the conclusion reached in Section 4.3, "Wilderness," that the land use restrictions established by the Wilderness Act of 1964 cannot be imposed on the Caldwell property. No further response is provided.

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Page 4

0071-5

4. Mr. Caldwell's private property is not "potential wilderness," and there is no authority to restrict his use of his property on that basis.

Some private parties have suggested that Mr. Caldwell's property should not be (further) developed based on the idea that the Forest Service, at some point in the future, might want to acquire the property and annex it to the wilderness. There is no legal authority, however, for the Forest Service to indefinitely treat Mr. Caldwell's property as "potential wilderness" and subject it to the same land-use restrictions as federally designated wilderness.

When Congress intends to designate non-wilderness land as "potential wilderness," it does so clearly and expressly—not with non-binding lines on a map, but with unambiguous statutory language. The California Wilderness Act, for example, identified by name certain non-wilderness lands to be considered for future wilderness designation (called "planning areas" or "potential wilderness"). Pub. L. No. 98-425 §§ 102, 106, 108. Mr. Caldwell's property was *not* on that list, nor was any land within or adjacent to Tahoe National Forest. This is a clear indication that Congress did not intend Mr. Caldwell's property to be treated as potential wilderness.

Moreover, even as to the lands that Congress did identify as potential wilderness in 1984, that was a temporary designation, not a permanent land status: the Secretary of Agriculture had four years to review the suitability of planning areas for inclusion as wilderness (*i.e.*, until 1988). Pub. L. No. 98-425 § 102(b). Thereafter, lands that did not become part of the wilderness would no longer be managed so as to preserve their "wilderness character." Given the strict four-year time limit imposed on lands actually designated as potential wilderness, there is clearly no justification for purporting to impose such land-use restrictions 30 years later on Mr. Caldwell's private property—which was never so designated.

Finally, to the extent the Forest Service desired to acquire Mr. Caldwell's property, the California Wilderness Act directed the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into negotiations to acquire the property via exchange or purchase. Pub. L. No. 98-425 § 103(c). Although 34 years have now passed since Granite Chief's designation, the Forest Service could still offer to purchase Mr. Caldwell's land and either maintain it as front country National Forest or seek to convert it to wilderness. What it *cannot* do, even if urged by others, is restrict Mr. Caldwell's use of his land as if such a sale and conversion has already taken place. Indeed, as already mentioned,

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0071-5 | any attempt to impose the Wilderness Act's land-use restrictions on Mr. Caldwell's
cont'd adjacent private property without just compensation could violate the Constitution.

0071-6 | **5. The DEIS/EIR erroneously found an “adverse effect” by impermissibly
applying wilderness criteria to Mr. Caldwell’s private property.**

As explained, the distinction in the law between wilderness and private land is clear, which the DEIS/EIR recognizes unequivocally in multiple places. *See, e.g.*, DEIS/EIR 4.3-2 (“[T]he land use restrictions of the Wilderness Act of 1964 do not apply to private parcels, including the Caldwell property”); *id.* at 4.3-5 (“These restrictions [imposed on federal wilderness areas] do not apply to private lands within congressionally mapped wilderness areas such as the Caldwell property.”). Yet despite acknowledging this distinction, the DEIS/EIR then inexplicably ignores it by including Impact 4.3-5 in its analysis.

The DEIS/EIR defines Impact 4.3-5 as “effects on potential wilderness characteristics on private lands within the congressionally mapped Granite Chief Wilderness.” *See* DEIS/EIR 4.3-13. It then concludes that, because the gondola’s proposed alignment under Alternative 2 “would reduce the untrammelled, undeveloped, and natural qualities” of *Mr. Caldwell’s* property (but *not* Granite Chief itself), it would have an “adverse effect” under NEPA.

This conclusion is contrary to law and directly contradicts statements elsewhere in the DEIS/EIR regarding the non-wilderness status of Mr. Caldwell’s private property. Indeed, in the paragraph immediately preceding the finding of an adverse effect, the DEIS/EIR acknowledges that development on Mr. Caldwell’s property is “legally permissible” because wilderness-like restrictions “apply only to NFS lands and cannot be enforced on private lands even if the private lands lie within the congressionally mapped wilderness boundary.” DEIS/EIR 4.3-13.

Only federally owned wilderness areas can and must be managed to retain their “untrammelled, undeveloped, and natural qualities.” That standard does not apply to non-wilderness lands. Because Mr. Caldwell’s private property is not wilderness, he has no obligation—and the Forest Service cannot constitutionally require him—to preserve his property as if it were wilderness. Nor, as just explained, is Mr. Caldwell’s property “potential wilderness”: it was not designated as such when Granite Chief was created, and even if it had been, that designation would have expired 30 years ago.

0071-5 cont'd, Wilderness (W2)

0071-6, Wilderness (W2)

Actual wilderness characteristics are not applied to the Caldwell Property under Impact 4.3-5 because they are not applicable for management of the privately owned Caldwell Property, as stated by the commenter. However, some discussion of the potential wilderness characteristics of the Caldwell Property is warranted for two reasons:

First, the indicator guiding analysis in this section explicitly calls for discussion of the private lands with congressional designation and the applicability of Forest Service management on those lands (please refer to page 4.3-8 of the Draft EIS/EIR).

As such, and contrary to the commenter's closing point, the extent to which the Caldwell Property reflects potential wilderness characteristics is not irrelevant under NEPA. While the California Wilderness Act of 1984 did provide direction for the Forest Service to "...enter into negotiations to acquire by exchange all or part of any privately owned lands within the national forest wilderness areas designated by this title," the Caldwell property owners have not in the past nor are they currently interested in conveying this property to the United States. The future acquisition of this property by the Forest Service, and its possible inclusion into the National Forest System-Granite Chief Wilderness (GCW), are beyond the scope of this analysis. While the development of private lands may negatively impact potential wilderness characteristics, those impacts may not necessarily be permanent nor would they preclude future inclusion of those lands into a National Forest System wilderness area if

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such private lands are acquired by the Forest Service in the future. In 2017, for example, private lands that previously contained roads and structures were acquired by the Forest Service and are now included within the National Forest System-GCW.

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0071-6 cont'd, Wilderness (W2)

0071-7, Wilderness (W2)

The comment affirms the conclusions reached in Section 4.3, "Wilderness." No further response is provided.

0071-6
cont'd

In short, only wilderness can be treated as wilderness. The Forest Service erred by imposing inapplicable wilderness criteria on Mr. Caldwell's private property to find an adverse effect under Alternative 2. The extent to which Mr. Caldwell's private property may reflect those wilderness characteristics now or in the future is simply irrelevant under NEPA. The DEIS/EIR's finding of an "adverse effect" is legally erroneous; the Final EIS/EIR should eliminate Impact 4.3-5 from its analysis.

* * *

0071-7

Mr. Caldwell's private property is not part of Granite Chief Wilderness, and an aspirational line on a map encroaching on his property does not change that fact. There is no lawful basis for treating his property as if it were wilderness, and land-use restrictions applicable only to federal wilderness areas may not be imposed on Mr. Caldwell's property without raising serious Constitutional concerns.

Sincerely,



Michael J.P. Hazel
Andrew L. Spielman
Counsel for Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows

0072



0072-1, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided below. See responses to the detailed comments below.

Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League

June 11, 2018

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% NEPA Contractor
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Frisco, CO 80443
Comments@squawalpinegondola-eis.com

Placer County Planning Department
Attn: Shirlee Herrington, Env. Coord. Services
3091 County Center DCr.
Auburn, CA 95603
cdraecs@placer.ca.gov

RE: Comments Regarding the Proposed Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Draft EIR/EIS

Dear Ms Herrington and Mr Ilano:

0072-1

The Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League is deeply concerned about several issues either raised in the DEIR/DEIS, omitted or glossed over in the DEIR/DEIS.

Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League
P.O. Box 2244, Olympic Valley, CA 96146

0072

0072-2

The Public Interest

Fundamental to the NEPA and CEQA evaluations is determining what is in the public interest, or conversely, what is not in, or is detrimental, to the public interest. The DEIR/DEIS points out a number of project results that would diminish and adversely impact public resources and Public Trust Assets, including:

- Air quality and associated public health impacts in a location that already fails to meet state and federal clean air standards, including the additional air impacts related to White Wolf, two more chairlifts, more skiers and more transportation emissions.
- Noise, temporary and permanent, that will unequivocally diminishes the intrinsic value of quietness in the Granite Chief Wilderness, as well as in Alpine Meadows and on the Five Lakes Trail
- Permanent loss and likely direct “taking” of Federal and state wildlife Endangered Species and their habitat
- Visual resources permanently marred by Gasex Exploders, steel towers, cables, gondola cars, new roads in pristine locations, and other permanent scars on the landscape
- Permanent loss of a designated wilderness area (all three build alternatives include road construction inside the designated wilderness, thus denying that designated wilderness area from ever fulfilling the intent of the Congress and public, ie completing the federal protections intended for the Granite Chief Wilderness)
- Permanent traffic Level of Service degradations, on the public’s county and state roadways
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions increases when the county, state and federal governments should be refusing any activity that might contribute to further degradation of the public’s inherent and legal interests in a safe and healthy climate future
- Growth-inducing consequence of the proposed action in an environment already exceeding its carrying capacity (evidenced by poor to miserable traffic

Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League
P.O. Box 2244, Olympic Valley, CA 96146

0072-2, Other (O2)

The comment summarizes the commenter's view of the project's environmental impacts. The Draft EIS/EIR summarizes the project's significant impacts in Tables ES-3 and 2-3, and the project's significant and unavoidable impacts are identified in Section 5.2.1, "Significant Environmental Effects than Cannot Be Avoided." Each impact issue listed in the comment is evaluated in the EIS/EIR: Air Quality - Section 4.10; Noise - Section 4.9; Granite Chief Wilderness - Section 4.3; Trails - Section 4.1; Endangered Wildlife - Section 4.14; Visual Resources - Section 4.2; Traffic - Section 4.7; Greenhouse Gases - Section 4.11; Growth Inducing Impacts - Section 5.2.3.

The comment also states that “the narrow range of action alternatives fails to meet the intent and requirements” of CEQA and NEPA. See response to comment 0072-5, below, regarding the alternatives analysis. See response to comment 0072-6, below, regarding the Federal Transportation Act.

0072

0072-2
cont'd

conditions, non-compliance of air quality standards; non-compliance of water quality standards; housing crises for workers; and continued native species losses in Squaw and Alpine)

- Permanent diminishment and loss of Federal Transportation Act Section 4(f) public resources

These impacts that would result from the gondola project are some of the 17 significant/adverse impacts of each of the build alternatives. Based on federal and state case law we submit that the narrow range of action alternatives fails to meet the intent and requirements of the applicable laws. Please provide further discussions in the Final regarding the justification for such narrowly framed alternatives that provide little to no relief of the many adverse impacts. How will the two agencies assess the public interests tied to the loss and degradation of all these natural and social resources? How will you help the public understand the “weight” of the range and extent of these public resource impacts compared to a seasonal convenience of a small population?

0072-3

The Public Interest is served when the project’s Purpose and Need (Federal) and the project Purpose and Objectives (county) are evaluated and weighed against the adverse impacts and potential diminishment of public resources.

The Federal “Purpose” per the DEIS is to “improve developed winter recreation opportunities...” The Federal “Need” is to respond to a request from Squaw Valley to amend the Special Use Permit so they can “improve connectivity between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley.” The several factors driving this need are convenience-based (see page 1-4). The Federal planning and management documents the Forest Service is using to determine use consistency (per the DEIS/DEIR) are 28 years old and outdated re: species protections, GHG’s, traffic, water quality, air quality, light pollution, recreation trends and other resource considerations. The FEIR/FEIS should describe the shortfalls of those planning documents and how the TNF is employing relevant considerations to meet today’s public interest obligations.

0072-4

Placer County’s stated “Purpose” is to provide “more convenient access to skiable terrain and resort amenities.” The Objectives of the county include more convenient access, maybe faster inter- resort access, less shuttle service, easier access to existing terrain, and infrastructure to serve the gondola (Gasex Exploders, , etc).

Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League
P.O. Box 2244, Olympic Valley, CA 96146

0072-2 cont'd, Other (O2)

0072-3, Purpose and Need (P&N)

The proposed project would require an amendment to the existing Forest Service Special Use Permit (SUP) issued for the operation and maintenance of Alpine Meadows. SUPs and amendments to SUPs must be consistent with the applicable Forest Plan. The TNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (1990) and the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (2004) provide the most up-to-date guidance from the Forest Service on management of Tahoe National Forest lands, and SUPs must be consistent with those documents.

Discussion of the perceived shortfalls of the Forest Plan and Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment would extend beyond the scope of this analysis.

0072-4, Purpose and Need (P&N)

As is directed by NEPA and CEQA statutory guidelines, the Draft EIS/EIR analyzes potential impacts to the environment that would result from implementation of the proposed project. The goal of the Draft EIS/EIR is to provide clear analysis of impacts that would occur to individual resources.

Weighing of beneficial and adverse impacts is the role of the respective decisionmakers. The EIS/EIR is intended to provide the decisionmakers with the best available data and analysis related to potential impacts on individual resources; with that information, the decisionmakers will determine whether or not the project, with all of its impacts (both beneficial and adverse/significant), would meet

0072

the project's identified purpose and need and/or CEQA project objectives. Skier convenience is not an environmental impact, and is therefore not quantified in the EIS/EIR.

Please refer to the Draft Record of Decision and the Placer County Board of Supervisors decision on this project, which provide detailed rationale on how the project would or would not meet the project's identified Forest Service purpose and need and/or CEQA project objectives.

This comment will be forwarded to the Forest Supervisor of the TNF and the Placer County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to take into consideration when making a decision regarding the project.

0072

0072-4
cont'd

Given these county and Federal purpose, need and objective statements we are struck by the fact that the project has limited benefits to the general public; especially all non-skiers, skiers that choose one resort or the other for a given day, skiers that don't want Alpine any "closer" to Squaw, and the tens of thousands of hikers that would have to cross under the gondola facilities throughout the (expanding) hiking seasons. The "convenience" need is, based on the DEIR/DEIS (pages 1-2 and 1-3), for an apparently small segment of the winter skier population at Squaw or Alpine (less than 5%).

We ask the Final EIR/EIS to provide clear and rational discussion and analysis of the "skier convenience." How will "convenience" be quantified for decision-makers and how this "convenience" will be weighed against the substantial adverse impacts to the public's resources. This "weighing" exercise will be particularly relevant for the public's understanding of the selection of a narrow set of alternatives. This discussion would also help the public understand how "significance" of impacts is balanced against "convenience" of a select population group. The FEIR/S could also set a clearer stage for the subsequent regulatory tests anticipated, given the significance of impacts to such a wide range of resources the public has deemed valuable and worth protecting (air quality, visual resources, hiking trails, Wilderness, water quality, night sky, endangered species, etc).

We ask that the Forest Service and the county define the thresholds for allowing irreversible and irretrievable environmental impacts when Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 are driven by no more than "skier convenience."

Alternatives

0072-5

NEPA and the federal courts are clear: agencies must "rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives." In CEQA case law we find that "without meaningful analysis of alternatives in the DEIR neither the courts nor the public can fulfill their proper roles in the CEQA process." Given the purpose and need declarations in the DEIR/S several other alternatives warrant full NEPA and CEQA analysis. We find the DEIR/S deficient in it's overly narrow and deceptive selection of three build alternatives, all dependent on a gondola and all located to serve a future resort development.

0072-6

Per the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) the project must fully consider all "Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives" (RPAs) that would avoid impacts to any

Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League
P.O. Box 2244, Olympic Valley, CA 96146

0072-4 cont'd, Purpose and Need (P&N)

0072-5, Alternatives (A)

In September 2015 and October 2015, the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) and County, respectively, accepted applications from Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC (SVSH), the project proponent, to install, operate, and maintain an aerial ropeway system (gondola) connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. The TNF needs to respond to SVSH's land use application, which proposes additional lift infrastructure be approved 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 (SVGPLUO) 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 alternatives was developed to meet the project objectives. The EIS/EIR analyzes in detail the No Action Alternative and three action alternatives. Strong indicators of impact differences between the action alternatives (Key Issues) are discussed in Section 2.4.1 of the EIS/EIR. Additionally, four alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis, including improvements to the existing shuttle system, alternative route alignments, a buffer zone around the National Forest System-Granite Chief Wilderness, and alternative technologies. These alternatives were ultimately eliminated from detailed analysis because they failed to meet the Forest

0072

Service purpose and need and/or the CEQA project objectives. Section 2.3 of the Final EIS/EIR provides additional information on these alternatives considered but not evaluated further, and provides rationale related to why they were eliminated from detailed analysis.

0072-6, Alternatives (A)

The comment states that the Endangered Species Act requires consideration of all "Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives" that would avoid impacts to endangered or threatened species and their habitats. As set forth in the Draft EIS/EIR, the action alternatives would have direct and indirect effects on SNYLF critical habitat. The project incorporates multiple RPMs to lessen these impacts, to the extent feasible, as required by Forest Service and Placer County policy. For those impacts that cannot feasibly be avoided, mitigation is recommended that would require compensatory habitat at a 3:1 ratio. For this reason, the project would not result in a net reduction of SNYLF critical habitat (please refer to the discussion contained within Impacts 4.14-1 and 4.14-2 of the EIS/EIR, and pages 2-38 through 2-40 of the Draft EIS/EIR).

In addition, the EIS/EIR considers alternative gondola alignments that would minimize potential impacts to SNYLF (Alternatives 3 and 4).

For further information on the development of alternatives that were analyzed in detail in the EIS/EIR, as well as those alternatives that were ultimately eliminated from detailed analysis in the EIS/EIR, please refer to comment response #0072-5 immediately above. With respect to shuttle/ground transportation alternatives, see the Master Response entitled "Improvements to Existing Shuttle

0072

System Alternative," in Section 1.8, "Master Responses." Also see Section 2.3.2 of the Draft EIS/EIR where alternatives considered but not evaluated further are analyzed, including multiple alternative route alignments and a buffer zone around wilderness alternative.

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0072-6
cont'd

endangered or threatened species and their habitats. Given that the purpose of the gondola is for intermittent (day-by-day) skier convenience, these alternatives do not include the full range of RPAs that are available to the applicant. The DEIR/DEIS is insufficient in this regard and we request that the Final EIR/S describe and fully evaluate other alternatives that would meet the “convenience” purpose of the gondola. Alternatives we would expect the courts to require include, at the least, various shuttle/ground transportation options and gondola routes near the already built (but never operated) Caldwell “Chairlift #1.”

0072-7

Under the US Transportation Act Section 4(f), per the statute, the regulatory language and US Supreme Court decisions, this gondola would, under all three build alternatives, fall within the Section 4(f) provisions and requirements for compliance. Thus the action alternatives must include all “Feasible and Prudent Alternatives” that would avoid the identified adverse impacts to the Granite Chief Wilderness, the Five Lakes Basin and the Five Lakes Trail. Again, the DEIR/S action alternatives fail to include “feasible and prudent alternatives” that would avoid or greatly reduce impacts to Section 4(f) resources. The Final EIR/EIS must include alternatives that meet the purpose and intent of this law.

Public Trust Protections

0072-8

As we stated in scoping comments the Designated Granite Chief Wilderness, the Five Lakes Basin, the Five Lakes Trail, at-risk-species and associated natural resources are Public Trust Assets and must be protected by our government agencies for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The DEIR/S fails to describe the Public Trust Assets the USFS has responsibility to steward and protect. The EIR/EIS should describe the responsibilities of the US Forest Service for Trust Assets the USFS stewards for the beneficiaries of these resources. The US and the California Supreme Courts have determined that public agencies hold Public Trust responsibilities for protection of Public Trust resources. The Final EIR/S needs to include descriptions of the trust assets potentially effected by the action alternatives and how those trust resources will be appropriately stewarded for future generations.

Irrevocable Loss of Wilderness

0072-9

The Granite Chief Wilderness is a Public Trust Resource (or, Trust Asset). The designation of this Wilderness by Congress was based on a sincere and dedicated public campaign to permanently protect the wilderness values for future

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0072-6 cont'd, Alternatives (A)

0072-7, Alternatives (A)

The comment states that the alternatives analysis in the Draft EIS/EIR does not comply with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. For a discussion of this statute, and its applicability to the project, please see response to comment #0166-48.

0072-8, Wilderness (W2)

Public trust assets like the GCW, Five Lakes Basin, Five Lakes Trail and at-risk-species were wholly analyzed in the Draft EIS/EIR. Please refer to Section 4.3, "Wilderness" for discussion of potential impacts to the GCW; Section 4.1, "Recreation" for discussion of potential impacts to the Five Lakes Basin and Five Lakes Trail; and Section 4.14, "Wildlife and Aquatics" for discussion of potential impacts to special-status wildlife species.

0072-9, Wilderness (W2)

The potential wilderness characteristics of the Caldwell property do not currently remain intact, as there is an existing segment of low standard, native surface road on the land, as well as a single family residence, outbuildings and an incomplete, private ski lift referred to as "KT South." Please refer to Pages 4.3-4 and 4.3-13 of Section 4.3, "Wilderness."

The proposed temporary road for construction would be located on private lands within the congressionally mapped GCW, where the land use restrictions established by the Wilderness Act of

0072

1964 do not apply. Still, Impact 4.3-5 discusses the impacts that implementation of any of the action alternatives (including construction of the temporary road for construction) would have on the potential wilderness characteristics of those private lands within the congressionally mapped GCW (i.e., the Caldwell property).

If the project were to be approved, the decisionmaker maintains the authority to condition specific project components (i.e., approve installation of the gondola but deny the use of a temporary road for construction); however, an action alternative excluding this temporary road for construction is not required.

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0072-9
cont'd

generations. The boundary was mapped to protect the vital features of the wilderness, including the intent to protect the Area from ski development (per the Congressional Record). The USFS failed in its charge from Congress to purchase all lands within the designated boundary, leaving a piece of the boundary outside federal ownership. That piece of land is still available for permanent protection as all its wilderness values remain intact. (In fact, the property owner has been approached by private parties to “do the right thing” and sell that undevelopable piece at full value, for the public good).

However, the three build alternatives all provide for a “temporary road for construction” to be built inside the Wilderness Boundary. The Forest Service owes the public the full disclosure of how that road could, or would, irrevocably deny the public the opportunity to see and experience the completion of the Granite Chief Wilderness. We find the DEIR/S arguably cavalier in its treatment of this access road. The construction of that road would take away something irreplaceable, irrevocable and of national interest. A build alternative that does not include this road must be included for full evaluation in the FEIR/S. Any claim that an alternative construction access road is not feasible will be met with great skepticism and would require extensive technical documentation in the FEIR/S.

White Wolf Development

0072-10

Reading the DEIR/S and the narrow choices of build alternatives leads the reader to conclude that there are operational and infrastructure relationships between the White Wolf development, completion of the existing partially built Caldwell chairlift #1 and the additional chairlift Caldwell and Squaw have been promoting (developing Estelle Bowl via the Rollers chairlift). If there is no relationship between one or more of these anticipated developments, please explain why these three gondola routes all purposely connect to the White Wolf Resort?

The EIR/S is deficient in disclosing to the public the relationship of the three build alignments with the other developments that Mr. Caldwell has been promoting for his property. Please describe the operational relationships and the potential dependencies between these developments. What are the cumulative impacts that the gondola would trigger at White Wolf? As reviewers of the EIR/S we are lacking an understanding of how these “separate” projects are financially or operationally inter-related and/or inter-connected. If in fact the build alternatives are to serve White Wolf, is that why we do not see alternatives further east (that would substantively reduce several significant impacts described in the DEIR/S)?

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0072-9 cont'd, Wilderness (W2)

0072-10, Cumulative Effects (CE)

See responses to comments 0072-5 and 0072-6, above, regarding the range of alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIS/EIR and the alternatives considered but eliminated from further evaluation.

The White Wolf Project and the Rollers lift are included in Table 3-3 and Exhibit 3-1 of the Draft EIS/EIR as projects considered in the cumulative effects analysis. (Draft EIS/EIR, pp. 3-12, 3-13, 3-14; see Alpine Meadows Master Development Plan, Table 3-3 entry #1, for Rollers Chair.) See response to comment 0166-6 regarding the White Wolf Project and its relationship to the proposed gondola project. The Rollers lift is a planned but unpermitted and unimplemented chairlift (proposed as part of the *Alpine Meadows Ski Area Master Development Plan* [Tahoe National Forest 2015]). Its bottom terminal would be near the Alpine Meadows mid-station under Alternative 2 (meaning that under Alternative 2, skiers could exit the gondola at the Alpine Meadows mid-station and ski/walk to the Rollers lift).

Caldwell's chairlift #1 (referred to in the Draft EIS/EIR as “KT South”) is an existing chairlift and is therefore considered as part of the existing setting for purposes of the cumulative impacts analysis. (See Draft EIS/EIR, page 3-11 “[p]ast and current projects in the project vicinity were also considered as part of the cumulative setting, as they contribute to the existing conditions/baseline upon which the alternatives and each probable future project's environmental effects are compared, but are not listed in Table 3-3.”) It is not reasonably foreseeable that the chairlift would be operated

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because there are no known plans for operation at this time. In addition, even if the chairlift were operated, it is a private chairlift and is approved for use only by friends and guests of the property owner with a limit of 25 users per day. The lift also cannot be operated for commercial purposes. Because use of the chairlift would be limited in these ways (per the conditions of approval issued by Placer County) it would not add substantially to traffic, noise, recreational, or other impacts and would not alter the evaluation of cumulative effects of the gondola project in connection with other probable future projects evaluated in Sections 4.1 through 4.17 in the Draft EIS/EIR.

The White Wolf Project would be located on the privately owned Caldwell lands located between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, and would include a 38-lot subdivision, a clubhouse/lodge, a chairlift, and seasonal recreational facilities. For all three action alternatives, the proposed gondola alignments would be partially constructed and operated within the White Wolf property.

Completion of the gondola project is independent of the White Wolf Project, and similarly, the White Wolf Project is moving forward independent of the gondola project. Although both projects share a geographic location, neither project has dependency on the other to move forward. In other words, from a CEQA standpoint, they are considered to have "independent utility." Thus, the White Wolf development is not, nor should it be, part of the purpose and need and project objectives of the proposed gondola project.

An Environmental Questionnaire application for the White Wolf project was provided to Placer County in 2016 and its status was incomplete at the time the

0072

Draft EIS/EIR was released. However, the application is now completed. Completion of the gondola project is independent of the White Wolf project, and similarly the White Wolf project is moving forward independent of the gondola.

The Rollers lift is a planned but unpermitted and unimplemented chairlift (proposed as part of the Alpine Meadows Master Development Plan). Its bottom terminal would be near the Alpine Meadows mid-station under Alternative 2 (meaning that under Alternative 2, skiers could exit the gondola at the Alpine Meadows mid-station and ski/walk to the Rollers lift). The Rollers lift is included in the Draft EIS/EIR's list of cumulative projects (see Table 3-3 and Exhibit 3-1; see Alpine Meadows Master Development Plan, map label 1) and cumulative effects of both project being in operation are addressed in the EIS/EIR cumulative effects analysis.

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0072-10
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Should the White Wolf connection be part of the project purpose and objectives? Please explain. Why did the DEIR/S choose to not seriously evaluate direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of these four developments (gondola, Caldwell chair #1, White Wolf and Estelle Bowl/Rollers chair)?

GHG's

0072-11

The action alternatives have greater GHG impacts than the DEIR/S discloses. Several sources, both during construction and long term operations and maintenance, will have emissions that are not disclosed in the DEIR/S (tower excavations, buildings construction, Gasex operations, timber operations, etc). Additionally, increases in skier days expected by Squaw include more air travel and more distance auto travel (Sacramento, San Francisco, San Jose, etc). These are indirect and cumulative impacts that are a legitimate and important concern of the public, as it does directly impact our climate. These are land use and Forest Use issues, not to be kicked down the road to another agency.

The DEIR/S states that even though there will be increased emissions (which the FEIR/S needs to more accurately estimate) the document dismisses these emissions as insignificant. We find this conclusion inappropriate and regrettable for public agencies to claim. The Final EIR/S should instead demonstrate how a project can in fact achieve zero, or close to zero, net emissions. All credible science points to the desperate and unequivocal need for all entities to achieve zero GHG emissions. The applicant (and USFS and county) has numerous opportunities to substantively offset the carbon footprint of this project. We request the county and the USFS to step up and actively help the applicant identify and implement GHG reductions and offsets. Squaw claims to be "green" after all. It is not in the public interest to give a free pass on emissions.

Gasex Exploders

0072-12

Recent experience in Alpine Meadows with the just-installed Gasex Exploders above Alpine Meadows Rd indicates far greater noise and vibration impacts than the DEIR/S describes. Residents experienced "very loud," "frightening" and "house shaking" when an exploder was recently set off. The eight proposed exploders are not necessary without a gondola. Eight exploders appear to present a potentially very significant noise and disturbance intrusion on all residents of Alpine Meadows. The DEIR/S appears dismissive as to the human and wildlife impacts of these exploders. More detailed and thorough evaluations of the actual

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0072-10 cont'd, Cumulative Effects (CE)

0072-11, Greenhouse Gases (GHG)

The comment states that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were not sufficiently quantified for both construction and operations. It further states that increases in skier days would result in more air and auto travel-associated GHG emissions that were not quantified. The comment disagrees with the less-than-significant conclusion and recommends the project achieve zero GHG emissions.

Emissions associated with construction and operation of the project are shown, by source, in Table 4.11-1 of the Draft EIS/EIR. Construction activities that were evaluated included site preparation, grading, building construction, and mobile-sources from worker commute, vendor deliveries, and material hauling activities. Operational-related emissions included increases in vehicle traffic associated with increased skier days, operation of the gondola, and long-term maintenance activities.

The comment states that the Draft EIS/EIR failed to calculate the GHG emissions from timber operations. The discussion of Impact 4.12-3 in the Draft EIS/EIR provides an estimate of the number of trees removed under each alternative, up to 328 trees under Alternative 2, up to 237 trees under Alternative 3, and up to 214 trees under Alternative 4. Marketable trees would be removed for processing into lumber. As described on page 2.13 of the Draft EIS/EIR, "tree removal would be accomplished via helicopter, skidding, hauling off-site, chipping, or lop-and-scatter, depending on the specific site conditions and accessibility." RPMs

0072

TREE-1 through TREE-12 provide numerous details on methods of tree removal and treatment of slash and other non-marketable materials. GHG emissions associated with tree removal were not quantified in the Draft EIS/EIR. Additional analysis that quantifies emissions associated with truck hauling was conducted subsequent to release of the Draft EIS/EIR, in response to comments from the public. The analysis is provided herein and Appendix G, as revised. To provide a conservative estimate, the maximum total number of trees that could be removed under any alternative, 328 trees under Alternative 2, was rounded up to 350 trees. Based on project-specific arborist's survey data, the average tree diameter on the project site is 17 inches (Under the Trees 2015, 2016, 2017). Based on a study conducted by the University of Arkansas, conifer trees with a diameter of 17 inches can weigh 3,344 pounds (2013). Logging trucks typically have a capacity of 26 tons (USDA 2004). Thus, 350 trees would result in 585 tons of haul material requiring up to 23 truckloads. Assuming each truck leaves the site full and returns empty, a total of 46 truck trips would be required. Using CalEEMod and the construction material hauling component, the analysis estimates that tree hauling would result in a maximum of 3.6 metric tons (MT) of CO₂. When combined with reported construction emissions in Table 4.11-1 of the Draft EIS/EIR, maximum emissions still remain below applicable PCAPCD thresholds of significance by several hundred MT CO_{2e}/year. Calculations are provided in Appendix G of the Final EIS/EIR.

Emissions were also calculated for the construction and operation of the Gazex facilities. 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

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EIS/EIR, the Gazex avalanche mitigation system has been removed as a component of any of the action alternatives for this project. See the Master Response on this topic in Section 1.8, "Master Responses," for more information on the removal of Gazex from the project. With Gazex removed, GHG emissions from these facilities have been removed from the Final EIS/EIR, as shown in Section 4.11, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change," as revised, and Appendix G, as revised.

The assumptions in the GHG analysis are conservative. Mobile-source emissions were quantified using traffic estimates associated with increases in skier days. (Draft EIS/EIR, p. 4.11-11.) As discussed in Chapter 4.7, "Transportation and Circulation," on page 4.7-18, "the analysis conservatively assumes all skiers (under both existing and cumulative conditions) would be day skiers who enter and then exit each resort in a single day." It is likely that a portion of any increases in visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows as a result of the project would come from people already traveling to the Lake Tahoe region for recreational purposes, and the project would not result in increased regional travel-related trips or emissions. However, the traffic analysis did not make adjustments for this likelihood, but rather assumed conservatively that all new trips would go to and from Squaw Valley or Alpine Meadows to other surrounding regions.

Additional people flying to the Lake Tahoe Region attributable to the proposed project is highly unlikely to result in additional flights being added by airlines. An airline is a form of mass transit and adding a small number of new passengers is not enough to add a new flight to an existing route. Typically, for an airline to add flights to an existing route, or start

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flights on a new route, sufficient demand must be present to regularly fill a large portion of an entire aircraft. Any added airline passengers attributable to the proposed project would be distributed among various origin airports and various airlines. The proposed project would not generate sufficient new airline passengers departing from one particular airport, on one particular airline, to result in that airline sufficiently filling a plane on a regular basis to add a flight from that airport to an airport serving the project site (i.e., Reno International Airport or Sacramento International Airport). So the number of flights to the region would not change. Further, even if there was the potential to increase flights to the region, there is no practical way to estimate potential increases in air travel relate GHG emissions given that air passengers would be originating from multiple possible locations and would use various possible airlines (as described above) and this analysis would be far too speculative to include in an EIS/EIR. The GHG analysis adequately evaluates the potential increases in construction and operational GHG emissions.

Regarding the significance conclusion, as discussed on page 4.11-9, PCAPCD has adopted construction thresholds of significance of 10,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e)/year and operational thresholds of significance of 1,100 MT CO₂e/year. PCAPCD, the agency with authority over air quality and emissions in the project area, has not adopted a zero net emissions threshold, and one is not necessary to comply with applicable laws and regulations regarding GHG emissions. Discussions for Impact 4.11-2 (Alt.2), Impact 4.11-1 (Alt. 3), and Impact 4.11-1 (Alt. 4) compared project construction and operational emissions to these thresholds and the analysis shows the project would not exceed either one. The EIS/EIR appropriately

0072

determines that the project would have less-than-significant impacts on GHG emissions. No further analysis or mitigation is necessary.

0072-12, Noise (N)

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. See the Master Response on this topic in Section 1.8, "Master Responses," for more information on the removal of Gazex from the project.

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0072-12
cont'd

magnitude of noise in Alpine Meadows (not data from vendors) is needed. Also, the likely use of the exploders during sleeping hours needs far more discussion and assessment.

Traffic

0072-13

Traffic impacts and mitigations are weak and deceptive. The gondola, touted as a traffic improvement project, in fact quantitatively lowers the Level of Service at Squaw. The analyses fails to provide the information necessary to understand the impacts of the gondola triggering the White Wolf Development, or the gondola's increasing of overall visitor uses at both ski areas. Traffic at Alpine and Squaw, as well as along Hiway 89, have increasing days and weekends of "failure" (no-movement, stand still traffic). The FEIR/S should be more transparent in the realities of these roadways.

The proposed mitigation in Squaw relies on a management and operations system that fails at a regular and predictable frequency. The Fire Department stated that "virtually all of the current issues with traffic and circulation...at Squaw, SR 28, Donner Pass Rd, SR 89 and I-80 East..." have their basis in poor planning and management at Squaw. Please explain how the proposed mitigation would work, given these realities? How will Squaw-Alpine actually operate and manage differently, as the current systems lack credibility for implementing the proposed project mitigations.

0072-14

The DEIR/S is a massive document at a rounded 1,700 pages. It is a difficult undertaking for the public. We ask that public meetings or hearings be scheduled to give the public the opportunity to have meaningful discussions about the proposed project, once the agencies have reviewed the comments but before the Final is prepared. We believe this would provide a more helpful and transparent review of key issues.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

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0072-12 cont'd, Noise (N)

0072-13, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

The comment states that the Draft EIS/EIR fails to provide information necessary to understand that impacts of the gondola triggering the White Wolf development or the gondola's increasing of visitor uses at both ski areas. However, the comment provides no specific details on where the analysis in the Draft EIS/EIR may be lacking.

The Draft EIS/EIR provides an in-depth discussion of how the number of new skier visits per year was estimated and the impacts of those skiers.

The proposed gondola project would not "trigger" the White Wolf Project. See response to comment 0166 -6 for additional explanation of the two separate projects. The White Wolf Project is included in the cumulative impact analysis, and the cumulative traffic analysis considers concurrent operation of the proposed gondola project and the White Wolf Project. (See Draft EIS/EIR, Table 3-3, project #9; Section 4.7.4.)

Regarding the implementation of mitigation measures, both Placer County and the Forest Service would have regulatory authority to enforce the implementation of mitigation measures. Through the issuance of each agency's respective permits, each agency has the authority to require the project applicant to adequately implement both mitigation measures and RPMs included in the EIS/EIR.

0072-14, NEPA/CEQA Process (NCP)

0072

Chapter 6, "Consultation and Coordination," of the Draft EIS/EIR describes the public involvement process conducted to date for this project, including the opportunities for public input at scoping meetings and through written scoping comments. Please also refer to Section 1.6 of the Draft EIS/EIR for further details on the public involvement process (including the scoping process, public comment period, and the creation of a revised Final EIS/EIR). The Forest Service, the County, and the project applicant continue to work individually with residents, homeowner's groups, and agencies to respond to concerns. Going forward, several meetings and hearings will be held as part of the project approval process, and the public is invited to attend and provide comments at these meetings, which will include: the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council, the North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council, the Placer County Planning Commission, and the Placer County Board of Supervisors.

*SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL*

June 11, 2018

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Comments Re: Alpine Meadow Squaw Valley Gondola Comments: Draft EIS/EIR SCH# 2016042066

0097-1

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity (the "Center") on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report ("DEIS/R") for the proposed Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project (the "gondola" or "project").

The Center opposes the project and considers the DEIS/R to be inadequate for several reasons. The DEIS/R does not consider an adequate number of project alternatives under CEQA. It also fails to adequately consider the visual impairment to the region which includes the Granite Chief Wilderness ("GCW"), a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and it does not adequately address the potential increase in visitors to the area and the cumulative effect of increased human traffic on the proximity to the GCW. The DEIS/R should be revised to adequately consider the impacts of the project and the installation of Gazex exploders on the survival, recovery, and the critical habitat of the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog ("SNYLF"). The project has multiple adverse and significant and unavoidable impacts under each action alternative that demonstrate the need for new alternatives and serious consideration about proceeding with the project.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a non-profit environmental organization dedicated to the protection of native species and their habitats through science, policy, and environmental

Alaska · Arizona · California · Florida · Minnesota · Nevada · New Mexico · New York · Oregon · Vermont · Washington, DC

www.BiologicalDiversity.org

0097-1, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided below. See responses to the detailed comments below.

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0097-1
cont'd

law. The Center has over 1.6 million members and online activists throughout California and the United States. The Center has worked for many years to protect imperiled plants and wildlife, open space, air and water, and overall quality of life for people in Northern California.

I. The DEIS/R is Inadequate Because it Fails to Analyze a Reasonable Range of Alternatives as Required by CEQA

CEQA requires that agencies identify project alternatives in their environmental impact reports. (Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 21002.1(a).) An EIR “shall describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives.” (Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, §15126.6 (a) (2018).) While an EIR “need not consider every conceivable alternative,” it must still “consider a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives that will foster informed decisionmaking and public participation.” (*Id.*) Furthermore, alternatives are feasible even if they would “impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly.” (*Id.*)

0097-2

The DEIS/R does not adequately address a reasonable range of feasible alternatives. The DEIS/R identifies four project alternatives—alternative 1, the “no-action alternative”, alternative 2, the “proposed action”, and alternatives 3 and 4. Alternatives 3 and 4 are two modifications of the project route proposed in alternative 2. All action alternatives result in the construction of a gondola between the Alpine Meadow and Squaw Valley ski areas. The action alternatives do not provide the public with an alternative to the construction of a gondola, despite the additional project alternatives that were proposed during the scoping process, and are therefore inadequate under CEQA/NEPA.

0097-3

A. The discussion of feasible alternatives is inadequate because the DEIS/R dismissed expansion of the existing inter-resort shuttle system for failing to meet the purpose and need of the project. (DEIS/R at 2-30.)

CEQA guidelines state that “the discussion of alternatives shall focus on alternatives to the project or its location which are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the project, *even if* these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly.” (Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, §15126.6(b) (2018) emphasis added.)

Project proponent states that the gondola is needed to “improve the connectivity between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows to allow visitors of both areas easier access to the varied terrain and amenities at the other area.” Thus, the project seeks to “enhance the visitor wintertime experience at both Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by providing direct connection between the ski areas for more convenient access to skiable terrain and resort amenities.” (DEIS/R at ES-2.)

Currently, “visitors are granted access to both areas with the same lift ticket; however visitors seeking to access the alternate regions must currently drive independently or take shuttle between the two regions.” (DEIS/R at 1-4.) The DEIS/R erroneously dismissed consideration of

0097-1 cont'd, Summary (S2)

0097-2, Alternatives (A)

The comment states that the Draft EIS/EIR does not consider a reasonable range of feasible alternatives. Please see response to comment #0072-5 for a description of the alternatives analysis provided in the Draft EIS/EIR.

0097-3, Alternatives (A)

The comment states that the Draft EIS/EIR “erroneously dismissed consideration of an expanded and improve shuttle system.” Section 2.3.2.1 of the Draft EIS/EIR describes the “Improvements to Existing Shuttle System Alternative,” and explains why this alternative was considered but not evaluated further in the Draft EIS/EIR (page 2-30 of the Draft EIS/EIR). In addition, the Master Response entitled “Improvements to Existing Shuttle System Alternative” further explains why the alternative would not meet the purpose and need under NEPA or the project objectives under CEQA, and explains that implementation of the alternative would be functionally identical to the No Action Alternative. Therefore, the alternative was not carried forward in the Final EIS/EIR for further evaluation.

The comment suggests that expansion of the existing inter-resort shuttle would eliminate all significant and unavoidable adverse impacts identified in the Draft EIS/EIR for all the action alternatives. However, an expanded shuttle service would increase vehicle trips on the local roadway network, and therefore, could generate significant

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and unavoidable traffic impacts similar to those identified in the EIS/EIR for the action alternatives (in particular, please refer to analysis provided under Impact 4.7-4 for the action alternatives).

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0097-3 cont'd, Alternatives (A)

0097-3
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an expanded and improved shuttle system because “guests do not presently find it convenient and/or effective to shuttle between the two resorts” and because they “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.” (DEIS/R at 2-30.)

The Squaw/Alpine Express (“shuttle”) runs daily between the two resort areas. The shuttle picks up every 20-30 minutes during the week with increased frequency on weekends and holidays. (<http://squawalpine.com/explore/more/getting-around-parking>.) Proponent contends that the shuttle in its existing state does not meet the needs or purpose of the project. (DEIS/R at 2-30.) However, in dismissing this alternative without analysis in the DEIS/R, the proponent did not provide information that supports the contention that expansion of the shuttle fleet size, increased frequency of trips, and increased visibility and marketing of the available or expanded shuttle services to guests would not expand usage and adequately address the needs of the project. (*Id.*) Furthermore, the DEIS/R states that the shuttle transport time ranges from 15-30 minutes, depending on traffic conditions, not including the wait to board. (*Id.*) Similarly, the travel time of the project is estimated to be 16 minutes not including wait; therefore the existing shuttle service is comparable in travel time to the gondola alternatives under some traffic conditions.¹ CEQA includes the consideration of feasible alternatives that “would impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly.” (Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, §15126.6(b).) The expansion of the current inter-resort shuttle system should be considered a feasible alternative and analyzed in the DEIS/R, because it still allows for the attainment of some project objectives.

Without further analysis in the DEIS/R, there is not conclusive information that supports proponent’s contention that expanding the shuttle fleet size, increasing the frequency of trips, and/or increasing visibility and marketing of the shuttle services to guests would not expand usage and adequately address the needs of the project. Furthermore, the expansion of the existing inter-resort shuttle system would eliminate the significant adverse environmental impacts that are unavoidable under all but the no action alternative, even with implementation of Resource Protection Measures (“RPMs”). An expansion of the current shuttle system would not require new construction and operation of a gondola, and it can be implemented with vehicles that use alternative energy, fuels, or some combination of alternative energy sources, which would not increase emissions of atmospheric gases or particulate matter.² (DEIS/R at 2-32–36.) The significant adverse environmental impacts that are associated with each of the action alternatives in the DEIS/R stem from the construction and operation of the gondola. Expansion and/or improvements to the existing inter-resort shuttle system would eliminate the permanent visual impairment to the GCW area both the permanent and temporary destruction and modification of SNYLF critical habitat. Thus, the DEIS/R does not provide a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project and should include an analysis of an expanded inter-resort shuttle system as an action alternative. At minimum, the DEIS/R should be revised to consider the expansion of the shuttle system as an action alternative.

¹ The estimated travel time for alternatives 2-4 is approximately 16 minutes, not including wait. DEIS/R at 1-1. This is contrasted with the current shuttle travel time of approximately 15 minutes. *Id.*

² In contrast, project construction is estimated to contribute an additional 568 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents. Operation and maintenance of the gondola and the Gazex exploders is estimated to contribute 755 metric tons. DEIS/R at 4.11-11. The estimates are the same for all action alternatives.

0097-4

B. The DEIS/R fails to provide information that supports that there is adequate need for the project as proposed.

Lift tickets purchased at one resort—either Alpine Meadow or Squaw Valley— may be utilized at the other, and they include use of the existing inter-resort shuttle. (DEIS/R at 4.7-14.) The DEIS/R states that after review of ticket scans from the 2015-26 ski season, only one percent of skiers utilized their passes to ski at both Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. (*Id.*) With so few guests utilizing their passes to visit both resorts, the proponent fails to establish that there is a need for the project that would support the construction of a gondola that can transport up to 1,400 people per hour between the two resort areas.

The DEIS/R relies on survey responses collected from about 700 hundred resort guests who were asked “How likely would you be to use the gondola to ski both mountains in a single day?” (DEIS/R at 4.7-22.) Among those surveyed, forty-three percent answered that they would use the gondola either “all of the time” or “most of the time.” However, thirty-three percent answered that they would use the gondola only “sometimes,” and twenty-three answered saying “infrequently” or “never.” (*Id.*) Therefore, over fifty percent of respondents indicated infrequent use of the gondola at best. Based on those responses, the DEIS/R concludes that “sizeable shifts of existing skier vehicle trips from one resort to the other in response to the gondola’s presence are not expected.” (*Id.*) This contradicts one of the provided objectives of the project, which is to “[r]educe visitor and resort shuttle system travel on roadways between the resorts.” (DEIS/R at ES-2.) Therefore, the project and its alternatives should be reconsidered because the project conflicts with the proponent’s objectives and is not supported by sufficient need.

0097-5

C. All action alternatives result in significant unavoidable adverse impacts to the traffic around and between Alpine Meadow and Squaw Valley.

The DEIS/R concludes that the project will result in a net increase in vehicle travel to the area, that this increase will result in a significant unavoidable adverse impact to the region, and that no mitigating factors are able to reduce this impact. (DEIS/R at 5-10–13.) In contrast to that result, the DEIS/R states that a project objective is to reduce the visitor travel on the roadways between the resort. (DEIS/R at ES-2.) The DEIS/R reports that the project will result in an increase of around 12,400 skier visits after the first year of opening. (DEIS/R at 4.7-18.) The cumulative effect of increased skier visits to the resorts under all action alternatives will significantly and unavoidably impact the highways and intersections surrounding the resorts. (DEIS/R at 5-10–13.) The cumulative effect of the project on the local infrastructure and roadways should be considered when evaluating the project because the impact remains significant and unavoidable.

0097-6

D. The DEIS/R does not provide a finite project description as required under CEQA.

“Only through an accurate view of the project may affected outsiders and public decision-makers balance the proposal's benefit against its environmental cost, consider mitigation measures, assess the advantage of terminating the proposal (i.e., the “no project” alternative) and weigh other alternatives in the balance.” (Cty. of Inyo v. City of Los Angeles, 71 Cal.App.3d 185, 193 (1977).) The DEIS/R states that the project will cease operation during the

0097-4, Purpose and Need (P&N)

The comment describes the existing infrequent usage of the shuttle system between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. This infrequent shuttle usage supports the need for the project. As described in the Draft EIS/EIR, there is a need for improved connectivity between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley based on many factors: the developed snow sports trail network at Squaw Valley has limited terrain suitable for beginners and teaching, whereas Alpine Meadows has additional intermediate and beginner terrain; Squaw Valley has more resort amenities than Alpine Meadows; etc (please refer to pages 1-3 through 1-4 of the Draft EIS/EIR for further detail). In addition, the CEQA project objectives include, in part: enhance the visitor experience at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by providing easy, and potentially faster, interresort access to terrain and amenities at both ski areas; reduce visitor and resort shuttle system travel on roadways between the resorts; and provide opportunities for skiers to offload at mid-stations to provide easier access to existing skiable terrain (page 1-4 of the Draft EIS/EIR).

Appendix C to the Draft EIS/EIR is the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Final Visitation and Use Assessment. Appendix C evaluates the anticipated changes to annual snowsports visitation at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows as a result of the proposed project. Page 5 of Appendix C explains that the “particularly low shuttle usage is an indicator that guests do not presently find it convenient and/or effective to shuttle between the two resorts (RRC Associates and SE Group 2018).” This statement is supported by other patterns observed throughout the ski industry; for example, as described on page 2-30 of the Draft

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EIS/EIR, "guests do not perceive time spent riding a shuttle bus to be part of their recreation experience, where, time spent on a lift, even if the lift is simply a transit conveyance, is perceived to be part of their skiing day."

The comment also states that the determination in the EIS/EIR that "sizeable shifts of existing skier vehicle trips from one resort to the other in response to the gondola's presence are not expected," contradicts the project objective to reduce visitor and resort shuttle system travel on roadways and between the resorts. The Draft EIS/EIR explains, however, that some shifts are expected because 43% of survey respondents indicated they would use the gondola most of the time or all of the time, and 33% of survey respondents stated they would sometimes use the gondola (Draft EIS/EIR at page 4.7-22).

0097-5, Transportation and Circulation/Traffic and Parking (T&C/T&P)

The comment restates many of the conclusions from the Draft EIS/EIR and concludes that the cumulative effect on the project on the roadway system should be considered when evaluating the project because the impact remains significant and unavoidable. The cumulative effects of the project on the roadway system is evaluated in Section 4.7.4, "Cumulative Effects." The objective cited in the comment, in full reads; "2. Reduced visitor and resort shuttle system travel on roadways between the resorts." The objective is not to reduce visitor travel overall, but to reduced vehicle trips on the roadway system between the two resorts. Adding vehicle trips from other locations to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows would not conflict with this objective. The

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comment does not raise any technical issues regarding the adequacy of the environmental review. Therefore, no further response is required.

0097-6, Project Description (PD)

Proposed operation and long-term maintenance of the gondola is described on pages 2-13 and 2-14 of the Draft EIS/EIR. The EIS/EIR states: "For the purposes of this project, the winter/ski season is defined as the period when both Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows are in operation for winter sports (based on past operations, Alpine Meadows, on average, closes on approximately April 16). The gondola connection between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley would not be operational beyond this date unless both resorts are open for the skiing and snowboarding public" (2-13). Therefore, the summer season is defined as those dates outside of the winter/ski season, when the gondola would not be operational.

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“summer months” with the exception of necessary or routine maintenance. (DEIS/R at 2-14.) However, the DEIS/R fails to state what includes “summer months.” The project description fails to provide concrete dates or measurable natural indicators that proponent will use to determine the closure of the gondola for the summer months. Without knowledge of the actual dates of operation of the project or the method by which the proponent will determine the appropriate time frame for operation, the public and other decision makers cannot adequately balance the purpose and objectives of the project against the environmental impact and the effectiveness of the RPMs. The DEIS/R should be revised to include the concrete or expected dates of operation of the gondola in the project description so that the environmental impact can be accurately measured and considered, as required by CEQA.

0097-7

II. The DEIS/R Fails to Adequately Consider the Impact of the Project on the Nearby Granite Chief Wilderness

The GCW consists of approximately 25,000 acres of designated wilderness area within the Tahoe National Forest. Originally designated in 1984, Congress expanded the GCW in 2007. (California Wilderness Act of 1984, Pub. L. 98-425, 98 Stat. 1619 (1984); California Wild Heritage Act of 2007 (110 H.R. 860).)

The GCW is a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System and is subject to management under the Wilderness Act of 1964. (16 U.S.C. §§1131, 1136.) The Wilderness Act provides that the area be “administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character.” (16 U.S.C. 1131 (a).) The GCW is managed in accordance with the principles of the Wilderness Act by the Tahoe National Forest (“TNF”) and the U.S. Forest Service (“FS”).

The GCW was designated for its “pristine nature, natural beauty, and primitive, non-motorized recreational opportunities.” (Granite Chief Wilderness, U.S. Dept. of Ag., <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/lbmu/recarea/?recid=11819>.) While none of the action alternatives traverse the federally designated GCW directly, they all infringe upon the pristine nature of the GCW. All of the action alternatives impose manmade characteristics upon the wilderness area, both through the visual impairment caused by the addition of the gondola and through the expected increase in flow of visitors and recreation within the wilderness area.

Under proponent’s proposed action (alternative 2), the Alpine Meadows mid-station and the project route border the federally designated GCW. (DEIS/R at 4.2-47.) Alternatives 3 and 4 do not border the GCW directly; however they disrupt the quiet and pristine nature of the wilderness area, visually impair the scenic views, and provide for easier access to the GCW through the location of their respective mid-stations.

0097-8

A. The RPMs described in the DEIS/R fail to mitigate the visual impairment of the project to the GCW

The DEIS/R analyzes the visual character of the region to determine whether or not the project will impair the scenic views. The DEIS/R explains that the visual character “considers visual impacts on scenic vistas and scenic roads, along with general changes to visual quality

0097-6 cont'd, Project Description (PD)

0097-7, Wilderness (W2)

The comment provides a summary of the commenter's understanding of the designation of the Granite Chief Wilderness (GCW), and the potential impacts of the proposed project on the GCW. Section 4.3, "Wilderness," of the EIS/EIR provides in -depth analysis related to the impacts that the action alternatives would have on the National Forest System-GCW. Impact 4.3-3 (all alternatives) includes detailed discussion of impacts that would occur to the natural wilderness quality as a result of potential impacts to the ecological systems of the National Forest System-GCW.

Similarly, Impact 4.3-4 (all alternatives) includes detailed discussion of impacts that would occur as a result of visibility of additional infrastructure, as well as the increased likelihood of visitor encounters resulting from improved access to the National Forest System-GCW. It is important to note that Resource Protection Measure (RPM) REC-4, which is required with project implementation, would reduce potential impacts to the National Forest System-GCW. RPM REC-4 states that "Signage will be posted at both the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base terminals and mid-stations stating that walking or hiking trail access directly from the gondola (i.e., by exiting at a mid-station) is strictly prohibited. The applicant will not permit foot traffic to exit at the Squaw Valley mid-station, or the Alpine Meadows mid-station under Alternative 2."

The comment does not identify specific errors in the Draft EIS/EIR and therefore further response cannot be provided.

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0097-8, Visual Resources (VR)

The comment states that the EIS/EIR should include additional viewpoints within the GCW "so that the full extent of the visual impairment to the wilderness area can be considered." Substantial evidence supports the visual impacts analysis. The commenter's disagreement with the conclusions of the EIS/EIR, and desire for inclusion of additional viewpoints in the EIS/EIR, does not establish that the analysis which led to the conclusions in Section 4.2, "Visual Resources," was deficient.

The 21 visual simulations created for each alternative allow for a qualitative analysis of the visual changes that are anticipated to occur with implementation of any of the action alternatives from a selection (16) of representative locations, which were selected from hundreds of viewpoints evaluated. Five of these (one site along Alpine Meadows Road, two sites at the Alpine Meadows base terminal, and two sites along Squaw Valley Road), experience widely varying conditions between the winter and summer months. They are also visible to a greater number of people traveling along the roads to or from the base terminal. As a result, these five viewpoint locations were simulated during both winter and summer conditions, which resulted in the creation of a total of 21 visual simulations for each alternative.

Visual simulations are designed to characterize the appearance of the action alternatives if constructed, rather than to provide a comprehensive view of the project from all possible locations in the project area; therefore, not all locations could be, or were required to be, simulated for the purposes of the

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EIS/EIR. Instead, highly frequent or prominent public areas, and visually sensitive vistas, were selected for simulation. For additional information, please refer to Visual Resources Analysis Methods discussed in Section 4.2.2 of the EIS/EIR.

In addition to the analysis of impacts to visual resources in Section 4.2, Section 4.3, "Wilderness," includes analysis specific to the Granite Chief Wilderness. Impact 4.3-4 in that section discusses the potential experiential effects of the project on the National Forest System-GCW, including those that would occur as a result of visibility of gondola infrastructure (cabins, towers, wire-rope) from within the National Forest System-GCW. More specifically, the EIS/EIR concludes that with respect to opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, adverse effects would occur under Alternative 2, and minorly adverse effects would occur under Alternatives 3 and 4.

Furthermore, Section 4.2, "Visual Resources," identifies RPMs that would reduce the identified significant impacts to the extent feasible. In particular, RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-8, REV-1 and REV-3 would reduce the magnitude of Impacts 4.2-2 and 4.2-3 for all alternatives.

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caused by development.” (DEIS/R at 4.2-19.) The DEIS/R includes viewshed and viewpoint analyses of several key scenic views throughout the Tahoe National Forest (TNF), Lake Tahoe, and the GCW. (DEIS/R at 4.2-3.) All action alternatives permanently disrupt the scenic offerings that the GCW is famous for and result in the addition of permanent manmade structures upon the landscape. The DEIS/R indicates that the region is known for its scenic views and that it is highly sensitive to visual impairment. However, the DEIS/R concludes that each of the alternatives results in significant unavoidable adverse disruptions to the “visual character” of the area. (*Id.*) Furthermore, no RPMs reduce the disturbance to less than significant. (DEIS/R at 4.2-30, 4.2-37, 4.2-44.)

The DEIS/R identified and analyzed sixteen viewpoints to determine the visual impairment of the region by each of the four alternatives. (DEIS/R at 4.2-3.) Due to seasonal differences, the original sixteen views resulted in twenty-one distinct views for analysis. (*Id.*) However, only one of those viewpoints identified and analyzed is located within the GCW. The DEIS/R is inadequate because it does not accurately reflect the impairment of the action alternatives to the GCW. The DEIS/R should be revised to include additional viewpoints within the GCW so that the full extent of the visual impairment to the wilderness area can be considered.

Under the proposed action alternative, alternative 2, twenty of the twenty-one views analyzed would result in visible infrastructure. Results from the viewshed analysis show under this alternative the project may be visible from approximately 17.99 square miles within the surrounding area. (DEIS/R at 4.2-30, DEIS/R at 4.2-15.) Alternative 3 has slightly less of an impact, with visible infrastructure in fifteen of the twenty-one views and approximately 16.04 square miles visible within the surrounding area. (DEIS/R at 4.2-36, DEIS/R at 4.2-44.) Alternative 4 results in the same number of viewpoint disruptions as alternative 3; however, alternative 4 results in increased viewshed visibility, with approximately 19.05 square miles visible, and it is the only alternative that results in views of the project from Lake Tahoe. (DEIS/R at 4.2-15–17, DEIS/R at 4.2-42.) The DEIS/R fails to adequately mitigate the visual impairment of the proposed project to the GCW. In each of the three action alternatives, the DEIS/R indicates that the impairment to the region is significant and unavoidable under CEQA and adverse under NEPA. (DEIS/R at 4.2-47.) The DEIS/R violates CEQA because all action alternatives negatively impact the pristine natural views and result in unavoidable significant adverse impacts. The proposed project fails to “indicate the manner in which [the identified] significant effects can be mitigated or avoided.” (Cal. Pub. Res. Code §21002.1(a) (2018).)

B. The RPMs fail to adequately mitigate for the impact of the project’s construction and operational noise on the GCW

Construction of the project will require transportation of materials and personnel by helicopter. To minimize the disruption that the noise of the flight will have on the GCW and nearby residential areas, the DEIS/R includes RPM NOI-3. NOI-3 states that “[h]elicopter flight patterns will be designed to avoid and minimize flights over residential areas and the Granite Chief Wilderness Area to the extent practical.” (DEIS/R at B-9.) However, “to the extent practical” is vague and unenforceable as a mitigation measure.

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0097-8 cont'd, Visual Resources (VR)

0097-8 cont'd, Noise (N)

The comment states that RPM NOI-3 is a vague and unenforceable mitigation measure. NOI-3 is an RPM, and is therefore part of the project and was included in the pre-analysis phase of the EIS/EIR. Exact helicopter flight paths cannot be known until project design and construction details are finalized. Due to the uncertainty regarding the specific locations and daily operations of helicopters, the Draft EIS/EIR determined that helicopter use could result in substantial noise levels. Disallowing the use of helicopters is not feasible because helicopters are necessary to construct the project. Because there is no other feasible mitigation, and to be conservative, the EIS/EIR identified the potential temporary construction noise from helicopters as a significant and unavoidable impact. However, RPM NOI-3 has been updated to further clarification implementation of the measure. RPM NOI-3 now reads:

"Helicopter flight patterns will be designed to avoid and minimize flights over residential areas, the National Forest system -Granite Chief Wilderness Area, and the Five Lakes Trail to the extent practical. For Alternatives 3 and 4, helicopter flights over the National Forest System - Granite Chief Wilderness will be prohibited. Prior to Placer County issuance of building permits and Forest Service Operating Plan approval, the applicant shall submit maps to both agencies, for review and approval, indicating zones where helicopter flights would occur during construction."

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Mitigation measures must be “enforceable through permit conditions, agreements, or other measures” (Federation of Hillside & Canyon Ass’ns v. City of Los Angeles, 83 Cal.App.4th 1252, 1261(2000).) RPM NOI-3 provides no enforceable guarantee that the flight patterns will not traverse the GCW and disrupt the wilderness area. Wilderness areas are managed to preserve their natural condition and opportunities for solitude. (16 U.S.C. §1131(b).) The use of mechanical transports within wilderness areas is prohibited “except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of th[e] [Wilderness] Act.” (*Id.* at §1133(c).) “Helicopters carry ‘man and his works’ and so are antithetical to a wilderness experience.” (Wolf Recovery Found. v. United States Forest Service, 692 F.Supp. 2d 1264, 1268 (Idaho D. C. 2010).) The circumstances where “machinery as intrusive as a helicopter” could satisfy the Wilderness Act’s exception to mechanical transport is rare. (*Id.*) Therefore, RPM NOI-3 does not adequately mitigate the impact of helicopter flight patterns on the GCW as required by CEQA. Because the use of mechanical transport is antithetical to the wilderness experience, RPM NOI-3 should be revised to provide that helicopter flight patterns under RPM NOI-3 are “fully enforceable through permit conditions, agreements, or other measures.” (Cal. Pub. Res. Code §21081.6(b).)

0097-9

C. The DEIS/R fails to adequately address the impact of increased accessibility to the GCW due to the addition of two mid-stations that allows passengers to off-load in closer proximity to the GCW

The TNF limits visitor pack size in the GCW to no more than 12 people and operates under the principles of “leave no trace.” (Granite Chief Wilderness, Lake Tahoe Basin Mgmt. Unit, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/lbmu/recarea/?recid=11819>.) According to the DEIS/R, under the action alternatives, the base stations for all three routes range from 75 feet to approximately 2,000 feet from federal lands designated as the GCW. (DEIS/R at 2-4, 4.3-12.) Project estimates state that, at capacity, the project would transport 1,400 passengers every hour and each cabin would carry eight passengers. The construction of the various mid-stations, consistent with the objective of the project to “[p]rovide opportunities for skiers to offload at mid-stations to provide easier access to existing skiable terrain,” would allow passengers to exit the gondola and access the areas in between. (DEIS/R at 1-4.) Therefore, the project would create an opportunity for those seeking to hike or recreate in GCW to use the gondola to enter through one of its mid-stations.

The DEIS/R does not adequately address the proponent’s plan to control the flow of passengers from the mid-stations into the wilderness area and does not adequately address how the increase in accessibility to the GCW will ensure that the wilderness area retains its “primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation” and is “protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” (16 U.S.C. §1331(c).) Although proponent submits that the project will not operate during the summer, it is likely that the gondola will operate when there is inconsistent ground cover and will result in increased activity in the GCW and within SNYLF critical habitat. (DEIS/R at 4.3-12.) The expected increase in activity would occur under all action alternatives; however it is most adverse in alternative 2. As noted in the Biological Assessment (“BA”), evidence of human use within the area and nearby is already evident in the form of trash left behind. (SNYLF BA at 75–76.) The increase in visitors to the GCW will reduce the opportunities for solitude and primitive unconfined recreation and it threatens the integrity of the wilderness if visitors do not respect the visitation guidelines.

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0097-8 cont'd, Noise (N)

0097-9, Wilderness (W2)

The comment states that the EIS/EIR “does not adequately address the proponent’s plan to control the flow of passengers from the mid-stations into the wilderness area and does not adequately address” the increase in accessibility to the National Forest System-GCW. Section 4.3 of the EIS/EIR, “Wilderness,” analyzes the potential for the gondola mid-stations to improve access to the National Forest System-GCW. The EIS/EIR recognizes that the mid-stations would improve access, and acknowledges that during transitional seasons and periods of inconsistent snow cover, the gondola could be open for use while the southern aspect slopes would be dry enough for hikers to use the National Forest System-GCW for day-trips or backpacking. Thus, the EIS/EIR states that this improved access could increase the likelihood of visitor encounters within the National Forest System-GCW, thereby reducing opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation (page 4.3 -12 of the Draft EIS/EIR). The increase in visitation during these limited time frames cannot be precisely measured.

RPMs have been included with the proposed project to minimize these potential impacts. In particular, RPM REC-4 requires that “Signage will be posted at both the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base terminals and mid-stations stating that walking or hiking trail access directly from the gondola (i.e., by exiting at a mid-station) is strictly prohibited.” Implementation of this RPM would minimize the increased likelihood of visitor encounters as the applicant will not permit foot traffic to exit at the

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Squaw Valley mid-station, or the Alpine Meadows mid-station, under Alternative 2.

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(DEIS/R at 4.3-18.) This disrupts the GCW and frustrates the purpose of the congressionally designated wilderness area. Because the project threatens the opportunities for solitude and the primitive and unconfined recreation on the GCW, the project and project alternatives should be reconsidered to include additional measures to mitigate or avoid the detrimental impact to the wilderness area caused by increased human activity on the natural landscape. This may include closing all mid-stations to entry/exit. This option would allow for the gondola to connect the two ski areas, in accordance with the project's purpose, but would reduce the detrimental impact of increased visitation to the wilderness. (DEIS/R at ES-2.)

0097-10

III. The DEIS/R Fails to Adequately Address and Mitigate the Impacts of the Project on the Endangered Sierra Nevada Yellow Legged Frog

The Sierra Nevada Yellow Legged Frog ("SNYLF") was designated as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act ("ESA") in 2014. (79 Fed. Reg. at 24,256 to be codified at 50 CFR pt. 17.11.) The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service determined that the SNYLF was in danger of extinction based on "the immediacy, severity, and scope of the threats to their continued existence." (79 Fed. Reg. at 24,256.) In accordance with the ESA, the Service also designated critical habitat for the SNYLF. (81 Fed. Reg. 59,046.) Of the designated critical habitat, subunit 2D, known as Five Lakes, consists of approximately 9,000 acres. (*Id.*) All three action alternatives have project areas that are located within the SNYLF's designated critical habitat. (DEIS/R at 4.14-14, 81 Fed. Reg. at 59,071.)

In the three actions analyzed by the DEIS/R, all proposed action alternatives will significantly impact the SNYLF and its critical habitat. (DEIS/R at 2-32–36.) The DEIS/R indicates that the proposed action alternative (alternative 2) will have thirty-eight adverse impacts under NEPA, and alternative 3 and 4 both resulted in a finding of thirty-four adverse impacts (*Id.*) Furthermore, under CEQA, all three action alternatives resulted in the same six consequences that are considered "significant and unavoidable," despite the implementation of RPMs. (*Id.*)

Despite the DEIS/R's claim that the mitigating measures required by CEQA will reduce this impact to less than significant (DEIS/R at 4.14-105–107), it fails to mention the impact of the measures on the recovery of the species and how the project may result in habitat fragmentation, an identified threat to the SNLYF. (Brown et al., Mountain Yellow Legged Frog Conservation Assessment 41–43 (July 2014).)

0097-11

A. The DEIS/R fails to adequately mitigate the impact of the project to the critical habitat of the SNYLF

The goal of the Endangered Species Act ("ESA") is to promote the conservation and the recovery of listed species. The SNYLF was listed as endangered in 2014 (79 Fed. Reg. 24,255 (2014).), and critical habitat was subsequently designated in 2016. (81 Fed. Reg. 59,046 (2016).) The ESA defines occupied critical habitat as "specific areas . . . on which are found those physical or biological features (I) essential to the conservation of the species and (II) which may require special management considerations or protection." (16 U.S.C §1532(5)(A).) In designating subunit 2d (Five Lakes) the Service noted that "[t]he physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog in the Five Lakes subunit

0097-9 cont'd, Wilderness (W2)

0097-10, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

The comment's statements are consistent with the conclusions of the Draft EIS/EIR. The comment begins and ends specifically addressing Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (SNYLF), but provides a general summary of overall project effects for all environmental issue areas, repeating information provided in the Draft EIS/EIR. Section 4.14, "Wildlife and Aquatics," particularly Impacts 4.14-1 and 4.14-2 (Alt. 2, Alt. 3, and Alt 4), analyze potential impacts to SNYLF and its critical habitat. As described in Section 2.2.6, "Resource Protection Measures," the project incorporates a number of Resource Protection Measures (RPMs) designed to avoid and minimize environmental effects. These RPMs are considered part of the project by the Forest Service and will be conditions of approval of the Placer County Conditional Use Permit. The text of all RPMs is provided in Appendix B. The potential effects of implementing the action alternatives are analyzed as follows: The effect of the action alternatives was determined, relevant RPMs were applied, and the effectiveness of reducing adverse effects was determined. If additional measures were needed to further reduce effects, they were identified. The RPMs and Mitigation Measure 4.14-1 (Alt. 2, Alt. 3, and Alt.4) in the Draft EIS/EIR would reduce or eliminate potential effects on the SNYLF or its habitat.

As it relates to CEQA, the significance of impacts is determined before RPMs are implemented. The analysis then determines whether the RPMs would reduce significant impacts to a less-than-significant level. If significant impacts would remain, mitigation

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measures are added, as feasible, to further reduce the significant impact. All RPMs, as well as additional mitigation measures, would be included in the Placer County mitigation monitoring and reporting program (MMRP), and their implementation would be ensured by the conditional use permit's conditions of approval. All RPMs are considered roughly proportional and have an essential nexus to the impacts they reduce.

The proposed project would not result in habitat fragmentation for SNYLF because the nature of the project (periodic towers or structures with overhead cables between the structures) would not adversely affect potential movement of SNYLF (if frogs were to attempt to cross the alignment of any of the action alternatives). This issue is specifically addressed in the discussion of Impact 4.14-6: Disturbance or Loss of Wildlife Movement, Wildlife Corridors, and Native Wildlife Nursery Sites. This impact is evaluated for every alternative.

The Draft EIS/EIR includes impact determinations consistent with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended, as well as requirements of NEPA and CEQA. For example, including the consideration of RPMs, but prior to the consideration of mitigation measures, Impact 4.14-1 (Alt. 2): Direct and Indirect Effects on Sierra Nevada Yellow-Legged Frog, includes the ESA determination of "may effect, and is likely to adversely affect" SNYLF. However, the final determination will be based on completion of ESA consultation with USFWS, as required by law and referenced in Mitigation Measure 4.14-1 (Alt. 2). Completion of ESA authorization for any of the action alternatives, including compensatory mitigation as referenced in Mitigation Measure 4.14-1, would ensure that the action alternatives would

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not result in significant adverse effects on the SNYLF, as well as not substantially degrade the potential for recovery of the species. The Final EIS/EIR will address Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended.

0097-11, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

The comment states that the Draft EIR/EIS fails to adequately mitigate for the impacts of the project to the SNYLF critical habitat, and provides a summary of Federal regulations that provide protection to SNYLF and its designated critical habitat. The comment also notes that the addition of the project through SNYLF critical habitat will be detrimental to the species because it will result in permanent increased recreation in the critical habitat, as well as temporary disturbances related to project construction. Furthermore, the comment states that the RPMs provided in the Draft EIR/EIS do not mitigate, or even mention the destruction of the SNYLF critical habitat.

Section 4.14, "Wildlife and Aquatics," and particularly the discussion of Impacts 4.14-1 and 4.14-2 (Alt. 2, Alt. 3, and Alt 4), analyze potential impacts to SNYLF and its critical habitat. The analysis shows that winter-time recreation (when the frogs are dormant in over-wintering ponds) will not be detrimental to SNYLF. Potential impacts to the frog, occupied habitat or critical habitat differ for all three alternatives as analyzed in Section 4.14, "Wildlife and Aquatics," particularly Impacts 4.14-1 and 4.14-2 (Alt. 2, Alt. 3, and Alt 4). As set forth in

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the Draft EIS/EIR, the proposed project and action alternatives would have direct and indirect effects on SNYLF critical habitat. The project incorporates multiple RPMs to lessen these impacts, to the extent feasible, as required by the Forest Service and County policy. For those impacts that cannot feasibly be avoided, mitigation is recommended that would require compensatory habitat. For this reason, the project would not result in a net reduction of SNYLF critical habitat.

The comment does not distinguish between critical habitat and occupied habitat. Not all aquatic or upland habitat found within the critical habitat designation is suitable habitat for SNYLF. As such, the likelihood of finding an adult or juvenile frog in unsuitable habitat such as the granite shelf, which supports limited vegetation and limited permanent water sources, is extremely low. This concept is supported by the fact that the Critical Habitat Area that encompasses the project site, as shown in Exhibit 4.14-2 of the Draft EIS/EIR, also includes parking lots, homes, and other development associated with Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. The USFWS mapping of a critical habitat area should be interpreted as a broad brush identification of where critical habitat, with all necessary habitat elements, may be found, but should not be interpreted as specifically identifying habitat critical to the SNYLF.

The comment states that RPM MUL-4 should apply to all action alternatives, and not only Alternative 2. RPM MUL-4 only applies to Alternative 2 because the Alpine Meadow mid-station would be located adjacent to Barstool Lake, and field surveys conducted for the project identified SNYLF occupancy within this lake. In regards to the seasonal variation in snowpack melt, and for the

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overall increase in average temperature and decrease in snowpack that is expected from climate change, the Gondola would be operational only if both resorts are open, as described in Chapter 2, "Description of Alternatives." In other words, the resorts and the gondola would only be open when snow is present. Any decreases in snowpack resulting from climate change would also shorten the period of gondola operation as both items are directly correlated.

0097-11
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0097-11 cont'd, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

may require special management considerations or protection due to the presence of introduced fishes, timber management and fuels reduction, and recreational activities.” (81 Fed. Reg. at 59,075–76.) Thus, the addition of the project through SNYLF critical habitat will be detrimental to the species because it will result in permanent increased recreation in the critical habitat, as discussed above, as well as temporary disturbances related to project construction.

All project alternatives result in permanent and temporary disruptions to the SNYLF’s known occupied critical habitat. (SNYLF BA at 61–63.) According to the biological assessment, 98.16% of the project area for alternative 2 is located within designated critical habitat. 93.34% of the project area for alternative 3 and 75.28% of the project area for alternative 4 are located within designated critical habitat (*Id.*) Further, the RPMs provided for in the DEIS/R do not mitigate, or even mention the destruction of the SNYLF’s critical habitat. (DEIS/R at Appendix B.)

Under CEQA, public agencies should not approve projects if there are “feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of such projects.” (Cal. Pub. Res. Code §21002.) Over ninety percent of the proposed routes for alternatives 2 and 3 overlap with designated critical habitat for the SNYLF. The route for alternative 4 also overlaps SNYLF critical habitat, however it overlaps slightly less, at only seventy-five percent. (SNYLF BA at 61–63.) Because the projects allow for off-loading at the respective mid-stations, the project will lead to an increase in recreation in areas identified by the Service to be occupied by the SNYLF and protected by critical habitat designation. The proximity of the mid-stations to occupied critical habitat will allow for increased recreational activities within the critical habitat, which is an identified threat to the SNYLF.

While the Center opposes construction of the project in SNYLF critical habitat, at a minimum the DEIS/R should be revised and recirculated to include mitigation measures that would lessen the impact of the added recreation and human intrusion into the SNYLF critical habitat. RPM MUL-4 states that under alternative 2, “the Alpine Meadows mid-station may be open to skier entry/exit through April 15th only, to minimize the potential for adverse effects on Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog at Barstool Lake.” (DEIS/R at B-4, *see also* DEIS/R at 2-13–14.) However, RPM MUL-4 is insufficient to protect the critical habitat and work towards recovery of the SNYLF.³ Alternatives 3 and 4 would remain open until the gondola ceased seasonal operation for the “summer months”. (*Id.*) All mid-stations should be closed to entry/exit because they provide for increased recreational access to SNYLF critical habitat under all action alternatives. The DEIS/R is inadequate under CEQA because there are feasible mitigation measures available that will substantially lessen the impact of the project on the SNYLF and on SNYLF critical habitat. (Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14 §15126.4 (2018).) To adequately mitigate the impact of the project on the SNYLF and the SNYLF’s critical habitat, the mid-stations should not be open to exit/entry.

³ The DEIS/R states that April 15 was selected because it is “around which time the frog is known to awaken from hibernation.” DEIS/R at 2-14. The justification for this date does not account for seasonal variations in snowpack melt, and for the overall increase in average temperature and decrease in snowpack that is expected from climate change. DEIS/R at 4.11-12.

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0097-12

B. The DEIS/R relied on insufficient information when it concluded that the installation of the Gazex Avalanche control measures will not significantly impact the SNYLF

The location of the Gazex system for all three action alternatives is the same. (DEIS/R at 4.14-87). Therefore, the impact on the SNYLF of the installation and the use of the avalanche control system would result in the same environmental disturbances and would require implementation of the same RPMs under each action alternative. The DEIS/R admits that “[t]here are currently no studies that have looked at the effects of avalanche control or shelling explosions on overwintering amphibians or tadpoles, and . . . sound and vibration may reach Barstool Lake (approximately 350 feet) and the overwintering SNYLF tadpoles and adults.” (*Id.* at 4.14-49). However, the DEIS/R later states that the impact under CEQA, with the implementation of mitigating measures, would be reduced to a less-than-significant level. (*Id.* at 4.14-54.)

Certain RPMs that would be enforced under CEQA may reduce some of the identified environmental impacts of the project to the endangered SNYLF, however the DEIS/R erroneously concludes that the RPMs would reduce the impact to less than significant. As the DEIS/R states, there are no studies that provide the effects of the avalanche control system on overwintering amphibians and tadpoles. Meanwhile, the proposed location of five Gazex exploders would be located near Barstool Lake, which is known occupied habitat for the SNYLF, and is also included in the SNYLF’s designated critical habitat. (DEIS/R at 2-4, SNYLF BA at 62.) Consequently, there is inadequate information for the DEIS/R to conclude that the implementation of RPMs would mitigate the impact of the project to the SNYLF “the point where it is believed no take would occur.” (DEIS/R at 5-4-5.) The DEIS/R should not conclude that “potential impacts to this species would be mitigated to the point where it is believed no take would occur,” and that “the action alternatives would comply with the ESA” without adequate support and knowledge of a baseline impact of avalanche control systems on overwintering amphibians and tadpoles. The DEIS/R should be revised to reflect this uncertainty regarding the impact of the avalanche control measures on overwintering amphibians and tadpoles.

0097-13

C. The DEIS/R errs in concluding that the implementation of all RPMs will result in no take of the SNYLF

The DEIS/R states that with the implementation of the relevant RPMs, “potential impacts to this species would be mitigated to the point where it is believed no take would occur, and because no other threatened or endangered species were found within the project area, the action alternatives would comply with the ESA.” (DEIS/R at 5-5.) However, the relevant RPMs for the SNYLF do not provide certainty that no take would occur.

The ESA defines take as “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.” (16 U.S.C. §1532(19).) Furthermore, “harm” is defined under the ESA to include “an act which actually kills or injures wildlife. Such act may include significant habitat modification or degradation where it actually kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding or sheltering.” (50 C.F.R. 17.3.) And harass is defined under the ESA to mean “an intentional or negligent act or omission which creates the likelihood of injury to wildlife by annoying it to such

0097-12, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

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. See the Master Response on this topic in Section 1.8, "Master Responses," for more information on the removal of Gazex from the project.

0097-13, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

The comment states that the Draft EIS/EIR incorrectly concludes that no take of SNYLF would occur. The Draft EIS/EIR explains that the project may result in incidental take of SNYLF, but with implementation of both the RPMs and mitigation measures, the project would minimize impacts on and prevent take of SNYLF. (Draft EIS/EIR, Impacts 4.14-1 and 4.14-2.)

The comment states that RPM BIO-18 defers completion of field surveys. Field surveys, as required by the Forest Service and USFWS, were conducted prior to preparation of the EIS/EIR. As described in Sections 4.12 through 4.15 of the EIS/EIR, field surveys of the alternative gondola alignments were conducted in 2015, 2016, and 2017 by Ascent Environmental, EcoSynthesis, and Hydro Restoration (also see Appendix H of the EIS/EIR for survey results). Surveys conducted within the project areas only identified SNYLF occupancy within Barstool Lake. Pre-construction surveys would ensure that the SNYLF has not moved into areas previously surveyed. RPM BIO-19 requires that a Forest Service Biologist, or Forest Service approved biologist (e.g., qualified ecological

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monitor) must be present during construction near riparian areas or aquatic habitat suitable for the SNYLF and adjacent upland habitat. This would help to ensure that construction activities do not cause adverse effects.

The comment is correct that RPMs BIO-18 and BIO-19 focus on potential effects to SNYLF during project construction. However, other measures, such as RPM BIO-3 and Mitigation Measure 4.14-1 address potential effect on SNYLF during other phases of project operation. Also, the potential for noise and other direct and indirect effect mechanisms to adversely affect SNYLF are discussed in Impact 4.14-1, for example, Draft EIS/EIR page 4.14-48, "Construction activities can also have a direct effect on the SNYLF by temporarily displacing the frog from the construction area as they may avoid the surrounding area due to human presence and noise during construction."

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0097-13 cont'd, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

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an extent as to significantly disrupt normal behavioral patterns which include, but are not limited to, breeding, feeding, or sheltering.” (*Id.*)

The pertinent RPMs (BIO-18 and BIO-19) state that they would prevent any incidental take of SNYLF by “relocate[ing] individuals to suitable habitat outside of the construction area.” (DEIS/R at B-18). However, for those identified RPMs to be successful, the SNYLF must be found and identified. The nature of the SNYLF and its size do not provide certainty that all SNYLFs within the construction area will be identified and relocated. Therefore, there is no certainty that incidental take will not occur. The relevant RPMs in the DEIS/R are inadequate to support the conclusion that no harm/take of the SNYLF will occur. The ESA includes in its definition for “take” both harass and collect. (16 U.S.C. §1532(19).) Moreover, moving or relocating SNYLF that have been identified within the construction *will* result in a take as defined by the ESA because the ESA defines take to include capture. (16 U.S.C. §1532(19).) The RPMs do not address any measures that will be taken to ensure that SNYLF that are relocated as a part of BIO-18 or BIO-19 survive relocation. Additionally, the presence of people and loud machinery within the SNYLF’s critical habitat will also likely disrupt normal behavior patterns, causing take in the form of harassment. (50 C.F.R. 17.3.) Thus, the RPM’s are inadequate to protect the SNYLF from take under the ESA.

RPM BIO-18 defers the completion of field surveys to be “[c]oncurrent with preconstruction surveys.” (DEIS/R at B-18.) The results of the field investigation will be used to “inform compensation ratios and any other required responses to SNYLF habitat loss associated with the project.” (*Id.*) The deferral of mitigation measures to a later time violates CEQA. (See Cal. Code of Regs. tit. 14 § 15126.4, stating that “[f]ormulation of mitigation measures should not be deferred until some future time.”) Under RPM BIO-18, it is unclear how the proponent can base a mitigation measure on the results of a future survey. The postponement of field investigations is an impermissible violation of CEQA and does not provide the public and decision makers with an accurate view of the project as a whole. (*See* *Cty of Inyo*, 71 Cal.App.3d at 193.) RPM BIO-18 should be revised to rely on known survey results. Alternatively, the field investigation should be conducted prior to the completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report so that the results can be adequately incorporated into the RPMs and considered in the decisionmaking process.

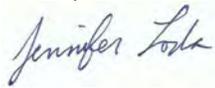
Further, RPM’s BIO-18 and BIO-19, which mitigation impacts to the SNYLF, are only implemented during the construction of the project. (DEIS/R at B-18.) The DEIS/R errs in its conclusion that the implementation of RPMs will result in “no take.” (*Id.* at 5.5) The DEIS/R does not discuss how the ongoing operation of the gondola, the installation and operations of the Gazex exploders, and future maintenance of the gondola may harm the species. The project results in an overall increase in noise to the region due to the ongoing operation of the gondola and the intermittent use of the Gazex exploders. (DEIS/R at Appendix F.) All three action alternatives are located within designated critical habitat for the SNYLF. The DEIS/R does not consider the impact of increased noise to the region to the SNYLF and does not analyze whether increased noise may adversely or significantly impact or harm the behavioral patterns of the SNYLF in its critical habitat. The DEIS/R does not provide sufficient information to support its conclusion that the action alternatives will not harm the SNYLF or adversely modify its critical habitat with the habitat destruction caused by construction, the introduction of increased noise, and the opportunities for increased recreation in the frog’s critical habitat.

0097-14

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this proposed Project. We look forward to working to ensure that the Project and environmental review conforms to requirements of state and federal law to make certain that all significant impacts to the environment are fully analyzed, mitigated, or avoided, and that accurate and current information is relied upon in the decisionmaking process. In light of the significant unavoidable adverse impacts that will result from all action alternatives, we strongly urge you to deny this Project. At a minimum, the DEIS/R must be revised and recirculated to address the deficiencies under CEQA. Please do not hesitate to contact the Center with any questions at the number provided below. We look forward to reviewing the Applicant's responses to these comments in the Final EIS/R for this Project once completed.

Sincerely,



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0097-14, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided above. See responses to the detailed comments above. For the reasons described above, the Draft EIS/EIR does conform to the requirements of NEPA and CEQA, and the Draft EIS/EIR does not require recirculation.

0104

0104-1, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided below. See responses to the detailed comments below.

*North Fork Association
P.O. Box 1334
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June 11, 2018

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Re: Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(F) Evaluation

Dear Ms. Herrington and Ms. Roubique:

0104-1

The North Fork Association (NFA) is a private landowner group that owns and manages approximately 5,400 acres of land in the Headwaters Basin of the North Fork American River near Squaw Valley. Our members are greatly concerned about the proposed Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project ("Project") and the potentially severe impacts it would cause on the sensitive natural resources that exist in this pristine subalpine and alpine environment which is adjacent to the Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

We respectfully submit these comments to help ensure that agency decision-makers fully comply with the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"), Public Resources Code section 21000 *et seq.*, and the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA"), 42 U.S.C. section 4321 *et seq.* These impacts could be even more damaging due to the Project's connection to and relationship with development in Squaw Valley and on Troy Caldwell's property ("White Wolf"). After carefully reviewing the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Statement ("DEIR/S") for the Project, we have concluded that it fundamentally fails to comply with the requirements of CEQA and NEPA in numerous respects. As described below, the DEIR/S violates these laws because it: (1) fails to provide an adequate description of the Project; (2) defers analysis of critical environmental impacts and fails to adequately analyze those impacts it does address; (3) fails to support its conclusions with substantial evidence; (4)

0104-1
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fails to propose adequate mitigation measures for the Project’s numerous significant environmental impacts; and (5) fails to undertake a sufficient study of alternatives to the Project.

Overall, our review of this environmental document indicates that it fails to fully and accurately inform decision-makers and the public of the severe environmental consequences of the proposed action and it does not identify ways to mitigate or avoid those impacts, it does not satisfy the basic goals of either CEQA or NEPA. We respectfully request that the Final EIR/S respond separately to each of the points raised in the technical consultant’s reports as well as to the points raised in this letter.

0104-2

1. The DEIR/S Fails to Comply with CEQA and NEPA because it does not provide a complete Description of the Project or a means of distinguishing among Project alternatives.

CEQA’s most fundamental requirement is that an EIR contain an accurate and complete description of the proposed project. This rule ensures “that environmental considerations do not become submerged by piecemealing large project into many small ones—each with a potential impact on the environment—which cumulatively may have disastrous consequences. Without a complete project description, an agency and the public cannot be assured that all of a project’s environmental impacts have been revealed and mitigated. Further, the CEQA and NEPA Guidelines mandate that an DEIR/S include a description of “the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project from both a local, regional, and cumulative perspective.” This requirement derives from the principle that without an adequate description of the project’s local, regional, and cumulative context, the DEIR/S and thus the decision-makers and the public who rely on this environmental document cannot accurately assess the potentially significant impacts of the proposed Project.

The document further explains that “based on the analysis documented within this EIS/EIR, the Responsible Official, the Forest Supervisor for the TNF, will decide whether to select Alternative 2 (Proposed Action Alternative provided by the applicant), one of the other action alternatives, or the No Action Alternative.” The DEIR/S then proceeds to analyze the significant environmental effects of each of these alternatives, which vary significantly depending on the route location. Although Alternative 2, the alternative that was ultimately selected, was evaluated in detail, the other alternatives received only a cursory analysis. The DEIR/S does not give sufficient information about Project alternatives’ components and actions to enable an informed evaluation of the Project’s environmental impacts. For example, the DEIR/S provides insufficient detail about construction of a “temporary” access road (and indeed, omits discussing of the access road entirely for two of the alternatives, although it appears necessary), tower sites, and associated infrastructure, leaving much to the reader’s imagination. The document must be revised to include the requisite detail, which is critical to adequate evaluation and proper mitigation of significant impacts. Finally, the DEIR/S improperly segments review of the gondola proposal from a proposed residential development and ski resort at White Wolf, which is within and/or abuts the area(s) of the Project alternatives. The White Wolf development is inextricably linked with the gondola Project.

2. The DEIR/S’s Analysis of and Mitigation for the Project’s Environmental

0104-3

0104-1 cont'd, Summary (S2)

0104-2, Project Description (PD)

The comment requests additional detail for Alternatives 3 and 4 regarding "construction of a temporary access road..., tower sites, and associated infrastructure." The additional detail requested by the comment was not provided in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS/EIR because this component of the project would not differ considerably between action alternatives. The exact alignment of the temporary construction access route under Alternative 2 would differ from Alternatives 3 and 4 (please refer to Exhibits 2-2, 2-9 and 2-13 in the Draft EIS/EIR), but the narrative description of the temporary construction access route provided on page 2-11 is applicable for all action alternatives.

Analysis provided in the Draft EIS/EIR was conducted with equal consideration of all alternatives. In places where specific detail was omitted for Alternatives 3 or 4, this detail was intentionally omitted to minimize redundancy in the Draft EIS/EIR. Much of the description of various project components or environmental analysis would not differ appreciably between action alternatives (e.g., description of the temporary construction access route). For any subjects where environmental impacts would be different across alternatives, distinctions between alternatives were identified in great detail. For example, please refer to Impact 4.2-2 for Alternative 3, beginning on page 4.2-34 of the Draft EIS/EIR; the analysis provided in this section refers to analysis provided earlier in the document for Alternative 2 where appropriate, and provides unique analysis as necessary where

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impacts for Alternative 3 would differ from those associated with Alternative 2.

In response to the comment that the Draft EIS/EIR improperly segmented review of the gondola project from the Caldwell property development (referred to as the "White Wolf Development"), please refer to the response provided for comment 0166-6. The White Wolf Development and the proposed gondola project are not considered part of the same project under either NEPA or CEQA.

0104-3, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided below. See responses to the detailed comments below.

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Impacts Are Inadequate.

As discussed below, the evaluation of a proposed project’s environmental impacts is the core purpose of a DEIR/S as it does not discuss fully the Project’s potential and likely impacts on biological resources, water quality and hydrology, noise, transportation, air quality, and climate change. It also fails to identify effective mitigation measures for the Project’s significant effects.

0104-4

The DEIR/S’s analysis of Project-related impacts to biological resources contains numerous deficiencies that must be remedied in order for the public and decision-makers to fully understand the Project’s likely impacts. Some of the DEIR/S’s most troubling omissions include: (1) an inadequate description of the existing setting; (2) an inadequate description of the Project; (3) an incomplete analysis of impacts; and (4) deficient mitigation measures. Of particular concern are the inadequate discussion of potential projects on the federally-listed Endangered Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (*Rana sierrae*), including the direct loss of individuals and occupied habitat. The uncertainty surrounding the Project leads inevitably to deferred analysis and mitigation. Time and again, the DEIR/S states that impacts will be avoided through Resource Protection Measures (“RPM”) that call for additional review and analysis down the road.

Merely stating that an impact will occur is insufficient, a DEIR/S must also provide “information about how adverse the adverse impact will be mitigated.” The DEIR/S’s analysis of impacts to the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged Frog and other biological resources fails to fulfill this mandate in several instances, including formal consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

0104-5

The Project would construct an aerial gondola more than two miles long consisting of 35 towers, some exceeding 50 feet in height, two base terminals, and two 24-foot by 84-foot mid-stations—traversing a pristine granite ridgeline at the crest of the Sierra Nevada. The Project would also install eight Gazex exploders at Alpine Meadows ski resort. The scenic value of this ridgeline is obvious to anybody who has hiked the popular Five Lakes Trail and is almost certainly among the reasons for its inclusion in the 1984 Granite Chief Wilderness designation. Unfortunately, the DEIR/S employs a viewshed analysis that largely ignores the largest components of the Project and fails to adequately analyze or disclose the harm this infrastructure would inflict on this treasured landscape. The DEIR/S employs an inappropriate method to analyze the Project’s impacts on viewsheds, as it uses high-resolution topographical mapping data

and geographical information system technology to define the Project viewshed—the “zone of potential visibility” where project components would be within line of sight of potential users. Although a properly conducted viewshed analysis can be a powerful tool for analysis, the DEIR/S applies the technique in a manner that serves to obscure and minimize rather than disclose and highlight the Project’s visual impacts. The viewshed analysis is misleading because it focuses entirely on the visibility of gondola towers within the viewshed, while failing to account for the proposed gondola mid-stations in determining the “zone of potential visibility.” Because the DEIR/S’s viewpoint analysis forms the basis of its significance determinations concerning visual resources, it is critical that the Forest Service the appropriate analysis to develop its mitigation through selected RPMs. Overall, our analysis of the DEIR/S suggests that the assertions in this document do not support the conclusion that visual impacts could be mitigated to less-than-significant levels since

0104-3 cont'd, Summary (S2)

0104-4, Wildlife and Aquatics (W&A)

The comment states that the Draft EIR/EIS contains numerous deficiencies, including an inadequate description of the existing setting and project description. However, the comment provides no evidence or specifics on how the setting information and project description may be lacking. Section 4.14, "Wildlife and Aquatics," describes the setting in Subsection 4.14.1.1, "Environmental Setting." Chapter 2.0, "Description of Alternatives," of the Draft EIR/EIS provides the project description. Also see responses to comments earlier in this letter related to Project Description.

The comment also states that the Draft EIR/EIS includes an incomplete analysis of impacts and that the mitigation measures are deficient. In particular, the comment expresses concern with the discussion of SNYLF and the associated mitigation. Again, the comment provides no evidence or specific examples to support these assertions.

The Draft EIS/EIR discusses impacts related to SNYLF in Section 4.14, "Wildlife and Aquatics." Cumulative effects of the project in connection with other probable future projects (including the proposed White Wolf Development) are evaluated in Sections 4.1 through 4.17. See in particular the discussion of impacts on SNYLF under Impacts 4.14 -1 (Alt.2), 4.14-2 (Alt. 2), 4.14- 6 (Alt.2), 4.14-1 (Alt.3), 4.14-2 (Alt. 3), 4.14- 6 (Alt.3), 4.14-1 (Alt.4), 4.14-2 (Alt. 4), and 4.14- 6 (Alt.4).

0104-5, Visual Resources (VR)

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The comment states that the viewshed analysis "employs an inappropriate method," because "it uses high-resolution topographical mapping data and geographical information system technology to define the Project viewshed." The comment further states that the "analysis is misleading because it focuses entirely on the visibility of gondola towers within the viewshed, while failing to account for the proposed gondola mid-stations." The methodology for the viewshed analysis is described in Section 4.2.2 of the EIS/EIR. The viewshed analysis provides a quantitative assessment of the visual impacts associated with the project using the best available data at the time of analysis. The viewshed analysis accurately accounts for topographic features, but does not incorporate potentially obscuring features such as vegetation or built structures. It is expected that existing vegetative screening would have the effect of considerably reducing the overall potential visibility of the project, dependent on the specific location and vantage of the viewer. Because it does not take into account potentially obscuring features, the viewshed analysis is a conservative approximation of the Zone of Potential Visibility.

In addition to the viewshed analysis, 21 visual simulations created for each alternative allow for a qualitative analysis of the visual changes that are anticipated to occur with implementation of any of the action alternatives from a feasible selection (16) of representative locations. The objective of creating visual simulations is to characterize the appearance of the action alternatives if constructed. The visual simulations analysis is also discussed in Section 4.2.2 of the EIS/EIR.

The analysis in the EIS/EIR is supported by substantial evidence.

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The Placer County General Plan Policy 1.K.1 is addressed specifically for each alternative in Section 4.2.3. CEQA requires only that inconsistencies with general plan goals and policies be identified and discussed (CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15125, subd. [d]). The Draft EIS/EIR does this (please refer to the Draft EIS/EIR, pp. 4.2-23 thru -24). Further, Policy 1.K.1 was not adopted as a threshold of significance under CEQA, so it does not dictate a new significant impact finding as to Impact 4.2-1 (Consistency with Federal, State and Local Regulations). Thus, a new significant impact finding is not warranted under CEQA and recirculation of the document is unnecessary. The Final EIS/EIR has been updated to further clarify that all alternatives would be, to a certain degree, inconsistent with Placer County General Plan Policy 1.K.1 which states: "The County shall require that new development in scenic areas (e.g., river canyons, lake watersheds, scenic highway corridors, ridgelines and steep slopes) is planned and designed in a manner which employs design, construction, and maintenance techniques that:

- a. Avoids locating structures along ridgelines and steep slopes;
- b. Incorporates design and screening measures to minimize the visibility of structures and grated areas;
- c. Maintains the character and visual quality of the area." (Placer County General Plan, p. 39)."

By their very nature, gondolas and ski lifts must extend along steep slopes to achieve their purpose. Given that the gondola is intended to connect the two ski resorts, all three action alternatives must also cross over the ridgeline which separates the two valleys. As such, it is not possible for the

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gondola to avoid slopes and ridgelines, but rather the design must rely on other means to screen and minimize the visible impacts of the infrastructure. Specifically the design of each alignment takes advantage of existing topography and vegetation to shield views as well as incorporates design standards via RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3. It is acknowledged that the Alternative 2 alignment traverses a lengthy distance of the sparsely vegetated ridgeline, whereas Alternatives 3 and 4 cross over the ridgeline in one discrete location before diving down into “Catch Valley”, thus limiting the visible impacts of the Alternative 3 and 4 gondola infrastructure to a greater extent than Alternative 2. With these design measures in place, all three gondola alignments achieve consistency with the goals and policies of Policy 1.K.1.

0104-5 cont'd | under the preferred Alternative 2 calls for a gondola route along ridgelines and steep slopes which is not consistent with the Placer County General Plan Policy 1.K.1.

0104-6 | The Project study area is an especially fragile ecosystem. The DEIR/S acknowledges the potential for severe hydrologic and water quality impacts but stops short of providing the analysis of these impacts required by CEQA and NEPA. The Project study area occurs upstream of two tributaries to the middle Truckee River, Squaw Creek, and Bear Creek. Within the Alternative 2 study area, there are a total of 1.65 acres of aquatic resources, but a formal delineation of jurisdictional features associated with each action alternative has not been conducted to confirm the exact boundaries of waters and wetlands.

0104-7 | The DEIR/S addresses the Project's potential to violate water quality standards. The document first provides an overview of the nature of the analysis that should be undertaken to evaluate the context and intensity of the Project's impacts on water quality. Factors to be addressed include the creeks' hydrologic function, stream health, rate and amount of runoff, stream sedimentation (both suspended and sand-size portion of bedload sediment), and slope stability. Part of this evaluation should address TMDL adopted for sediment in the creeks. As the DEIR/S acknowledges, given the sensitivity of Bear Creek and Truckee River and their upland environs to erosion and sedimentation, even small amounts of sedimentation could have harmful downstream effects. The potential for the Project to degrade water quality in this sensitive environment warrants a thorough impact analysis. Yet, other than identifying the amount of land and vegetation that would be disturbed by each of the Project Alternatives the DEIR/S provides only a vague discussion of the types of impacts that could theoretically occur. The DEIR/S's treatment of potential impacts on water quality falls well short of legal standards as it is cursory and not quantitative.

0104-8 | Analysis of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is essential under CEQA and NEPA. Scientists agree that existing conditions are such that we have already exceeded the capacity of the atmosphere to absorb additional GHG emissions without risking catastrophic and irreversible consequences. Therefore, even seemingly small additions of GHG emissions into the atmosphere must be considered cumulatively considerable. This DEIR/S concludes that the Project would result in less-than-significant impacts related to greenhouse gas emissions. However, as detailed above, the DEIR/S presents an incomplete description of the Project and its construction activities, which results in a flawed greenhouse gas analysis.

0104-9 | **3. The DEIR/S's Analysis of Alternatives Is Inadequate.**
A proper analysis of alternatives is essential to comply with the CEQA/NEPA mandate that significant environmental damage be avoided or substantially lessened where feasible. The fundamental goal that the public be fully informed as to the consequences of action by their public officials. The discussion of alternatives must focus on alternatives to the project or its location that are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the Project. The DEIR/S is defective because it fails to consider a reasonable range of alternatives, including any alternative other than a gondola to provide access between the two resorts. To be

0104-5 cont'd, Visual Resources (VR)

0104-6, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

This comment states that the Draft EIS/EIR does not provide an adequate analysis of hydrology and water quality impacts under CEQA and NEPA because a delineation of U.S. jurisdictional waters has not been completed. A wetland delineation would be required if, after selection of a project alternative and completion of project design, impacts to wetland resources cannot be fully avoided, consistent with the process described in RPM BIO-26. In that instance, a wetland delineation would be prepared and reviewed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife prior to project implementation, in anticipation of permit acquisition. Completion of a wetland delineation could potentially result in small adjustments to the acreages of jurisdictional features identified in the EIS/EIR; however, adjustments would likely be in the scale of tenths or hundredths of acres. Any modifications would not be sufficient to alter the impact conclusions in the EIS/EIR, or the ability to compare environmental effects across alternatives. In addition, RPM BIO-26 requires wetland impacts to be avoided and minimized, and any unavoidable disturbance to wetlands would be restored or otherwise mitigated consistent with USACE no net loss standards.

The hydrology and water quality analysis in Section 4.17 of the Draft EIS/EIR analyzes the potential effects on water quality for the alternatives. The EIS/EIR uses best available information related to the project as described in Section 4.17.2.1, "Methods and Assumptions." Based on this information and the application of provisions in the

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RPMs to the project, the Draft EIS/EIR found that the project would have adverse and mitigated effects under NEPA, and less than significant effects with implementation of RPMs under CEQA.

0104-7, Hydrology and Water Quality (H&WQ)

This comment states that the impact analysis conducted for water quality in Impacts 4.17-1 and 4.17-2 should include a discussion of the TMDL adopted for the Truckee River. It also suggests several factors (hydrologic function, stream health, rate and amount of runoff, stream sedimentation, and slope stability) that could be considered for the analyses under these impact statements. Please see response to comment 0166-15. Comment 0166-15 repeats much of the same language provided in this comment.

0104-8, Greenhouse Gases (GHG)

The comment states that the GHG analysis is flawed because the project description is incomplete. Please see responses to comments 0104-2 and 0166-6 regarding the project description.

Emissions associated with construction and operation of the project are shown, by source, in Table 4.11-1 of the Draft EIS/EIR. Construction activities that were evaluated include site preparation, grading, building construction, and mobile-sources from worker commute, vendor deliveries, and material hauling activities. Operational-related emissions included increases in vehicle traffic associated with increased skier days, operation of the gondola, and long-term maintenance activities.

0104

The EIS/EIR explains that PCAPCD has adopted construction thresholds of significance of 10,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent CO₂e/year and operational thresholds of significance of 1,100 MT CO₂e/year. (Draft EIS/EIR, p. 4.11-9.) Discussions for Impact 4.11-2 (Alt.2), Impact 4.11-1 (Alt. 3), and Impact 4.11-1 (Alt. 4) compared project construction and operational emissions to these thresholds and demonstrated that emissions will not exceed either one. The conclusion in the EIS/EIR that greenhouse gas emissions would be less than significant is supported by substantial evidence. Also see response to comment 0072-11, which addresses similar issues. No further analysis or mitigation is necessary.

0104-9, Alternatives (A)

Please see response to comment #0072-5 regarding the alternatives analysis in the EIS/EIR.

0104

0104-9
cont'd

reasonable, the range of alternatives analyzed in an EIR/S must provide enough variation from the proposed project “to allow informed decision making” regarding options that would reduce environmental impacts. In this case, all three alternatives include roughly the same number of towers (between 33 and 35), 2 base terminals and 2 mid-stations, and 8 Gazex Exploders. The alternatives would also all disturb roughly the same amount of land.

Due to the lack of clear distinctions among alternatives, as the DEIR/S explains, there is very little difference in environmental effects among them. For example, all of the alternatives would have significant and unavoidable impacts on biological and visual resources, traffic, and noise. As the primary purpose of alternatives analysis under CEQA and NEPA is to explore options to proposed actions that will adversely affect the environment, assessing slightly different variations of proposals with essentially identical environmental effects does not constitute an adequate alternatives analysis. Notably, the DEIR/S fails to seriously evaluate non-gondola alternatives. The NFA encourages the County and the Forest Service to consider evaluate alternatives that could achieve Project objectives without the negative environmental impacts attendant to the proposed gondola.

0104-10

In light of these likely adverse environmental effects, members of the NFA feel strongly that the County and Forest Service must consider a feasible and prudent alternative to the gondola—one that does not impact the Granite Chief Wilderness, Squaw Saddle, and the Five Lakes Trail. The Act also requires that the Service include all possible planning to minimize harm to this land. Because the EIR/S lacks an adequate range of alternatives, but instead promotes only the gondola, any approval of the Project would violate the stated goals of both CEQA and NEPA and the DEIR/S should not be approved in its present form.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Mackey, DVM
NFA President

0104-9 cont'd, Alternatives (A)

0104-10, Summary (S2)

The comment states that because the Draft EIS/EIR lacks an adequate range of alternatives, approval of the project would violate the goals of NEPA and CEQA, and therefore the Draft EIS/EIR should not be approved. The analysis in the EIS/EIR is adequate and is supported by substantial evidence. No changes are necessary in response to this comment.



Plan Review Team
Land Management

PGEPlanReview@pge.com
6111 Bollinger Canyon Road 3370A
San Ramon, CA 94583

0127

0127-1, Utilities (U)

The Forest Service and County appreciate PG&E's review of the project plans. The applicant, in collaboration with the Forest Service and County, will work with PG&E as project planning continues to ensure that the project complies with applicable laws and requirements regarding gas and electric facilities.

June 11, 2018

Shirlee Herrington
Placer County
Community Development Resource Agency
3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190
Auburn, CA 95603

Re: Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project
Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows

Dear Shirlee Herrington:

0127-1

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to review your plans. The proposed Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project dated April 27, 2018 does not appear to interfere with any existing PG&E facilities or easement rights; therefore, we have no comments at this time.

Please note that this is our preliminary review and reserve the right for future review as needed. If there are subsequent modifications made to your design, we ask that you resubmit your plans to the email address listed below.

In the event that you require PG&E's gas or electrical service in the future, please continue to work with PG&E's Service Planning department: <https://www.pge.com/cco/>

If you have any questions regarding our response, please contact the PG&E Plan Review Team at (877) 259-8314 or pgeplanreview@pge.com.

Sincerely,

PG&E Plan Review Team
Land Management

0135

Shirlee Herrington

From: PGE Plan Review <PGEPlanReview@pge.com>
Sent: Monday, May 07, 2018 1:09 PM
To: Placer County Environmental Coordination Services
Subject: Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Proj.
Attachments: PGE_Plan_Review_StepbyStep_Guide_20180411.pdf; Initial_Response_Letter_18_05_07.pdf

0135-1, Summary (S2)

The comment is an introductory statement and does not address the content, analysis, or conclusions in the Draft EIS/EIR. Therefore, a response is not warranted.

Dear Shiree Herrington,

0135-1 | Thank you for submitting the Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Proj. plans. The PGE Plan Review Team is currently reviewing the information provided. We will respond to you with project specific comments prior to the provided deadline. Attached is general information regarding PGE facilities for your reference.

This email and attachment does not constitute PG&E's consent to use any portion of its easement for any purpose not previously conveyed.

*****Please note the new process for PG&E Plan Reviews [attached]. To avoid future delays please update your records and send requests to the below email address*****

Thank you,

Plan Review Team
6111 Bollinger Canyon Rd., 3rd Floor
Mail Code BR1Y3A
San Ramon, CA 94583
pgeplanreview@pge.com

*****This is a notification email only. Please do not reply to this message.***



Plan Review Team
Land Management

PGEPlanReview@pge.com
6111 Bollinger Canyon Road 3370A
San Ramon, CA 94583

0135

0135-2, Utilities (U)

May 7, 2018

Placer County Community Development Resources Agency
Shirlee Herrington
Environmental Coordination Services
3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190
Auburn, CA 95603

Ref: Gas and Electric Transmission and Distribution

Dear Shirlee Herrington,

Thank you for submitting Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Proj. plans for our review. PG&E will review the submitted plans in relationship to any existing Gas and Electric facilities within the project area. If the proposed project is adjacent/or within PG&E owned property and/or easements, we will be working with you to ensure compatible uses and activities near our facilities.

Attached you will find information and requirements as it relates to Gas facilities (Attachment 1) and Electric facilities (Attachment 2). Please review these in detail, as it is critical to ensure your safety and to protect PG&E's facilities and its existing rights.

Below is additional information for your review:

1. This plan review process does not replace the application process for PG&E gas or electric service your project may require. For these requests, please continue to work with PG&E Service Planning: https://www.pge.com/en_US/business/services/building-and-renovation/overview/overview.page.
2. If the project being submitted is part of a larger project, please include the entire scope of your project, and not just a portion of it. PG&E's facilities are to be incorporated within any CEQA document. PG&E needs to verify that the CEQA document will identify any required future PG&E services.
3. An engineering deposit may be required to review plans for a project depending on the size, scope, and location of the project and as it relates to any rearrangement or new installation of PG&E facilities.

Any proposed uses within the PG&E fee strip and/or easement, may include a California Public Utility Commission (CPUC) Section 851 filing. This requires the CPUC to render approval for a conveyance of rights for specific uses on PG&E's fee strip or easement. PG&E will advise if the necessity to incorporate a CPUC Section 851 filing is required.

This letter does not constitute PG&E's consent to use any portion of its easement for any purpose not previously conveyed. PG&E will provide a project specific response as required.

Sincerely,

Plan Review Team
Land Management

The Forest Service and County appreciate PG&E's review of the project plans. The project applicant, in coordination with the Forest Service and County, will work with PG&E as project planning continues to ensure that the project complies with applicable laws and requirements regarding gas and electric facilities.

0135-2



Attachment 1 – Gas Facilities

There could be gas transmission pipelines in this area which would be considered critical facilities for PG&E and a high priority subsurface installation under California law. Care must be taken to ensure safety and accessibility. So, please ensure that if PG&E approves work near gas transmission pipelines it is done in adherence with the below stipulations. Additionally, the following link provides additional information regarding legal requirements under California excavation laws: <http://usanorth811.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CA-LAW-English.pdf>

1. Standby Inspection: A PG&E Gas Transmission Standby Inspector must be present during any demolition or construction activity that comes within 10 feet of the gas pipeline. This includes all grading, trenching, substructure depth verifications (potholes), asphalt or concrete demolition/removal, removal of trees, signs, light poles, etc. This inspection can be coordinated through the Underground Service Alert (USA) service at 811. A minimum notice of 48 hours is required. Ensure the USA markings and notifications are maintained throughout the duration of your work.

2. Access: At any time, PG&E may need to access, excavate, and perform work on the gas pipeline. Any construction equipment, materials, or spoils may need to be removed upon notice. Any temporary construction fencing installed within PG&E's easement would also need to be capable of being removed at any time upon notice. Any plans to cut temporary slopes exceeding a 1:4 grade within 10 feet of a gas transmission pipeline need to be approved by PG&E Pipeline Services in writing PRIOR to performing the work.

3. Wheel Loads: To prevent damage to the buried gas pipeline, there are weight limits that must be enforced whenever any equipment gets within 10 feet of traversing the pipe.

Ensure a list of the axle weights of all equipment being used is available for PG&E's Standby Inspector. To confirm the depth of cover, the pipeline may need to be potholed by hand in a few areas.

Due to the complex variability of tracked equipment, vibratory compaction equipment, and cranes, PG&E must evaluate those items on a case-by-case basis prior to use over the gas pipeline (provide a list of any proposed equipment of this type noting model numbers and specific attachments).

No equipment may be set up over the gas pipeline while operating. Ensure crane outriggers are at least 10 feet from the centerline of the gas pipeline. Transport trucks must not be parked over the gas pipeline while being loaded or unloaded.

4. Grading: PG&E requires a minimum of 36 inches of cover over gas pipelines (or existing grade if less) and a maximum of 7 feet of cover at all locations. The graded surface cannot exceed a cross slope of 1:4.

5. Excavating: Any digging within 2 feet of a gas pipeline must be dug by hand. Note that while the minimum clearance is only 12 inches, any excavation work within 24 inches of the edge of a pipeline must be done with hand tools. So to avoid having to dig a trench entirely with hand tools, the edge of the trench must be over 24 inches away. (Doing the math for a 24 inch wide trench being dug along a 36 inch pipeline, the centerline of the trench would need to be at least 54 inches $[24/2 + 24 + 36/2 = 54]$ away, or be entirely dug by hand.)



Water jetting to assist vacuum excavating must be limited to 1000 psig and directed at a 40° angle to the pipe. All pile driving must be kept a minimum of 3 feet away.

Any plans to expose and support a PG&E gas transmission pipeline across an open excavation need to be approved by PG&E Pipeline Services in writing PRIOR to performing the work.

6. Boring/Trenchless Installations: PG&E Pipeline Services must review and approve all plans to bore across or parallel to (within 10 feet) a gas transmission pipeline. There are stringent criteria to pothole the gas transmission facility at regular intervals for all parallel bore installations.

For bore paths that cross gas transmission pipelines perpendicularly, the pipeline must be potholed a minimum of 2 feet in the horizontal direction of the bore path and a minimum of 12 inches in the vertical direction from the bottom of the pipe with minimum clearances measured from the edge of the pipe in both directions. Standby personnel must watch the locator trace (and every ream pass) the path of the bore as it approaches the pipeline and visually monitor the pothole (with the exposed transmission pipe) as the bore traverses the pipeline to ensure adequate clearance with the pipeline. The pothole width must account for the inaccuracy of the locating equipment.

7. Substructures: All utility crossings of a gas pipeline should be made as close to perpendicular as feasible (90° +/- 15°). All utility lines crossing the gas pipeline must have a minimum of 12 inches of separation from the gas pipeline. Parallel utilities, pole bases, water line 'kicker blocks', storm drain inlets, water meters, valves, back pressure devices or other utility substructures are not allowed in the PG&E gas pipeline easement.

If previously retired PG&E facilities are in conflict with proposed substructures, PG&E must verify they are safe prior to removal. This includes verification testing of the contents of the facilities, as well as environmental testing of the coating and internal surfaces. Timelines for PG&E completion of this verification will vary depending on the type and location of facilities in conflict.

8. Structures: No structures are to be built within the PG&E gas pipeline easement. This includes buildings, retaining walls, fences, decks, patios, carports, septic tanks, storage sheds, tanks, loading ramps, or any structure that could limit PG&E's ability to access its facilities.

9. Fencing: Permanent fencing is not allowed within PG&E easements except for perpendicular crossings which must include a 16 foot wide gate for vehicular access. Gates will be secured with PG&E corporation locks.

10. Landscaping: Landscaping must be designed to allow PG&E to access the pipeline for maintenance and not interfere with pipeline coatings or other cathodic protection systems. No trees, shrubs, brush, vines, and other vegetation may be planted within the easement area. Only those plants, ground covers, grasses, flowers, and low-growing plants that grow unsupported to a maximum of four feet (4') in height at maturity may be planted within the easement area.

11. Cathodic Protection: PG&E pipelines are protected from corrosion with an "Impressed Current" cathodic protection system. Any proposed facilities, such as metal conduit, pipes,

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service lines, ground rods, anodes, wires, etc. that might affect the pipeline cathodic protection system must be reviewed and approved by PG&E Corrosion Engineering.

12. Pipeline Marker Signs: PG&E needs to maintain pipeline marker signs for gas transmission pipelines in order to ensure public awareness of the presence of the pipelines. With prior written approval from PG&E Pipeline Services, an existing PG&E pipeline marker sign that is in direct conflict with proposed developments may be temporarily relocated to accommodate construction work. The pipeline marker must be moved back once construction is complete.

13. PG&E is also the provider of distribution facilities throughout many of the areas within the state of California. Therefore, any plans that impact PG&E's facilities must be reviewed and approved by PG&E to ensure that no impact occurs which may endanger the safe operation of its facilities.



Attachment 2 – Electric Facilities

It is PG&E's policy to permit certain uses on a case by case basis within its electric transmission fee strip(s) and/or easement(s) provided such uses and manner in which they are exercised, will not interfere with PG&E's rights or endanger its facilities. Some examples/restrictions are as follows:

1. Buildings and Other Structures: No buildings or other structures including the foot print and eave of any buildings, swimming pools, wells or similar structures will be permitted within fee strip(s) and/or easement(s) areas. PG&E's transmission easement shall be designated on subdivision/parcel maps as "**RESTRICTED USE AREA – NO BUILDING.**"
2. Grading: Cuts, trenches or excavations may not be made within 25 feet of our towers. Developers must submit grading plans and site development plans (including geotechnical reports if applicable), signed and dated, for PG&E's review. PG&E engineers must review grade changes in the vicinity of our towers. No fills will be allowed which would impair ground-to-conductor clearances. Towers shall not be left on mounds without adequate road access to base of tower or structure.
3. Fences: Walls, fences, and other structures must be installed at locations that do not affect the safe operation of PG&'s facilities. Heavy equipment access to our facilities must be maintained at all times. Metal fences are to be grounded to PG&E specifications. No wall, fence or other like structure is to be installed within 10 feet of tower footings and unrestricted access must be maintained from a tower structure to the nearest street. Walls, fences and other structures proposed along or within the fee strip(s) and/or easement(s) will require PG&E review; submit plans to PG&E Centralized Review Team for review and comment.
4. Landscaping: Vegetation may be allowed; subject to review of plans. On overhead electric transmission fee strip(s) and/or easement(s), trees and shrubs are limited to those varieties that do not exceed 15 feet in height at maturity. PG&E must have access to its facilities at all times, including access by heavy equipment. No planting is to occur within the footprint of the tower legs. Greenbelts are encouraged.
5. Reservoirs, Sumps, Drainage Basins, and Ponds: Prohibited within PG&E's fee strip(s) and/or easement(s) for electric transmission lines.
6. Automobile Parking: Short term parking of movable passenger vehicles and light trucks (pickups, vans, etc.) is allowed. The lighting within these parking areas will need to be reviewed by PG&E; approval will be on a case by case basis. Heavy equipment access to PG&E facilities is to be maintained at all times. Parking is to clear PG&E structures by at least 10 feet. Protection of PG&E facilities from vehicular traffic is to be provided at developer's expense AND to PG&E specifications. Blocked-up vehicles are not allowed. Carports, canopies, or awnings are not allowed.
7. Storage of Flammable, Explosive or Corrosive Materials: There shall be no storage of fuel or combustibles and no fueling of vehicles within PG&E's easement. No trash bins or incinerators are allowed.
8. Streets and Roads: Access to facilities to be maintained at all times. Street lights may be allowed in the fee strip(s) and/or easement(s) but in all cases must be reviewed by PG&E for



proper clearance. Roads and utilities should cross the transmission easement as nearly at right angles as possible. Road intersections will not be allowed within the transmission easement.

9. Pipelines: Pipelines may be allowed provided crossings are held to a minimum and to be as nearly perpendicular as possible. Pipelines within 25 feet of PG&E structures require review by PG&E. Sprinklers systems may be allowed; subject to review. Leach fields and septic tanks are not allowed. Construction plans must be submitted to PG&E for review and approval prior to the commencement of any construction.

10. Signs: Signs are not allowed except in rare cases subject to individual review by PG&E.

11. Recreation Areas: Playgrounds, parks, tennis courts, basketball courts, barbecue and light trucks (pickups, vans, etc.) may be allowed; subject to review of plans. Heavy equipment access to PG&E facilities is to be maintained at all times. Parking is to clear PG&E structures by at least 10 feet. Protection of PG&E facilities from vehicular traffic is to be provided at developer's expense AND to PG&E specifications.

12. Construction Activity: Since construction activity will take place near PG&E's overhead electric lines, please be advised it is the contractor's responsibility to be aware of, and observe the minimum clearances for both workers and equipment operating near high voltage electric lines set out in the High-Voltage Electrical Safety Orders of the California Division of Industrial Safety (<https://www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/sb5g2.html>), as well as any other safety regulations. Contractors shall comply with California Public Utilities Commission General Order 95 (http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/gos/GO95/go_95_startup_page.html) and all other safety rules. No construction may occur within 25 feet of PG&E's towers. All excavation activities may only commence after 811 protocols has been followed.

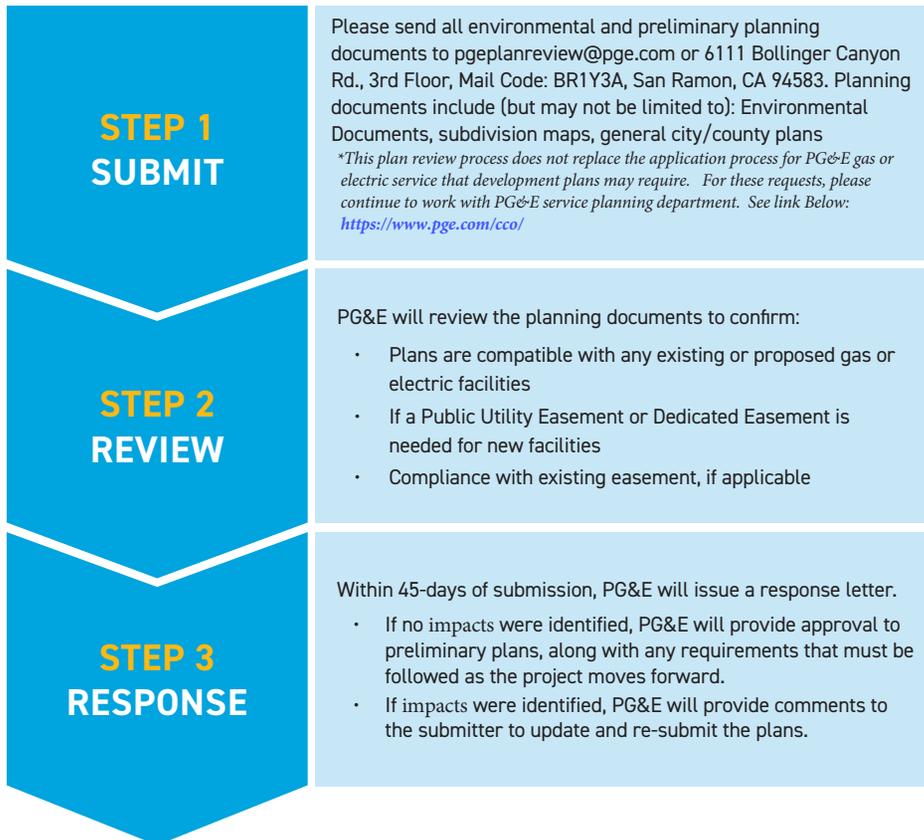
Contractor shall ensure the protection of PG&E's towers and poles from vehicular damage by (installing protective barriers) Plans for protection barriers must be approved by PG&E prior to construction.

13. PG&E is also the owner of distribution facilities throughout many of the areas within the state of California. Therefore, any plans that impact PG&E's facilities must be reviewed and approved by PG&E to ensure that no impact occurs that may endanger the safe and reliable operation of its facilities.



PG&E Preliminary Document
and Plan Review
Step-by-Step Guide

When planning a development project, it is important that any new buildings or landscaping are located a safe distance from overhead and underground utility lines. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) has developed the following 3-step guide to assist cities/counties, builders, and developers with ensuring preliminary plans are compatible with any PG&E electric or gas facilities in the area.



For More Information

For more information, or to check the status of your plan review, please contact PG&E Land Management Department at 1-877-259-8314. PG&E will follow-up with you within two business days.

0144



June 9, 2018

Placer County Planning Department
 Attn: Shirlee Herrington, Env. Coordination Services
 3091 County Center Drive
 Auburn, CA 95603
cdraecs@placer.ca.gov

Tahoe National Forest, Truckee Ranger District
 c/o NEPA Contractor
 P.O. Box 2729
 Frisco, CO 80443
Comments@squawalpinegondola-eis.com

Subject: Proposed Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project Draft EIS/R

Dear Ms. Herrington and Mr. Ilano:

0144-1 | The Friends of the West Shore (FOWS) and Sierra Club, Tahoe Area Group (SCTAG) appreciate this opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (DEIS/R) for the Proposed Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project. FOWS and SCTAG are very pleased with the inclusion of two feasible¹ Alternatives (3 and 4) which locate the gondola off of the 'ridge' and out of the privately-owned portion of the Granite Chief Wilderness Area (GCWA) as it would be in the proposed project (Alternative 2). We appreciate the time and effort of Placer County and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to develop these alternatives.

0144-2 | We are concerned with the extensive impacts the Proposed Project (Alternative 2) would have on the environment and communities in and around Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley and within the Lake Tahoe Basin, however our comments focus more heavily on Tahoe Basin impacts. Although Alternatives 3 and 4 create fewer impacts than the proposed Alternative 2, both alternatives result in numerous unmitigated environmental and public health and safety impacts. Further, for all action alternatives there are technical inadequacies which need to be sufficiently addressed in the Final EIS/R.

0144-3 | We hope these comments will assist Placer County and the USFS with the development of a comprehensive, technically-adequate FEIS/R, which sufficiently examines and discloses the impacts of the project and includes adequate mitigation. Please feel free to contact Jennifer Quashnick at jqtahoe@sbcglobal.net or Laurel Ames at amesl@sbcglobal.net if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Judith Tornese,
 President
 Friends of the West Shore

Laurel Ames,
 Conservation Chair
 Sierra Club, Tahoe Area Group

Jennifer Quashnick
 Conservation Consultant
 Friends of the West Shore

¹ Various gondola alignments that would connect the Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley base areas without traversing the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property are feasible." (p. 4.2-24)

0144-1, Other (O2)

The comment is an introductory statement and does not address the content, analysis, or conclusions in the Draft EIS/EIR. Therefore, a response is not warranted.

0144-2, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided below. See responses to the detailed comments below.

0144-3, Summary (S2)

The comment provides a summary of detailed comments provided below. See responses to the detailed comments below.

FOWS & SCTAG comments on Draft EIS/R for proposed AM/SV Base to Base Gondola

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Alternatives selected for analysis (Section 2):

0144-4

Conservation option for privately-owned land within Granite Chief Wilderness Area:

Numerous public comments on the NOP (including ours) regard the need to evaluate an alternative which involves public purchase and/or a conservation easement across the privately-owned lands within the Congressionally-designated GCWA. This option could be incorporated into Alternatives 3 and/or 4 and contribute toward mitigation for the impacts to wilderness values (as our comments discuss below, these impacts remain adverse and are not mitigated by the included measures).²

The Final EIS/R must address these significant public comments, and consider such a purchase and/or a conservation easement for the privately-owned lands within the Congressionally-designated GCWA.

Alternative Route Alignments and Alternative Technologies³ not evaluated further:

0144-5

The discussion of Alternative Route Alignments considered but not evaluated further in section 2.3.2.2 is deficient. Scoping respondents suggested a considerable number of alternative alignments which they believed might reduce environmental impacts and/or transport skiers more efficiently. These suggestions deserve more complete and thoughtful responses than the cursory dismissal in section 2.3.2.2. For example, alignments to the east of Alternatives 3 and 4 might have some substantial benefits. These benefits would include greater separation from the Granite Chief Wilderness Area and

² Namely Impact 4.3-3: Effects on Natural Wilderness and Impact 4.3-4: Effects on Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation.

³ Further evaluation of the Alternative Technologies listed in section 2.3.2.4 is not necessary.

0144-4, Alternatives (A)

Placer County and the Forest Service reviewed and considered all scoping comments provided in response to the NOP. The comment proposes an alternative that is beyond the scope of this EIS/EIR. Specifically, the comment refers to public comments on the NOP regarding the need to evaluate an alternative that includes "public purchase and/or a conservation easement across the privately-owned lands within the Congressionally-designated GCWA." The comment suggests that such action could be incorporated into Alternatives 3 and/or 4 to contribute toward mitigation for the impacts to wilderness values. Management of privately owned lands within the congressionally mapped Granite Chief Wilderness are not under the jurisdiction of the TNF.

Chapter 4.3 of the Draft EIS/EIR, moreover, explains that the project's potential effects on wilderness areas is a federal issue and therefore not necessary to satisfy the requirements of CEQA (Draft EIS/EIR, page 4.3-1). As explained, the effects would be either "no effect" or "minorsly adverse" depending on the alternative (refer to Table 4.3-1). As such, no mitigation or alternative as suggested by the comment is required. The requested inclusion of a conservation easement across privately owned lands is also infeasible because there is not a willing seller. The analysis process for the EIS/EIR has included numerous discussions with Mr. Caldwell, the private landowner, regarding his property. Mr. Caldwell has been very clear that the Caldwell Property is not available for purchase or easement.

0144-5, Alternatives (A)

The comment provides an opinion that the EIS/EIR discussion in Section 2.3.2.2, explaining why various other suggested alternative alignments for the gondola were not fully considered in the document, is inadequate. Section 2.3.2.2 of the EIS/EIR explains that mountain resort planners and lift equipment engineers reviewed and considered 39 additional conceptual alignments, including those suggested as part of the NOP comments, as part of the planning and analysis in the EIS/EIR (please also refer to Appendix A [scoping summary]).

The comment states that alignments to the east of Alternatives 3 and 4 "might have" some substantial benefits, including greater separation from the National Forest System-GCW and therefore "might include" reduced visual impacts. No evidence

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is offered in support of these statements. CEQA requires that lead agencies consider a "reasonable range" of potentially feasible alternatives that will avoid or substantially lessen the significant adverse impacts of a project in detail, not every alternative or mitigation measure suggested by comments. NEPA also requires federal lead agencies to consider a range of alternatives. The EIS/EIR includes a reasonable range of alternatives. The commenter's opinion is nevertheless noted and will be forwarded to the Forest Supervisor for the TNF and the Placer County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to take into consideration when making a decision regarding the project.

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0144-5 cont'd | might include reduced visual impacts from numerous viewpoints in the vicinity of the Wilderness and elsewhere.

0144-6 | An adequate discussion could be based upon a "constraints map" delineating constraint areas with technical or design challenges which preclude feasible alignments across these areas. A "constraints map" would be very informative. Suggestions for optimizing the constraints map include:

- Each constraint area is defined by its set of constraints, and there may be contiguous constraint areas defined by different sets of constraints; the boundaries between contiguous constraint areas should be shown on the map.
- Constraint areas should be identified by numbers, letters, or other symbols, and the existing constraints on each area should be listed and described in a text paragraph.
- The more explicit and quantitative the descriptions of the constraints on each area, the better.

0144-7 | Presumably considerable portions of the ridge separating Squaw and Alpine are not feasible locations for a mid-station because creating a sufficiently large flat area would require excessive grading. The remainder of the ridge would be within constraint zones delineated on the map and described in the text accompanying the map. On the other hand, "Excessively steep terrain" is among the cited constraints,⁴ however the never-completed KT South lift rises straight up to the vicinity of KT-22; presumably the designer of that lift considered that route feasible.

If a constraint map is created, each assertion that a suggested alternative alignment or group of alignments is infeasible could be justified by pointing out that the alignment would cross one or more constraint areas.

The FEIS/R should provide additional analysis of alternatives that were dismissed by the DEIS/R. A "Constraints Map" as discussed above is recommended as one option to ensure adequate review and disclosure.

Visual Resources (Section 4.2):

0144-8 | Presentation of data:

Some of the information on the visual simulation pages in Appendix D is more confusing than helpful. Relating the small insets showing the field of view to the large view is difficult. The portions of the small insets which are hidden from the viewpoint by intervening topography are not identified by, for example, shading. Whether the alignment crossing the field of view is in fact visible may be uncertain. If an alignment crossing a field of view is in fact hidden by topography, why not include that fact in the caption?

Exhibit 4.2-3 would be even more informative if an arrow showing the direction of the view were added to each dot denoting a viewpoint location. An enlargement of the area containing viewpoints 9-14 might have to be added to the document.

The way information is displayed should be improved for clarity in the FEIS/R.

⁴ "Each alternative alignment considered includes specific technical or design challenges. For example, some issues include excessively steep terrain..." (p. 2-31)

0144-5 cont'd, Alternatives (A)

0144-6, Alternatives (A)

The comment suggests that a "constraints map" be prepared and provided as part of the EIS/EIR. While commenters may find such a map helpful, it is not required for inclusion in the EIS/EIR to justify the alternative alignments studied in full (*Clover Valley Foundation v. City of Rocklin* [2011] 197 Cal. App. 4th 200, 245 [agency not required to conduct every requested study]). Various constraints were considered during preparation of the project's alternatives, including the mountainous terrain referred to in Comment 0144-7 below, and the avoidance of sensitive resources (e.g., Section 4.12 [avoidance of sensitive vegetation]; Section 4.13 [avoidance of special status botanical species]; and Section 4.15 [avoidance of wetlands]).

0144-7, Alternatives (A)

The comment provides an opinion regarding the merits or qualities of the project and does not address the content, analysis, or conclusions in the Draft EIS/EIR. The Forest Supervisor for the TNF and the Placer County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will take the commenter's opinions regarding the merits or qualities of the project into consideration when making a decision regarding the project.

0144-8, Visual Resources (VR)

The comment expresses confusion with the visual simulations in Appendix D, and more specifically with the topographic squares provided with each simulation. The topographic squares (or small insets as characterized by the comment) were included to provide the reader with a framework within which to identify the surrounding geographic area shown in the visual simulation, including (as shown in red) where the various alignments would be located. While including arrows and a description of topography could be helpful to some, it is not necessary to be included with the visual simulations for the EIS/EIR to adequately convey the alignment of each alternative (and the potential visual effects of each) to the reader. Because the comment does not provide specific evidence or reasons specifying why the Draft EIS/EIR is inadequate, a further response is unwarranted.

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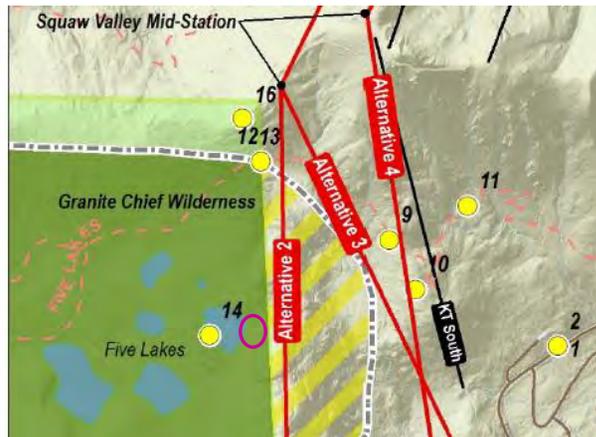
0144-9

Additional viewpoints within Five Lakes Basin:

The Five Lakes basin is the most popular hiking destination within the Granite Chief Wilderness, and all hikers will spend time at one or more of the lakes. The visual impacts of alternative gondola alignments from viewpoints on the lakeshores are therefore some of the most significant visual impacts. Viewpoint 14, the only viewpoint within the Five Lakes Basin, is on the western shore of the most easterly of the lakes; the impact of the Alternative 2 alignment on views to the east is significant. The Alternative 3 and 4 alignments appear to be hidden from viewpoint 14 by intervening topography.

In views from the eastern shore of the lake and points between the eastern shore and the section line, the Alternative 2 alignment would dominate easterly views, and the Alternative 3 and 4 alignments might be visible. Views from these points would be more informative than views from Viewpoint 14; they would be more conservative in the sense of showing the most adverse visual impacts from a popular destination in the Five Lakes Basin. These views would more sharply differentiate a visual impact of Alternative 2 from the corresponding impacts of Alternatives 3 and 4.

The FEIS/R should include analysis from an additional viewpoint on the east shore of the eastern lake as depicted below by the purple circle:



0144-10

The DEIS/R concludes visual impacts from all action alternatives to be "mitigated" per NEPA, and significant and unavoidable or less than significant for CEQA, as follows.

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0144-9, Visual Resources (VR)

The comment asserts that the Final EIS/EIR should include an additional viewpoint on the east shore of the eastern lake shown in Viewpoint 14 of the Five Lakes. In the commenter's view, views from this vantage point would "be more informative than views from Viewpoint 14" by showing the differentiation between Alternative 2 from Alternatives 3 and 4 and from within the Five Lakes Basin. It was determined that Viewpoint 14 would be located on the west side of the lake and not the east side because of observations by local land managers that most of the use at this lake occurs on the west side (as hikers ascend the trail and come to the lake, few actually walk around the lake); therefore, views from the west side of the lake were determined to be more sensitive (looking towards the proposed gondola) than from the east side. As explained and shown in the Draft EIS/EIR, during the summer, only the gondola wires would be partially visible from View 14 under Alternative 2 (please refer to Draft EIS/EIR, pages 4.2-28 through 4.2-29).

Nevertheless, Alternative 2 was found to have a significant and unavoidable impact on visual resources because it would be visible from 20 of the 21 views for which visual simulations were created, and because of the sensitive and remote nature of the area (including the Five Lakes area). Substantial evidence therefore supports the visual impacts analysis. The commenter's disagreement with the conclusions of the Draft EIS/EIR and desire for the creation of an additional viewpoint does not establish that the analysis leading to the conclusions in Section 4.2, "Visual Resources" of the Draft EIS/EIR was inadequate. (See *North Coast Rivers Alliance v. Marin Municipal Water Dist.* [2013] 216 Cal. App. 4th 614, 627-28; *Assn. of Irrigated Residents v. County of Madera* [2003] 107 Cal. App. 4th 1383, 1397 ["CEQA does not require a lead agency to conduct every recommended test and perform all recommended research to evaluate the impacts of a proposed project"]; see also *Laurel Heights Improvement Assn. v. Regents of the Univ. of Cal.* [1988] 47 Cal. 3d 376, 415-416 [agency has discretion to decline to perform further studies]).

The 21 visual simulations created for each alternative, moreover, allow for a qualitative analysis of the visual changes that are anticipated to occur with implementation of any of the action alternatives from a selection (16) of representative locations, which were selected from hundreds of viewpoints evaluated. Five of these (one site along Alpine Meadows Road, two sites at the Alpine Meadows base terminal, and two sites along Squaw Valley Road), experience widely varying

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conditions between the winter and summer months. They are also visible to a greater number of people traveling along the roads or from the base terminal. As a result, these five viewpoint locations were simulated during both winter and summer conditions, which resulted in the creation of a total of 21 visual simulations for each alternative.

The objective of creating visual simulations is to characterize the appearance of the action alternatives if constructed, rather than to provide a comprehensive view of the project from all possible locations in the project area; therefore, not all locations could be, or were required to be, simulated for the purposes of this EIS/EIR. Instead, highly frequented or prominent public areas and visually sensitive vistas were selected for simulation.

For additional information, refer to Visual Resources Analysis Methods discussed in EIS/EIR section 4.2.2.

0144-10, Visual Resources (VR)

The comment is an introductory statement summarizing the conclusions in the Draft EIS/EIR and expressing the view of the commenter that different conclusions should have been reached. The comment does not offer any evidence or explanation; thus, a further response is unwarranted.