

## 4.1 RECREATION

This section includes a description of the existing recreation facilities and experience in the study area, descriptions of applicable recreation management policies, and an analysis of short- and long-term impacts on recreation resources associated with implementation of the project.

### 4.1.1 Affected Environment

#### 4.1.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

##### Existing Ski Area Facilities and Experience

Squaw Valley Ski Area (Squaw Valley) initially opened to the public in 1949 and Alpine Meadows Ski Area (Alpine Meadows) in 1961. Since their inception, both resorts have developed and expanded to offer a high-quality skiing experience within the competitive Lake Tahoe market. Squaw Valley operates mostly on private land, with 195 acres located on National Forest System (NFS) lands managed through a Special Use Permit (SUP) administered by the Forest Service. Alpine Meadows is also located on a mix of private and public lands; the portion of Alpine Meadows on NFS lands is similarly managed through a SUP administered by the Forest Service. Between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows lies the privately owned Caldwell property, through which the proposed gondola would traverse to connect the two resorts. Squaw Valley currently offers approximately 3,600 acres of skiable terrain served by 29 lifts. Alpine Meadows offers approximately 2,400 acres of skiable terrain served by 13 lifts. Squaw Valley Ski Holdings (SVSH) purchased Alpine Meadows in 2011, and guests can now access both resorts through the purchase of a single lift ticket.

##### Visitation

Over the previous 10 winter seasons, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows have experienced significant variation in annual snowsports visitation. Total annual visits to both resorts have ranged from a low of 770,000 to a peak of 1.06 million with a 10-year mean of approximately 886,000 (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018). The two resorts combined capture approximately 24 percent of the total annual snowsports visits to the Tahoe Region each winter season (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018).

Annually, approximately 44 percent of snowsports visitors to the Pacific South Region<sup>1</sup> are day visitors, and 56 percent are destination and overnight visitors (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018). Many visitors reside in the region, including Reno, Truckee, Sacramento, and the San Francisco Bay Area. The number of active snowsports visits to Lake Tahoe area ski resorts is strongly correlated to annual snowfall. While variability in weather conditions will continue to affect visitation at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, ski resorts that continually improve the quality of their infrastructure tend to maintain or improve market share compared with those that do not (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018).

##### Comfortable Carrying Capacity

The Comfortable Carrying Capacity (CCC) is a snow sports industry planning parameter used to determine the optimum level of daily utilization for a resort—one that facilitates a pleasant recreational experience without overburdening the resort's infrastructure. This is a planning figure only and does not represent a regulatory cap on visitation. CCC is used to ensure that capacities are balanced across the resort's facilities and are sufficient to meet anticipated demand. CCC is based on a combination of the uphill vertical lift supply, downhill vertical skiing demand, and the total amount of time spent in the lift line, time spent of the lift itself, and time spent on the downhill descent. The accurate calculation of a ski area's CCC is an

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<sup>1</sup> This group includes Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows, Heavenly Mountain Resort, Kirkwood Mountain Resort, Mammoth Mountain, and Northstar California.

important metric, whereby other related skier service facilities can be evaluated and planned based on the proper identification of the CCC.

- ▲ The CCC at Alpine Meadows calculated for the *Alpine Meadows Ski Area 2015 Master Plan* is approximately 5,570 guests per day (Tahoe National Forest 2015).
- ▲ A detailed calculation of CCC for Squaw Valley has not recently been undertaken but is estimated to be approximately 9,000 guests per day (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018).

A resort's CCC is an important planning criterion for the rest of the resort in that skier service facilities, guest service space, and other amenities are planned around the mountain's estimated capacity. In this way, a resort can maintain a baseline inventory of existing facilities and have a better understanding of how to make improvements to facilities to further enhance guest experience. A desired end result is a resort that is well-balanced in providing an array of services and experiences to satisfy guest expectations for a quality recreation experience.

### **Resort Balance**

Currently, guest service space is adequate to meet current needs. On most weekdays and non-peak weekends, daily visitation at both resorts tends to fall within normal CCC and recreationists are comfortably accommodated by existing infrastructure. However, on peak weekends and during holiday periods visitation is often at or above CCC, resulting in longer lines at popular lifts and crowded guest service facilities due to an overall deficit of space and seating. In addition, lift closures during wind events or as a result of avalanche mitigation measures can reduce the consistent and timely opening of popular terrain further causing congested conditions.

### **Connectivity**

As mentioned earlier, visitors have access to both Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows with the purchase of a single lift ticket, which is a valuable amenity that greatly increases the amount of recreation opportunity available to visitors. Currently, visitors can either use their own form of transportation or utilize the inter-resort shuttle bus to get from one resort to the other. A five-season average of roundtrip ridership on the shuttle bus concluded that only about 2.7 percent of snowsports visitors utilized the shuttle bus, showing that guests do not presently find it convenient and/or effective to shuttle between the two resorts (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018). The *Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (LRMP), discussed below, explicitly mentions the potential that exists to connect certain ski areas along the Sierra Nevada crest, which would provide improved dispersal and opportunities for skiers. While snowsports visitors have access to both Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows with the purchase of a single lift ticket, connectivity between the two resorts is currently insufficient for visitors to fully utilize this amenity.

### **Snow Safety**

The recreational experience for visitors of Alpine Meadows is largely dependent on snow safety conditions. Currently, ski patrollers rely on various tools and techniques to perform avalanche mitigation. Explosives used for avalanche mitigation include nitrogen gas-powered avalaunchers, 105-millimeter artillery rounds fired from a howitzer, and explosive hand-charges thrown by ski patrollers manually, all of which can be limiting and at times dangerous for patrollers. Avalaunchers are rarely fired during night-time or severe weather because wind and weather conditions can cause shot placements to be imprecise. Hand-charges must be thrown by hand into avalanche-prone terrain, requiring that ski patrollers be in high elevation areas near avalanche starting zones. These limitations and hazards often result in the untimely and inconsistent opening of popular terrain, which reduces the quality of visitors' recreational experiences. See Section 4.6, "Public Safety" for further discussion.

## **Existing Dispersed Recreation Experience**

The area surrounding Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows offers a variety of opportunities for dispersed recreation during summer and winter. Dispersed recreation users have access to the Granite Chief Wilderness (GCW), which is located just southwest of Squaw Valley and to the northwest of Alpine Meadows.

The GCW consists of both NFS and private lands; for the purposes of this document, all lands within the congressionally mapped wilderness boundary (public and private) are referred to as the “GCW,” the NFS lands within the GCW are referred to as the “National Forest System-GCW,” and the privately owned land included within the congressionally mapped wilderness boundary are referred to as “private lands within the congressionally mapped GCW.” Only the National Forest System-GCW is managed as a federally protected wilderness area under as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. See Section 4.3, “Wilderness,” for a detailed discussion of the GCW and impacts that may occur to it as a result of the project. The National Forest System-GCW has a highly varied landscape of rugged granite cliffs and broad glaciated valleys, and visitors have many opportunities for wildlife viewing. During the summer months, recreationists hike and backpack through the area’s alpine meadows. During the winter months, recreationists use the area for a remote backcountry skiing and snowboarding experience. The National Forest System-GCW receives considerably more visitation during the summer than during the winter.

One popular dispersed recreation resource in the study area is the Five Lakes Trail which provides access to the Five Lakes area of the National Forest System-GCW. The LRMP identifies this trail as one of the most popular day hikes on the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) (U.S. Forest Service 1990). The majority of use on the Five Lakes Trail occurs in the summer. Users depart from the trailhead on Alpine Meadows Road and traverse private lands located on the Caldwell property; the trail is managed under easement to the Forest Service for this portion. After approximately 1.5 miles hiking through the private lands, users enter the National Forest System-GCW. This roughly 5-mile round trip trail provides hikers with a nearly 1,000-foot climb towards a high ridge where visitors are able to explore and enjoy a series of pristine wilderness lakes. From higher elevations on the trail, users can see Lake Tahoe. Currently, the recreation experience is mostly primitive. However, users can see existing ski area infrastructure at the Alpine Meadows base area, and the top terminal of the KT-22 lift at Squaw Valley, and on the Caldwell property, where a partially constructed lift exists (referred to as “KT South”). Despite the relative proximity to ski area infrastructure, the recreation experience is mostly undisturbed and primitive.

The Five Lakes Trail also provides users an access connection to the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT). The PCT is a 2,659-mile hiking trail between the Mexican border in southern California and the Canadian border in northern Washington. The overall recreation experience on the PCT is characterized by remoteness, scenery, and primitiveness. The PCT traverses the Sierra Nevada west of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. In particular, the PCT currently passes near the Alpine Bowl and Summit Six lifts at Alpine Meadows and crosses under the Granite Chief lift at Squaw Valley. From the intersection of the Five Lakes Trail and the PCT, recreationists can travel south on the PCT towards Twin Peaks or north towards Tinkers Knob.

## Parks

Squaw Valley Park, located on Squaw Valley Road near the intersection with State Route 89, is the only designated public park in proximity of the project site. The park is operated by the Placer County Facility Services Parks Division, which operates and maintains numerous local and community parks, trails, and some open space areas in unincorporated Placer County. Squaw Valley Park facilities include a soccer field, tot lot, pickle ball courts, restrooms, picnic areas, bike and hiking trails, and trail staging area (Placer County 2018). The park has no developed winter recreation focused facilities. Elsewhere in the Olympic Valley there are small playgrounds and tot-lots associated with private lodging and other facilities.

### 4.1.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

#### Federal

##### Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment

The purpose of the LRMP is to direct the management of the TNF. Goals of the plan are to ensure the wise use and protection of TNF resources, fulfill legislative requirements, and address local, regional, and national issues. The TNF’s outdoor recreation program is designed to provide various types of outdoor

recreation opportunities for residents and visitors to the TNF under the authority of the Resource Planning Act of 1974, the National Forest Management Act of 1976, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and other relevant acts and Executive Orders. The program includes all practices necessary to administer outdoor recreational opportunities in a manner compatible with other resource values and with minimal environmental impact. In addition, the recreation program protects, manages, and develops trails and roads to scenic and cultural resources of the TNF.

The LRMP includes the following Forestwide goal for recreation:

Provide a broad spectrum of dispersed and developed recreation opportunities in accordance with identified needs and demands.

The LRMP discusses the popularity of downhill skiing on the TNF and notes existing challenges of overcrowding (U.S. Forest Service 1990:3-9). It also mentions a “potential for interconnecting ski areas along the Sierra Nevada crest” that would “provide better dispersal and opportunities for skiers” (U.S. Forest Service 1990:III-4).

The Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Record of Decision Final Supplemental EIS (SNFPA) (U.S. Forest Service 2004) amended the LRMP in 2004. The LRMP and SNFPA, collectively referred to as the Forest Plan, established standards and guidelines related to recreation on the TNF. As part of the analysis conducted for this Final EIS/EIR, these standards and guidelines were applied and evaluated for consistency.

The study area on NFS lands is located within the Scott Management Area, which directs:<sup>2</sup>

Development of private sector ski area maintenance, operation, and planning will be emphasized during the planning period. This may include development of bed space at the ski base facility. Project-level planning will coordinate increased capacities with off-site capabilities.

Specific language for the Scott Management Area identifies development and expansion of ski areas as being a central resource to be considered in future planning (U.S. Forest Service 1990:V-447). The Scott Management Area emphasizes the development of private sector ski area maintenance, operation and planning to include planning and coordination for further developing improved mass transportation and expanded facilities on- and off- site of this area (U.S. Forest Service 1990:V-447). Ski areas are encouraged to utilize mass transit to support further expansion in addition to developing overnight facilities to cut down on peak traffic flows.

The SNFPA does not include management direction specific to recreation projects. Applicable guidance for overstory vegetation removal is incorporated into this analysis.

### **Recreation Opportunity Spectrum**

The *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* (ROS) is a classification tool used by Forest Service managers to categorize recreation areas based on their size, distance from roads, and degree of development (U.S. Forest Service 1986). The ROS classifies NFS lands into six management class categories defined by setting and the recreation experiences allowed therein, including: urban, rural, roaded natural, semi-primitive motorized, semi-primitive non-motorized, and primitive. The ROS is used to determine existing and potential recreation activities and opportunities on NFS lands and provides a baseline against which future conditions and management actions can be prepared. Alpine Meadows is the only portion of the project site partially located on NFS lands. The ROS for the Alpine Meadows SUP area is classified as Roded Natural (U.S. Forest Service 1986). The expected recreation experience for this classification is:

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<sup>2</sup> A portion of the Alternative 2 alignment is located within the Granite Chief Management Area on private lands where Forest Service management does not apply (see Section 4.3, “Wilderness,” for additional information). Additionally, portions of Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are located within the Tinkers Management Area on private lands where Forest Service management does not apply.

An area characterized by predominantly natural-appearing environments with moderate evidences of the sights and sounds of other humans. Such evidences usually harmonize with the natural environment.

Interaction between users may be low to moderate, but with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification and utilization practices are evident but harmonize with the natural environment. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards and design facilities.

The recreation opportunity experience level provided would be characterized by the equal probability for experiencing affiliation with individuals and groups and for isolation from sights and sounds of humans. Opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized forms of recreation may be provided.

The ROS for the nearby National Forest System-GCW is classified as Primitive (U.S. Forest Service 1986). The expected recreation experience for this ROS classification is:

An area characterized by essentially unmodified natural environment of fairly large size. Interaction between users is very low and evidence of other users is minimal. The area is managed to be essentially free from evidence of human-induced restrictions and controls. Motorized used within the area is not permitted.

#### **Alpine Meadows Master Plan**

The Alpine Meadows Master Plan, published in 2015, identifies existing and desired conditions of Alpine Meadows and proposes improvements that would occur on NFS lands within the SUP area. The Forest Service requires that any ski resort operated at least partially on NFS lands create a Master Development Plan (MDP) to articulate its long-term vision for use of public lands and to assist the Forest Service in anticipating future use of these lands.

The Alpine Meadows Master Plan explicitly mentions the Base-to-Base Gondola in its upgrade plan:

Since Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are jointly owned, there is an interchangeable lift ticket and shuttle service between the two base areas. However, the variety and quantity of ski terrain that is available to skiers at both Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley would be increased considerably if there was a lift connection between the two resorts.

The intent of the planned Interconnect Gondola is to provide a direct lift connection between the Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley base areas, allowing for skiers and non-skiers alike to easily travel between the two resorts. Skiers will also have the ability to use the gondola to access ski terrain at both resorts from mid-stations...

As discussed below, this multi-stage gondola plan allows for maximum flexibility and functionality, allowing for skiers to use the lift in multiple ways and allowing non-skiers to ride it as well...

## **State**

There are no state laws or regulations addressing recreation resources that are relevant to the analysis of the project.

## **Local**

#### **Placer County General Plan**

The *Placer County General Plan* (Placer County 2013) serves as a general guide for future land use and development in Placer County. The plan does not call for specific action or encourage any specific strategy; however, it does provide framework and policy context within which to make such decisions. The following policies related to public recreation and facilities opportunities may be applicable to the project:

- ▲ **Policy 1.G.1.** The County will support the expansion of existing winter ski and snow play areas and development of new areas where circulation and transportation system capacity can accommodate such expansions or new uses and where environmental impacts can be adequately mitigated.
- ▲ **Policy 1.G.2.** The County shall strive to have new recreation areas located and designed to encourage and accommodate non-auto mobile access.

#### **Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance**

The purpose of the *Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance* (Placer County 2006) (SVGPLUO) is to help guide and direct current and future growth and development consistent within environmental, physical, social, and economic constraints. The plan's purpose is to provide a framework for expansion and development of Squaw Valley into a destination resort. The SVGPLUO seeks to increase visitor use and residential/lodging opportunities without degrading the unique characteristics and intrinsic value of the natural environment of Squaw Valley. This underlines the overall desire of this plan to maximize development potential while remaining consistent with good conservation and development practices. To support this balance of objectives, the SVGPLUO allows growth in Squaw Valley to reach a seasonal-peak, overnight residential population of about 11-12,000 and a maximum skier capacity of 17,500 people per day.

#### **Alpine Meadows General Plan**

The *Alpine Meadows General Plan* (Placer County 1968) provides an outline for comprehensive planning and development reflective of the distinct environment of the area. This plan recognized the long-term objectives of setting up guidelines to preserve and promote convenience, prosperity, beauty, health, safety, and decency for local and regional populations. Recreation, including downhill skiing, is recognized as a defining feature of Alpine Meadows and development of recreation is identified within plan goals:

- ▲ [M]aintain the open, natural, mountain-recreation character. All aspects of the vast, unique and outstanding physical beauty of the area must be consciously and continuously preserved.
- ▲ [C]reate a balanced selection of living environments and recreational outlets, sensitive to the terrain and undisturbed by trafficways, pollution, excessive slopes, scarring and other deleterious effects.
- ▲ The Bear Creek Valley area offers an excellent opportunity to preserve and develop an outstanding residential-recreational community oriented to a high mountain, year-round environment.
- ▲ The basic resource, location and attitude of the area indicates a seasonal sports and weekend vacation area, rather than a year-round permanent residence site.
- ▲ A continued growth and expansion of the Alpine Meadows and Powder Bowl ski areas can be expected as skiing becomes an ever more popular winter sports activity.

## **4.1.2 Analysis Methods**

### **4.1.2.1 METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

This analysis uses quantitative metrics of visitation to analyze changes to the skiing experience at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. The Forest Service ROS system provides a system for analyzing recreational opportunities by considering the qualitative values of access, remoteness, naturalness, facilities and site management, social encounters, visitor impacts, and visitor management. Geographic information systems (GIS) are used to determine proximity to dispersed recreation trails.

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 (CUP). 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.

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 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, and their implementation would be ensured by the CUP's conditions of approval. All RPMs are considered roughly proportional and have an essential nexus to the impacts they reduce.

#### 4.1.2.2 EFFECTS ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

##### NEPA Indicators

An environmental document prepared to comply with NEPA must consider the context and intensity of the environmental effects that would be caused by or result from the action alternatives. Under NEPA, impacts should be addressed in proportion to their significance (40 CFR 1502.2[b]), meaning that severe impacts should be described in more detail than less consequential impacts. This is intended to help decision makers and the public focus on the project's key effects. The evaluation of effects considers the magnitude, duration, and significance of the changes. Changes that would improve the existing condition if they occur are noted and considered beneficial, and detrimental impacts are characterized as adverse. Where there would be no change, a "no effect" conclusion is used. The Forest Service has determined that the action alternatives could affect the skiing experience at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows and the dispersed recreation experience in the study area in both summer and winter seasons. The following analytical indicators are used to inform the Forest Service's determination of impacts:

- ▲ Quantitative analysis of existing and anticipated skier visitation, including discussion of existing guest service space and other amenities **(Impact 4.1-1)**
- ▲ Discussion of consistency with Forest Service ROS classifications **(Impact 4.1-3)**
- ▲ Qualitative analysis of existing and proposed guest experiences for winter recreation at Squaw and Alpine Meadows, including safety, connection/accessibility, and changes to hike-to ski terrain at Alpine Meadows **(Impact 4.1-1)**
- ▲ Discussion of the existing and proposed dispersed recreation experience on the Five Lakes Trail, PCT, and other nearby trails, during both summer and winter. Discussion of the anticipated length of the construction period, potential impacts such as noise and emissions from machinery (including helicopters), and potential limitations on trail use during construction or operation. Discussion of impacts resulting from operation of the gondola, including use conflicts, noise, privacy, and visual impacts **(Impact 4.1-1)**

##### CEQA Criteria

Based on the Placer County CEQA checklist, Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, and recreation policies and standards in the *Placer County General Plan*, implementing any of the alternatives would result in a significant impact related to recreation if it would:

- ▲ increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated **(Impact 4.1-1)**; or

- include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment (**Impact 4.1-2**).

### 4.1.2.3 ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

All issues related to recreation are analyzed here.

## 4.1.3 Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

### 4.1.3.1 ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

#### **Impact 4.1-1 (Alt. 1): Recreation Experience, Access, and Visitation**

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Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative would result in a continuation of existing conditions. There would be no change in use of recreational facilities that would contribute to substantial deterioration. There would be **no effect** under both NEPA and CEQA.

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Under Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, the TNF and Placer County would not provide necessary authorizations to allow construction of a gondola. The outcome would be a continuation of existing conditions, with no new construction and no installation and operation of new facilities. Therefore, there would be no change in use of recreational facilities, access, visitation, or the recreation experience.

#### **NEPA Effects Conclusion**

With no change to existing recreational facilities, access, visitation, or the recreation experience, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

#### **CEQA Determination of Effects**

With no change to existing recreational facilities, access, visitation, or the recreation experience, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

### **Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation measures are required.

#### **Impact 4.1-2 (Alt. 1): Adverse Effects Associated with New or Expanded Recreation Facilities**

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Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative would result in a continuation of existing conditions. There would be no expansion to or change in recreational facilities that would adversely affect the environment. There would be **no effect** under CEQA. This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

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Under Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, the TNF and Placer County would not provide necessary authorizations to allow construction of a gondola. The outcome would be a continuation of existing conditions, with no new construction and no installation and operation of new facilities. Therefore, there would be no expansion to or change in recreational facilities that would adversely affect the environment.

#### **NEPA Effects Conclusion**

This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

#### **CEQA Determination of Effects**

With no expansion to or change in recreational facilities, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.



## Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

### Impact 4.1-3 (Alt. 1): Consistency with Land Use Plans

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Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative would result in a continuation of existing conditions. There would be no new infrastructure or land use changes that would be inconsistent with a land use plan. There would be **no effect** under both NEPA and CEQA.

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Under Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, the TNF and Placer County would not provide necessary authorizations to allow construction of a gondola. The outcome would be a continuation of existing conditions, with no new infrastructure that would be inconsistent with a land use plan. The existing condition is consistent with all applicable plan guidance.

#### NEPA Effects Conclusion

With no new infrastructure or land use changes, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

#### CEQA Determination of Effects

With no new infrastructure or land use changes, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

## Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

### 4.1.3.2 ALTERNATIVE 2

#### Impact 4.1-1 (Alt. 2): Recreation Experience, Access, and Visitation

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Alternative 2 would result in increased use of recreational facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley, but this is not expected to result in substantial physical deterioration of these ski facilities or other existing recreational facilities. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation would be **beneficial** because implementation of Alternative 2 would generally improve facilities and access for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the two ski resorts, and effects on the recreational experience would be **beneficial** within ski area facilities but **adverse** for dispersed recreation occurring beyond the ski areas because of elevated noise levels and the presence of construction equipment during project construction as well as long-term changes to the visual characteristics of the scenery associated with project operation. In particular, users of the Five Lakes Trail would encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. Implementation of RPMs MUL-7, and REC-1 through REC-4 would mitigate this effect. In addition, other RPMs related to visual resources, noise, and biological resources, identified in the corresponding sections of this EIS/EIR would further mitigate this effect. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects on recreational facilities would be **less than significant** because while Alternative 2 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, this would not lead to a substantial physical deterioration of any recreational facilities or accelerate the deterioration of any recreational facilities. In addition, RPMs MUL-7, and REC-1 through REC-4 would minimize potential adverse effects on existing dispersed recreation facilities during project construction by ensuring the completion of construction activities in a single construction season, requiring SVSH to coordinate with and notify the Forest Service and the public regarding construction activities, installing signage to inform the public about trail reroutes and/or temporary closures, and avoiding conflicts with planned events. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced, although these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant impact to a less-than-significant level.

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### **Ski Area Facilities and Recreation Experience**

Alternative 2 would improve the recreational experience for visitors to Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. While Alternative 2 does not include any additional terrain, it would improve access to existing terrain at both ski areas by providing a direct and efficient means of transportation between the base areas. This improved access would increase the variety of terrain easily available to skiers at both ski areas.

Alternative 2 is estimated to result in a combined visitation increase of approximately 4 percent, or 36,856 snowsports visits over the initial five seasons of operation, per year (SE Group and RRC Associates 2018). As discussed in the skier visitation and use assessment (Appendix C), this increased visitation is not anticipated to adversely affect the guest experience or lead to substantial deterioration of any ski area facilities because existing guest service facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support this increase in use. Alternative 2 would not cause the maximum skier capacity of 17,500 people per day at Squaw Valley (described above) to be exceeded; this proprietary data has been reviewed and confirmed during the preparation of this Final EIS/EIR.

Under Alternative 2, skier unloading would be permitted at the Squaw Valley mid-station, which would increase access to existing terrain in the KT-22 area at Squaw Valley; as a result, this improved access could result in a minimal increase in skiers in this area. Due to its location, the gondola would be less prone to wind closures than the existing KT-22 lift and could therefore operate more consistently and improve access to existing terrain in this area when the KT-22 lift is not operable. This increase in use is not expected to result in a measurable change in usage at Squaw Valley.

Skier unloading would be permitted at the proposed Alpine Meadows mid-station. Skiable terrain from this mid-station is limited to the areas known as *the Buttriss* and *Bernie's Bowl*, both of which could experience increased use as a result of implementation of Alternative 2 and the improved access that the Alpine Meadows mid-station would provide. Utilization of this terrain is presently limited because it is expert terrain and skiers can only access it by hiking/traversing from the Summit Express lift. *The Buttriss* area has a south-facing aspect and skiing is available to the public only when snow and terrain conditions permit; without Gazex<sup>3</sup> facilities as a component of Alternative 2, avalanche hazard mitigation in *The Buttriss* area would still be accomplished through the use of hand charges and avalaunchers. These avalanche mitigation methods are authorized under the current Ski Area Permit and the Alpine Meadows Operating Plan, meaning that the existing level of avalanche risk would not be changed. Offloading at the Alpine Meadows mid-station would be prohibited during times when *the Buttriss* terrain is not accessible to guests and after April 15<sup>th</sup> as per RPM MUL-4 for protection of the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog.

### **Dispersed Recreation Experience**

Alternative 2 would adversely affect the dispersed recreation experience on nearby trails and wilderness areas, including the Five Lakes Trail, the PCT, and the National Forest System-GCW.

The Five Lakes Trail crosses under that portion of the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 that is located on private lands (i.e., the Caldwell property). The Five Lakes Trail is managed by the TNF under an easement from the landowner (U.S. Forest Service 1990). Impacts to the recreational experience on the Five Lakes Trail would include both short-term direct impacts during construction, and long-term indirect impacts during operation.

During construction of the gondola (estimated to last approximately 6-8 months in one summer season), the Five Lakes Trail could be closed temporarily while towers are installed via helicopter, drilling and/or blasting activities are performed, or other hazardous construction-related activities are completed that could pose a risk to trail users. While no physical construction activities would be permitted within the National Forest System-GCW, Alternative 2 would likely produce elevated noise levels during construction activities as a result of the presence of construction equipment (including helicopters, tracked machinery, pick-up trucks, and ATVs); this impact would be short-term and would be reduced upon completion of construction (see

<sup>3</sup> Gazex facilities were included as part of the original project proposal for all action alternatives and were subsequently eliminated from the project proposal after the release of the Draft EIS/EIR.

Section 4.9, "Noise," for additional details, including specific RPMs that would reduce or avoid construction noise disturbance). The presence of construction equipment would also result in temporary visual impacts (see Section 4.2, "Visual Resources," for additional details, including specific RPMs that would reduce or avoid visual impacts during construction). Construction access to the project site (including tower footings and the Alpine Meadows mid-station) would require a temporary access route through private lands. The construction access route under Alternative 2 would not cross the Five Lakes Trail but would be proximate, resulting in noise and visual impacts. ATVs may be used to transport construction crews, which in turn could affect scenic resources and increase noise levels during construction. No permanent roads would be created, and the temporary access route would be rehabilitated post-construction consistent with applicable RPMs (comprehensive list of RPMs included in Appendix B; in particular, see RPMs related to Biological Resources and Soils and Erosion as they relate to rehabilitation of disturbed sites).

Alternative 2 would change the visual characteristics of the scenery surrounding the Five Lakes Trail, resulting in a long-term impact to the recreation experience. Under Alternative 2, users of the Five Lakes Trail would pass beneath the gondola line to continue their hike to the Five Lakes in the National Forest System-GCW. Impacts to dispersed recreation would be more substantial as a result of the alignment associated with Alternative 2, as users would pass beneath the gondola line far along the Five Lakes Trail, in an area where the recreational experience is already very remote; with implementation of Alternative 3 or 4, users would pass beneath the gondola line earlier in their hike, in proximity to existing development and infrastructure, meaning that the new infrastructure associated with Alternative 3 or 4 would represent less of a contrast with the existing landscape than the infrastructure associated with Alternative 2. The Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley mid-stations, as well as towers and lift cable, would be visible in the foreground along part of the Five Lakes Trail. The towers would be visible along the top of ridgeline to the west which could detract from the intrinsic scenic value of this location. Alternative 2 would affect scenic resources in this area and could take away from the experience of remoteness and primitiveness. Outside of the winter operating season, the gondola would not operate, and gondola cabins would be removed from the line, which would reduce the visible infrastructure. As discussed within the Affected Environment section above, users of the Five Lakes Trail presently pass by existing lift towers associated with the incomplete lift project located on the Caldwell property (KT South); however, with implementation of Alternative 2, users of the Five Lakes Trail would encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. Based on the five visual simulations created to analyze the visual impacts that would occur along the Five Lakes Trail as a result of each alternative, users of the Five Lakes Trail would be able to see infrastructure from four views where no infrastructure is currently visible (Views 9, 10, 11, and 12); refer to Appendix D for visual simulations of Alternative 2 from these views. Gondola infrastructure would be particularly noticeable along the high ridgeline that separates that Caldwell property from the National Forest System-GCW, within Views 9 and 10.

Impacts to the dispersed recreation experience on the PCT would be less than those described above for the Five Lakes Trail. The PCT is approximately 0.5 mile from the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 at its closest point. Short-term direct impacts to the trail experience during construction are not anticipated because the trail is separated from the project site by topography and vegetation, which would screen noise and visual impacts. Long-term visual impacts on the trail would be negligible; the project could be visible from a section of trail approximately 2.5 miles north, near the Granite Chief lift at Squaw Valley, but vegetation would likely screen this view. The project could also be visible from the PCT near the Five Lakes and Alpine Meadows, but in areas where vegetation would likely screen the view. The PCT would not be closed at any point during the construction phase.

Recreational impacts are also possible for users of the National Forest System-GCW. Gondola infrastructure would be visible from certain locations within the National Forest System-GCW. No legislation pertaining to federally managed wilderness areas precludes development being visible from within these areas. However, experiential impacts are possible for users of the National Forest System-GCW as a result of Alternative 2. During the winter operating period, guests unloading at either the Alpine Meadows or Squaw Valley mid-stations could exit the ski area and gain access to the National Forest System-GCW without using the Five Lakes Trail, which could result in increased winter access to the National Forest System-GCW. This increase

in visitation could also occur during transitional seasons, or periods of inconsistent snow cover, during which the gondola (and two ski areas) would be operational and at the same time, southern aspect slopes would be dry enough for foot traffic to access the National Forest System-GCW by hiking. During these periods, the additional access provided by the gondola to hikers could increase the likelihood of visitor encounters within the National Forest System-GCW and therefore reduce opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. For some users, these effects could be considered a reduction in quality of the wilderness recreational experience (see Section 4.3, “Wilderness,” for further discussion).

Ambient noise would be perceptible in close proximity to the gondola during operating hours of the gondola in the winter months. Noise impacts are discussed further in Section 4.9, “Noise.”

Impacts to dispersed recreation would be reduced through the application of RPMs. As identified above, there are RPMs related to Scenic Resources, Noise, Biological Resources, and Soils and Erosion that would also minimize effects on the recreation experience. RPMs applicable to these resource areas are also identified in the following sections of this EIS/EIR: 4.2, “Visual Resources”; 4.9, “Noise”; 4.12, “Vegetation”; 4.13, “Botany”; and 4.16, “Soils, Geology, and Seismicity.” As mentioned above, a comprehensive list of RPMs is included in Appendix B. As described in Chapter 2, “Description of Alternatives,” operation of the gondola would be limited to only the winter season, minimizing conflicts with dispersed recreation during the summer months.<sup>4</sup> RPM MUL-7 confirms the completion of construction activities in a single construction season and minimizes the amount of time that project construction could conflict with dispersed recreation opportunities in the area. There are also RPMs specifically related to recreation resources that would assist in reducing or avoiding any adverse effects on the recreational experience. RPMs REC-1, REC-2, and REC-3, provide mechanisms for SVSH to coordinate with and notify the Forest Service and the public regarding construction activities, install signage to inform the public about trail reroutes and/or temporary closures, and avoid conflicts with planned events. RPM REC-4 requires signage to be posted at the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base stations 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, and that the applicant will not permit foot traffic to exit at either mid-station under Alternative 2. These RPMs would reduce the potential for user conflicts during construction and operation.

### **Deterioration of Existing Facilities**

Because the gondola would operate only during the winter period, operation of the gondola would have no effect on use of parks or other recreational facilities in the summer. Project construction would occur during the summer months, and those seeking dispersed recreation experiences on the project site during construction could temporarily seek dispersed recreation experiences elsewhere, in places that are further from construction activities (during the single season construction period). However, a single season of diversion of some members of the public seeking dispersed recreation experiences elsewhere would not result in a sufficient increase in use of any one site or facility in another location, such that substantial physical deterioration of any such site or facility would occur or be accelerated. There are numerous opportunities for dispersed recreation in the area and region that could absorb members of the public avoiding the project site such that sites or facilities at any one location would not be deteriorated, and any diversion of individuals would be for only a single summer season.

There are no neighborhood or regional parks in the project area geared toward winter time use. Alternative 2 would not result in an increase in summer time use at Squaw Valley Park, or any other park, such that a substantial physical deterioration of any such facility would occur or be accelerated. For the reasons described above for ski area facilities and recreation experience, Alternative 2 would not result in increased use of existing winter time recreational facilities such that a substantial physical deterioration of any such facility would occur or be accelerated.

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

RPMs identified above that minimize or prevent conflicts between construction of Alternative 2 and existing dispersed recreation opportunities (RPMs MUL-7, and REC-1 through REC-4) would minimize the need for recreationists to seek these experiences elsewhere.

### **NEPA Effects Conclusion**

Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation for skiers resulting from Alternative 2 would be **beneficial**, and effects on the recreational experience for skiers would be **beneficial** because implementation of Alternative 2 would generally improve the recreational experience for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the two ski resorts. While Alternative 2 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, it is not anticipated that this would lead to substantial deterioration of these ski facilities. Alternative 2 would generally improve the recreational experience for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the two ski resorts. There could be **adverse** effects on the dispersed recreational experience near the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 because of elevated noise levels and the presence of construction equipment during project construction as well as long-term changes to the visual characteristics of the scenery associated with project operation. In particular, users of the Five Lakes Trail would encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. These effects would be mitigated through implementation of RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4.

### **CEQA Determination of Effects**

Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects on recreational facilities would be **less than significant** because while Alternative 2 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, this would not lead to a substantial physical deterioration of any recreational facilities or accelerate the deterioration of any recreational facilities. RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4 would minimize potential adverse effects on existing dispersed recreation facilities during project construction by ensuring the completion of construction activities in a single construction season, requiring SVSH to coordinate with and notify the Forest Service and the public regarding construction activities, installing signage to inform the public about trail reroutes and/or temporary closures, and avoiding conflicts with planned events. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced, although these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant impact to a less-than-significant level.

### **Mitigation Measures**

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4 as mitigation measures would reduce the effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation, but are not necessary to reduce a significant effect. Also, see Sections 4.2, 4.9, 4.12, 4.13, and 4.16, which list the specific RPMs that would reduce impacts to the dispersed recreation experience, and incorporate the RPMs as mitigation measures under CEQA.

## **Impact 4.1-2 (Alt. 2): Adverse Effects Associated with New or Expanded Recreation Facilities**

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Alternative 2 would not require the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant** because existing recreational services and facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support the estimated increase in visitation resulting from construction and operation of a gondola. This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

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Alternative 2 includes the construction and operation of a gondola. The gondola itself could be considered a recreational facility; refer to the analysis throughout this EIS/EIR regarding potential impacts to other environmental resources from Alternative 2. No other recreational facilities, or modification or expansion of existing facilities, are proposed as part of this alternative. As identified above in the discussion of Impact

4.1-1, existing recreational services and facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support the estimated increase in visitation resulting from construction and operation of a gondola.

#### **NEPA Effects Conclusion**

This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

#### **CEQA Determination of Effects**

Alternative 2 would not require the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant** because existing recreational services and facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support the estimated increase in visitation resulting from construction and operation of a gondola. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact.

### **Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation measures are required.

### **Impact 4.1-3 (Alt. 2): Consistency with Land Use Plans**

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Alternative 2 includes amendments to the Alpine Meadows SUP but would be consistent with Forest Service ROS classifications in addition to County and other local plans applicable to private lands that would be affected. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, there would be **no effect**. Consistent with the similar analysis of land use plan consistency in Section 4.4, “Land Use,” and the CEQA criteria identified there, this effect would be **less than significant**.

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Forest Service policy requires that all ski areas operating on NFS lands under an SUP submit a Master Development Plan (MDP) for acceptance by the Forest Service. Consistent with this policy, Alpine Meadows submitted a 2015 MDP that has been accepted by the TNF. Alternative 2 is included in the 2015 MDP.

Alternative 2 would be consistent with all relevant policies provided in the LRMP, including Forest Service ROS classifications. Alternative 2 would serve to improve developed winter recreation opportunities in the Scott Management Area. The ROS classification for the Scott Management Area is Roded Natural, as described above in the “Affected Environment” section. The existing Alpine Meadows SUP is consistent with the ROS classification, and thus the installation of additional ski area infrastructure would also be consistent. The National Forest System-GCW has an ROS classification of Primitive, as described above in the “Affected Environment” section. While some gondola infrastructure would likely be visible from limited locations within the National Forest System-GCW, Alternative 2 would not represent an inconsistency with this ROS classification. This is because Alternative 2 would cause no modification of the natural environment of the National Forest System-GCW; interaction between users of the National Forest System-GCW would remain very low; and the National Forest System-GCW would remain essentially free from human-induced restrictions and controls (and would also remain essentially free from evidence of these human-induced restrictions and controls).

The LRMP directs the Forest Service to “provide a variety of opportunities for developed and dispersed recreation experiences” (U.S. Forest Service 1990:V-5). In addition, the LRMP explicitly mentions the “potential for interconnecting ski areas along the Sierra Nevada Crest” to “provide better dispersal and opportunities for skiers” (U.S. Forest Service 1990:III-4). The Scott Management Area allows for development of additional winter sports facilities and support services as part of the desired future condition of the management area (U.S. Forest Service 1990:V-448).

Alternative 2 is in alignment with recreation management objectives in the *Placer County General Plan*. Specifically, Alternative 2 would improve the recreational offerings available in Placer County (Recreation Land Use Goal 1.G) and would promote terrain connectivity within existing ski areas while providing improved transportation options that will not substantially crowd or burden existing transportation resources

(Recreation Land Use Policy 1.G.1). Although the project is anticipated to require an amendment of the SVGPLUO, the amendment consists only of adding the gondola to the SVGPLUO map(s) of existing and new ski lifts. The SVGPLUO contains text indicating that new ski lifts would be limited to those shown on maps included in the SVGPLUO (i.e., Squaw Valley General Plan Map and the Future Potential Ski Lifts Map). These maps do not include the proposed gondola; therefore, a General Plan amendment would be required. The proposed amendment to the SVGPLUO is also addressed in Section 4.4, “Land Use.”

In addition to the General Plan amendment to add the proposed gondola to the SVGPLUO map(s), a rezone would be required to change the existing zoning designation from Neighborhood Commercial to Open Space in the area where the Alpine Meadows base terminal would be located, as the Neighborhood Commercial zoning designation does not allow for the presence of ski lifts. In particular, the existing Open Space zone surrounding the base area would be modified slightly to encompass the proposed location of the Alpine Meadows base terminal. With these requested land use entitlements, the project would be consistent with Placer County zoning designations for the project site. The proposed rezone is also addressed in Section 4.4, “Land Use.”

Alternative 2 would also be consistent with the overall goals of the SVGPLUO and *Alpine Meadows General Plan*.

#### NEPA Effects Conclusion

While Alternative 2 would amend the Alpine Meadows SUP, the project would be consistent with LRMP ROS classification standards and recreation management objectives in the LRMP. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, there would be **no effect** related to project consistency with land use plans under Alternative 2. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact.

#### CEQA Determination of Effects

While Alternative 2 would require an amendment to the SVGPLUO to add the gondola to the “Potential Future Ski Lifts” map and a rezone to accommodate the Alpine Meadows base terminal, it would be consistent with recreation management objectives in all County and local plans applicable to private lands. Consistent with the similar analysis of land use plan consistency in Section 4.4, “Land Use,” and the CEQA criteria identified there, this impact would be **less than significant**. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact.

### **Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation measures are required.

## **4.1.3.3 ALTERNATIVE 3**

### **Impact 4.1-1 (Alt. 3): Recreation Experience, Access, and Visitation**

Alternative 3 would result in increased use of recreational facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley, but this is not expected to result in substantial physical deterioration of these ski facilities or other existing recreational facilities. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation would be **beneficial** because implementation of Alternative 3 would generally improve facilities and access for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the two ski resorts, and effects on the recreational experience would be **beneficial** within ski area facilities but **minimally adverse** for dispersed recreation occurring beyond the ski areas because of elevated noise levels and the presence of construction equipment during project construction as well as long-term changes to the visual characteristics of the scenery associated with project operation. In particular, users of the Five Lakes Trail would encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. Implementation of RPMs MUL-7, and REC1- through REC-4 would mitigate this effect. In addition, other RPMs related to visual resources, noise, and biological resources, identified in the corresponding sections of this EIS/EIR would further mitigate this effect. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects on recreational facilities would be **less**

**than significant** because while Alternative 3 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, this would not lead to a substantial physical deterioration of any recreational facilities or accelerate the deterioration of any recreational facilities. In addition, RPMs MUL-7, and REC-1 through REC-4 would minimize potential adverse effects on existing dispersed recreation facilities during project construction by ensuring the completion of construction activities in a single construction season, requiring SVSH to coordinate with and notify the Forest Service and the public regarding construction activities, installing signage to inform the public about trail reroutes and/or temporary closures, and avoiding conflicts with planned events. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced, although these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant impact to a less-than-significant level.

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### **Ski Area Facilities and Recreation Experience**

Effects to ski area facilities and the recreation experience under Alternative 3 would be nearly the same as those described above for Alternative 2. The primary difference in these effects is that under Alternative 3, the Alpine Meadows mid-station would not be located immediately above *the Buttress* area, and instead would be located on the Caldwell property. As a result, *the Buttress* area would be accessible only off the existing Summit Express lift via a substantial hike/traverse, similar to the existing condition, so access to *the Buttress* area under Alternative 3 would not be improved in any way.

### **Dispersed Recreation Experience**

The gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would result in long-term impacts to scenic resources. Effects related to dispersed recreation opportunities along the Five Lakes Trail would be less substantial under Alternative 3 than under Alternative 2 as the alignment of the gondola under Alternative 3 would descend from the Squaw Valley mid-station through Catch Valley instead of remaining high along the ridgeline adjacent to the National Forest System-GCW, meaning that the gondola would not be visible along the ridgeline. Under Alternative 3, users would pass beneath the gondola line closer to the trailhead than under Alternative 2, in closer proximity to existing development and infrastructure. New infrastructure under Alternative 3 would represent less of a contrast with the existing landscape than under Alternative 2, but more of a contrast than under Alternative 4. Under Alternative 3, users of the Five Lakes Trail would still encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. Based on the five visual simulations created to analyze the visual impacts that would occur along the Five Lakes Trail as a result of each alternative, users of the Five Lakes Trail would be able to see infrastructure from three views where no infrastructure is currently visible under Alternative 3 (Views 9, 10, and 13), as opposed to four views under Alternative 2; refer to Appendix D for visual simulations of Alternative 3 from these views.

Under Alternative 3, impacts associated with increased likelihood of visitor encounters within the National Forest System-GCW would exist as described for Alternative 2 during the winter season, transitional seasons, and periods of inconsistent snow cover; however, any impacts would be lesser than those discussed above for Alternative 2, because gondola-users would only be able to disembark and enter the National Forest System-GCW from the Squaw Valley mid-station; the location of the Alpine Meadows mid-station associated with Alternative 3 would not provide additional access to the National Forest System-GCW.

Direct short-term noise impacts during construction would be similar to those described above for Alternative 2, as the gondola alignment would still cross the Five Lakes Trail. Noise effects from the daily operation of the gondola could be slightly greater because the gondola would be closer to the Five Lakes Trail trailhead. However, the noise effects would be minimized because the gondola's hours of operation would occur only when Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are open and only during the winter months (see Section 4.9, "Noise," for additional details).

Impacts to the PCT would be less than those described for Alternative 2 because the gondola alignment would be further removed and less visible from the PCT.

### **Deterioration of Existing Facilities**

Effects associated with the deterioration of existing facilities under Alternative 3 would be nearly the same as those described above for Alternative 2.



The same RPMs identified above for Alternative 2 would apply to Alternative 3. These include RPMs related to Scenic Resources, Noise, Biological Resources, and Soils and Erosion, RPMs MUL-4 and MUL-7, and recreation specific RPMs REC-1 through REC-4.

### **NEPA Effects Conclusion**

Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation for skiers resulting from Alternative 3 would be **beneficial**, and effects on the recreational experience for skiers would be **beneficial** because implementation of Alternative 3 would generally improve the recreational experience for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the two ski resorts. While Alternative 3 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, it is not anticipated that this would lead to substantial deterioration of these ski facilities. Alternative 3 would generally improve the recreational experience for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the ski areas. There would be **minorly adverse** effects on the dispersed recreational experience near the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 because of elevated noise levels and the presence of construction equipment during project construction as well as long-term changes to the visual characteristics of the scenery associated with project operation. In particular, users of the Five Lakes Trail would encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. These effects would be mitigated through implementation of RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4. These effects would be slightly less than Alternative 2 for the PCT and slightly greater for the Five Lakes Trail.

### **CEQA Determination of Effects**

Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects on recreational facilities would be **less than significant** because while Alternative 3 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, this would not lead to a substantial physical deterioration of any recreational facilities or accelerate the deterioration of any recreational facilities. RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4 would minimize potential adverse effects on existing dispersed recreation facilities during project construction by ensuring the completion of construction activities in a single construction season, requiring SVSH to coordinate with and notify the Forest Service and the public regarding construction activities, installing signage to inform the public about trail reroutes and/or temporary closures, and avoiding conflicts with planned events. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced, although these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant impact to a less-than-significant level. This impact does not differ materially from Alternative 2 as both alternatives would generate the same, or very similar, increases in skier visitation.

### **Mitigation Measures**

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4 as mitigation measures would reduce the effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation, but are not necessary to reduce a significant effect. Also, see Sections 4.2, 4.9, 4.12, 4.13, and 4.16, which list the specific RPMs that would reduce impacts to the dispersed recreation experience, and incorporate the RPMs as mitigation measures under CEQA.

## **Impact 4.1-2 (Alt. 3): Adverse Effects Associated with New or Expanded Recreation Facilities**

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Alternative 3 would not require the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant** because existing recreational services and facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support the estimated increase in visitation resulting from construction and operation of a gondola. This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

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Impacts related to the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, under Alternative 3 would be nearly the same as those described for Alternative 2.

### NEPA Effects Conclusion

This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

### CEQA Determination of Effects

Alternative 3 would not require the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant** because existing recreational services and facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support the estimated increase in visitation resulting from construction and operation of a gondola. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact. This impact does not differ from Alternative 2 as neither alternative includes the construction or expansion of recreation facilities.

### **Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation measures are required.

## **Impact 4.1-3 (Alt. 3): Consistency with Land Use Plans**

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Alternative 3 includes amendments to the Alpine Meadows SUP, but it would be consistent with Forest Service ROS classifications in addition to County and other local plans applicable to private lands that would be affected. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, there would be **no effect**. Consistent with the similar analysis of land use plan consistency in Section 4.4, "Land Use," and the CEQA criteria identified there, this effect would be **less than significant**.

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Impacts related to land use plan consistency under Alternative 3 would be nearly the same as those described for Alternative 2.

### NEPA Effects Conclusion

While Alternative 3 would amend the Alpine Meadows SUP, the project would be consistent with Forest Service ROS classifications and recreation management objectives in the LRMP. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, there would be **no effect** related to project consistency with land use plans under Alternative 3. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact. This impact under Alternative 3 does not differ from Alternative 2.

### CEQA Determination of Effects

While Alternative 3 would require an amendment to the SVGPLUO to add the gondola to the "Potential Future Ski Lifts" map and a rezone to accommodate the Alpine Meadows base terminal, it would be consistent with recreation management objectives in all County and local plans applicable to private lands. Consistent with the similar analysis of land use plan consistency in Section 4.4, "Land Use," and the CEQA criteria identified there, this impact would be **less than significant**. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact.

### **Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation measures are required.

#### 4.1.3.4 ALTERNATIVE 4

##### Impact 4.1-1 (Alt. 4): Recreation Experience, Access, and Visitation

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Alternative 4 would result in increased use of recreational facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley, but this is not expected to result in substantial physical deterioration of these ski facilities or other existing recreational facilities. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation would be **beneficial** because implementation of Alternative 4 would generally improve facilities and access for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the two ski resorts, and effects on the recreational experience would be **beneficial** within ski area facilities but **minorly adverse** for dispersed recreation occurring beyond the ski areas because of elevated noise levels and the presence of construction equipment during project construction as well as long-term changes to the visual characteristics of the scenery associated with project operation. In particular, users of the Five Lakes Trail would encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. Implementation of RPMs MUL-7, and REC1- through REC-4 would mitigate this effect. In addition, other RPMs related to visual resources, noise, and biological resources, identified in the corresponding sections of this EIS/EIR would further mitigate this effect. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects on recreational facilities would be **less than significant** because while Alternative 4 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, this would not lead to a substantial physical deterioration of any recreational facilities or accelerate the deterioration of any recreational facilities. In addition, RPMs MUL-7, and REC-1 through REC-4 would minimize potential adverse effects on existing dispersed recreation facilities during project construction by ensuring the completion of construction activities in a single construction season, requiring SVSH to coordinate with and notify the Forest Service and the public regarding construction activities, installing signage to inform the public about trail reroutes and/or temporary closures, and avoiding conflicts with planned events. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced, although these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant impact to a less-than-significant level.

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##### Ski Area Facilities and Recreation Experience

Effects to ski area facilities and the recreation experience under Alternative 4 would be nearly the same as those described above for Alternative 2, and identical to those described above for Alternative 3. The primary difference in these effects is that under Alternative 4, the Alpine Meadows mid-station would not be located immediately above *the Buttress* area, and instead would be located on the Caldwell property. As a result, *the Buttress* area would be accessible only off the existing Summit Express lift via a substantial hike/traverse, similar to the existing condition, so access to *the Buttress* area under Alternative 4 would not be improved in any way.

##### Dispersed Recreation Experience

Effects related to dispersed recreation opportunities along the Five Lakes Trail would be different than described for Alternatives 2 and 3 because the alignment of the gondola for Alternative 4 would be located further east of the other action alternatives. Five Lakes Trail users would cross under the gondola line approximately 0.5 mile from the trailhead at Alpine Meadows Road. This crossing would be closer to existing development and infrastructure as compared with Alternatives 2 and 3; as a result, new infrastructure associated with Alternative 4 would represent less of a contrast with the existing landscape than the infrastructure associated with Alternative 2 or 3. Situating the gondola alignment closer to previously disturbed and inhabited areas would allow the Five Lakes Trail to retain a stronger sense of remote and pristine nature. Under Alternative 4, users of the Five Lakes Trail would still encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. Based on the five visual simulations created to analyze the visual impacts that would occur along the Five Lakes Trail as a result of each alternative, users of the Five Lakes Trail would be able to see infrastructure from three views where no infrastructure is currently visible (Views 10, 11, and 13), which would be the same as Alternative 3 but less than the four views under Alternative 2; refer to Appendix D for visual simulations of Alternative 4 from these views.

Similar to Alternative 3, the gondola under Alternative 4 would be less visually intrusive from the National Forest System-GCW than under Alternative 2 because it would be located closer to the valley floor and not high on a ridgeline. Under Alternative 4, impacts associated with increased likelihood of visitor encounters within the National Forest System-GCW would be identical to those discussed above for Alternative 3; any impacts would be lesser than those discussed above for Alternative 2, because gondola-users would be able to disembark and enter the National Forest System-GCW only from the Squaw Valley mid-station and not from the Alpine Meadows mid-station.

Impacts to the PCT would be less than those described for Alternatives 2 and 3 because the gondola alignment would be further removed and less visible from the trail.

Noise effects from the daily operation of the gondola would be similar to Alternative 3 because the gondola would be closer to the Five Lakes Trail trailhead. However, the noise effects associated with the Alternative 4 alignment could be largely masked by the ambient noise of the base area and traffic sounds from Alpine Meadows Road.

### **Deterioration of Existing Facilities**

Effects associated with the deterioration of existing facilities under Alternative 4 would be nearly the same as those described above for Alternative 2.

The same RPMs identified above for Alternative 2 would apply to Alternative 4. These include RPMs related to Scenic Resources, Noise, Biological Resources, and Soils and Erosion, RPMs MUL-4 and MUL-7, and recreation specific RPMs REC-1 through REC-4.

### **NEPA Effects Conclusion**

Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation for skiers resulting from Alternative 4 would be **beneficial**, and effects on the recreational experience for skiers would be **beneficial** because implementation of Alternative 4 would generally improve the recreational experience for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the two ski resorts. While Alternative 4 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, it is not anticipated that this would lead to substantial deterioration of these ski facilities. Alternative 4 would generally improve the recreational experience for skiers at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by increasing connectivity between the ski areas. There would be **minorly adverse** effects on the dispersed recreational experience near the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 4 because of elevated noise levels and the presence of construction equipment during project construction as well as long-term changes to the visual characteristics of the scenery associated with project operation. In particular, users of the Five Lakes Trail would encounter gondola infrastructure in sections of the trail where none is currently visible. These effects would be mitigated through implementation of RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4. These effects would be slightly less for the PCT and nearly the same for the Five Lakes Trail as compared with Alternative 3.

### **CEQA Determination of Effects**

While Alternative 4 would potentially increase skier visitation to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, this would not lead to a substantial physical deterioration of any recreational facilities or accelerate the deterioration of any recreational facilities. Under CEQA and using the CEQA criteria, effects on recreational facilities would be **less than significant**. RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4 would minimize potential adverse effects on existing dispersed recreation facilities during project construction by ensuring the completion of construction activities in a single construction season, requiring SVSH to coordinate with and notify the Forest Service and the public regarding construction activities, installing signage to inform the public about trail reroutes and/or temporary closures, and avoiding conflicts with planned events. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced, although these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant impact to a less-than-significant level. This impact does not differ materially from Alternative 2 as both alternatives would generate the same, or very similar, increases in skier visitation.

## Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs MUL-7 and REC-1 through REC-4 as mitigation measures would reduce the effects related to recreational facilities, access, and visitation, but are not necessary to reduce a significant effect. Also, see Sections 4.2, 4.9, 4.12, 4.13, and 4.16, which list the specific RPMs that would reduce impacts to dispersed recreation experience, and incorporate the RPMs as mitigation measures under CEQA.

### Impact 4.1-2 (Alt. 4): Adverse Effects Associated with New or Expanded Recreation Facilities

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Alternative 4 would not require the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant** because existing recreational services and facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support the estimated increase in visitation resulting from construction and operation of a gondola. This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

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Impacts related to the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, under Alternative 4 would be nearly the same as those described for Alternative 2.

#### NEPA Effects Conclusion

This impact analysis is specific to a CEQA criterion and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

#### CEQA Determination of Effects

Alternative 4 would not require the construction of new recreational facilities, or the expansion of existing facilities, that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant** because existing recreational services and facilities at Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are sufficient to support the estimated increase in visitation resulting from construction and operation of a gondola. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact.

## Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

### Impact 4.1-3 (Alt. 4): Consistency with Land Use Plans

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Alternative 4 includes amendments to the Alpine Meadows SUP, but it would be consistent with Forest Service ROS classifications in addition to County and other local plans applicable to private lands. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, there would be **no effect**. Consistent with the similar analysis of land use plan consistency in Section 4.4, "Land Use," and the CEQA criteria identified there, this effect would be **less than significant**.

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Impacts related to plan consistency under Alternative 4 would be nearly the same as those described for Alternative 2.

#### NEPA Effects Conclusion

While Alternative 4 would amend the Alpine Meadows SUP, the project would be consistent with Forest Service ROS classifications and recreation management objectives in the LRMP. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, there would be **no effect** related to project consistency with land use plans under Alternative 4. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact. This impact under Alternative 4 does not differ from Alternative 2.

### **CEQA Determination of Effects**

While Alternative 4 would require an amendment to the SVGPLUO to add the gondola to the “Potential Future Ski Lifts” map and a rezone to accommodate the Alpine Meadows base terminal, it would be consistent with recreation management objectives in all County and local plans applicable to private lands. Consistent with the similar analysis of land use plan consistency in Section 4.4, “Land Use,” and the CEQA criteria identified there, this impact would be **less than significant**. There are no applicable RPMs that would reduce this impact. This impact under Alternative 4 does not differ from Alternative 2.

### **Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation measures are required.

## **4.1.3.5 SUMMARY OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS**

Table 4.1-1 provides a summary of the effects determinations for the direct and indirect effects evaluated above for each alternative.

For Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative, there would be no effect for all NEPA indicators and CEQA criteria evaluated.

Addressing the action alternatives, for Impact 4.1-1, for all NEPA indicators other than the summertime dispersed recreation experience, effects are beneficial because of the improved recreational facilities and improved access for skiers between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. For these indicators, there is no meaningful difference in effects across the three action alternatives. Addressing the summertime dispersed recreation experience, there would be an adverse effect under Alternative 2 and a minorly adverse effect under Alternatives 3 and 4; these adverse effects would be mitigated with RPMs. For all three action alternatives, users of the Five Lakes Trail would be able to see new infrastructure from locations where infrastructure is not currently visible; under Alternative 2, infrastructure would be visible in locations where none is currently visible from four views, as compared with three views for Alternatives 3 and 4. It is important to note that there are many locations along the Five Lakes Trail for which visual simulations were not created and therefore, potential visual impacts that would occur in these locations cannot be compared between alternatives. Further, under Alternative 2, users of the Five Lakes Trail would pass under the gondola line far along the Five Lakes Trail, in an area where the recreational experience is already very remote; with implementation of Alternative 3 or 4, users would pass beneath the gondola line earlier in their hike, in proximity to existing development and infrastructure, meaning that the new infrastructure associated with Alternative 3 or 4 would represent less of a contrast with the existing landscape than the infrastructure associated with Alternative 2. As the alignment for Alternative 4 is further from the PCT than the alignment for Alternative 3, which is further from the PCT than the alignment for Alternative 2, Alternative 4 would have the least impact on the PCT. Considering that Alternative 4 would have the least impact on both the PCT and the Five Lakes Trail, Alternative 4 would have the least impact on the dispersed recreation experience out of all the action alternatives.

For the CEQA criteria related to increased use of facilities potentially leading to deterioration of those facilities, the impact is less than significant for all three action alternatives and there is no difference in effects across the alternatives. There are applicable RPMs that would be equally effective at reducing potential effects under all three action alternatives; however, these RPMs would not be necessary to reduce a significant impact to a less-than-significant level.

For Impact 4.1-2, the impact is less than significant for all three action alternatives and there is no difference in effects across the action alternatives. The analysis provided for Impact 4.1-2 is specific to a CEQA criteria and is not responsive to a NEPA analytical indicator. No NEPA effects conclusion is provided.

For Impact 4.1-3, there is no effect when considering the NEPA indicator for all three action alternatives and there is no meaningful difference in effects across the action alternatives. This impact is less than significant

under CEQA for all three action alternatives and there is no meaningful difference in effects across the action alternatives.

**Table 4.1-1 Summary of Direct and Indirect Effects**

Impact	Applicable Analytical Indicators and Significance Criteria	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
4.1-1: Recreation Experience, Access, and Visitation	Quantitative analysis of existing and proposed CCC and skier visitation, including discussion of existing guest service space and other amenities.	No effect	Beneficial effect under NEPA	Beneficial effect under NEPA Same as for Alternative 2	Beneficial effect under NEPA Same as for Alternatives 2 and 3
	Qualitative analysis of existing and proposed guest experiences for winter recreation at Squaw and Alpine Meadows, including safety, connection/accessibility, and changes to hike-to ski terrain at Alpine Meadows	No effect	Beneficial effect under NEPA	Beneficial effect under NEPA Same as for Alternative 2	Beneficial effect under NEPA Same as for Alternatives 2 and 3
	Discussion of the existing and proposed dispersed recreation experience on the Five Lakes Trail, PCT, and other nearby trails, during both summer and winter. Discussion of the anticipated length of the construction period, potential impacts such as noise and emissions from machinery (including helicopters), and potential limitations on trail use during construction or operation. Discussion of impacts resulting from operation of the gondola, including use conflicts, noise, privacy, and visual impacts	No effect	Adverse effect under NEPA	Minorly adverse effect under NEPA Less than under Alternative 2	Minorly adverse effect under NEPA Less than under Alternatives 2 and 3
	Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated	No effect	Less than significant under CEQA	Less than significant under CEQA Same as for Alternative 2	Less than significant under CEQA Same as for Alternatives 2 and 3
4.1-2: Adverse Effects Associated with New or Expanded Recreation Facilities	Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment	No effect	Less than significant under CEQA	Less than significant under CEQA Same as for Alternative 2	Less than significant under CEQA Same as for Alternatives 2 and 3
4.1-3: Consistency with Land Use Plans	Discussion of consistency with Forest Service ROS classifications	No effect	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA Same as for Alternative 2	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA Same as for Alternatives 2 and 3

## 4.1.4 Cumulative Effects

### 4.1.4.1 METHODS AND APPROACH

The list of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects considered in this cumulative analysis is provided in Chapter 3 of this Final EIS/EIR. The spatial scope for this analysis of cumulative effects to recreation includes the ski area operating boundaries of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows and surrounding NFS and private lands (including the National Forest System-GCW).

Any present or reasonably foreseeable future projects within the spatial scope of this analysis that have the potential to create impacts to recreation as a resource are listed below. Potential impacts associated with these projects include altered quality of the recreational experience and altered recreational opportunities.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Potential Impacts</b>
Alpine Meadows Master Development Plan	Altered quality of the recreational experience
Squaw Valley Red Dog Lift Replacement	Altered quality of the recreational experience
Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan	Altered quality of the recreational experience
Timberline Twister	Altered quality of the recreational experience; altered recreational opportunities
White Wolf Project	Altered quality of the recreational experience
Big Sugar Trail Enhancement Project	Altered quality of the recreational experience; altered recreational opportunities

#### 4.1.4.2 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

##### **Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative**

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative would result in a continuation of existing conditions. There would be no direct and indirect impacts, and thus by definition no cumulative impacts to recreation.

##### **Alternative 2**

Considered cumulatively with planned ski area improvements at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, Alternative 2 would contribute to an overall improvement in the skiing experience. The Alpine Meadows MDP includes base area/guest service improvements, lift improvements, snowmaking improvements, and trail grading projects. The Squaw Valley Red Dog Lift Replacement would replace the existing Red Dog triple lift with a high-speed, detachable, six-person lift. The Timberline Twister project includes a new alpine coaster at the Squaw Valley ski area between the Far East and Red Dog chairlifts. As described above, the proposed gondola would improve connectivity between the two ski areas and allow visitors to access both resorts on a single day more easily. Planned ski area improvements like those listed in the Alpine Meadows MDP and the Red Dog lift replacement at Squaw Valley, when considered cumulatively with Alternative 2, would further improve the recreational experience at the two resorts.

The proposed Alpine Meadows mid-station would provide access to the master planned Rollers lift (included in the Alpine Meadows MDP). The bottom terminal of the Rollers lift would be located near the Alpine Meadows mid-station (on private land) and it is anticipated that skiers could exit the gondola at the mid-station to access this future lift and the terrain it would serve. The proposed gondola, in combination with the Rollers lift, would result in increased use of the terrain below the top terminal of the Rollers Lift (Beaver and Estelle bowls). The increased use surrounding the Alpine Meadows mid-station and Rollers lift area would result in noise and visible infrastructure adjacent to the National Forest System-GCW, which are further evaluated in Sections 4.2, “Visual Resources”; 4.3, “Wilderness”; and 4.9, “Noise.”

The *Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan* would add lodging capacity for overnight visitors at Squaw Valley within approximately 94 acres of the previously developed Squaw Valley Village located at the western end of the Olympic Valley. The additional lodging space could increase visitation at Squaw Valley, thereby increasing use of the terrain at both Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. If this additional lodging capacity resulted in an appreciable change to use at the two resorts, the quality of some users’ recreational



experiences could be reduced. Additional development of recreation infrastructure at Squaw Valley would include the Timberline Twister project, which would add a new year-round recreation amenity to the area.

Cumulative impacts to dispersed recreation could result from the White Wolf project. This project would include the construction of 38 residences, a private ski lift in addition to the existing private ski lift (i.e. “KT South”) and other amenities. These additions would result in further development in proximity to the Five Lakes Trail, potentially reducing the recreational experience there. Noise and visual impacts during construction would result in temporary impacts to trail users. The increased visibility of development associated with operation of the White Wolf project, when combined with Alternative 2, would detract further from the recreational experience; however, the beginning section Five Lakes Trail is operated with an access easement on private lands and these private lands are allowed the right to develop. Additionally, the proposed private ski lift that would connect the Caldwell property to the Alpine Meadows mid-station could indirectly increase winter access to the National Forest System-GCW; this would increase chances of visitor encounters in the National Forest System-GCW and could thereby reduce opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined recreation experience for some users of the National Forest System-GCW during the winter season. This change could also be experienced during transitional seasons or periods of inconsistent snow cover as well, because during relatively short periods, the gondola could be operational and the southern aspect slopes could be dry enough to provide for hiking access. However, RPM REC-4 requires that signage be posted at both the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base stations stating that walking or hiking trail access directly from the gondola (i.e., by exiting at a mid-station) is strictly prohibited; thereby reducing the potential for this effect. Overall, this private ski lift is not expected to result in a change to the skiing experience or a meaningful increase in visitation at either resort, because the only residents and guests of the Caldwell property would have access to this private ski lift.

The Big Sugar Trail Enhancement includes improvements to dispersed recreation trails on the American River Ranger District. These projects are not directly adjacent to the Five Lakes Trail or other resources affected by Alternative 2, so no cumulative impacts are expected.

### **Alternatives 3 and 4**

Cumulative impacts resulting from Alternatives 3 and 4 would be nearly the same as those discussed above for Alternative 2, with some exceptions identified below.

While the gondola alignments associated with Alternatives 3 and 4 are not identical, they are similar enough that cumulative impacts to the recreational experience associated with both of these alternatives would be nearly identical. Under Alternatives 3 and 4, there would be no gondola mid-station near the bottom terminal of the planned Rollers lift. Alternatives 3 and 4 would not provide access to the Rollers lift and would not introduce infrastructure and activity to this area adjacent to the National Forest System-GCW; therefore, there would not be cumulative effects to the skiing experience at Alpine Meadows. While there would be fewer cumulative impacts to the dispersed recreation experience associated with increased likelihood of visitor encounters in the National Forest System-GCW if the private lift connecting the Caldwell property to *the Buttress* area were not constructed, the construction of this lift is still possible. Under Alternatives 3 and 4, this private lift could be constructed to provide direct access to *the Buttress* area and other terrain beneath it exclusively for the use of residents and guests of the Caldwell property. This potential private lift could minimally increase visitation to the dispersed recreation areas for residents and guests of the Caldwell property by improving access to dispersed recreation areas. Similarly, the Rollers lift could be constructed even if Alternative 3 or 4 were selected, and skiers/snowboarders at Alpine Meadows would be able to access it from the existing Summit Express lift.

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