



COUNTY OF PLACER
Community Development Resource Agency

**ENVIRONMENTAL
COORDINATION
SERVICES**

Michael J. Johnson, AICP
Agency Director E. J. Ivaldi, Coordinator

DATE: April 22, 2016

TO: California State Clearinghouse
Responsible and Trustee Agencies
Interested Parties and Organizations

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Proposed Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project

REVIEW PERIOD: April 22, 2016 to May 23, 2016

Placer County is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project (project or B2B), which would include installation, operation, and maintenance of a winter-time only/ski season only gondola connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. The project would also include installation, operation, and maintenance of an avalanche control system within proximity to the Alpine Meadows portion of the gondola alignment. Placer County (County) has prepared an Initial Study to analyze these actions and has identified potentially significant environmental effects. The County will therefore prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) for the project to satisfy the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 et seq.), and will serve as the lead agency for CEQA compliance. Concurrent with posting of this NOP in support of the EIR, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is publishing a separate Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EIS will evaluate the environmental effects resulting from the USFS amending the existing Special Use Permit (SUP) issued for the operation and maintenance of Alpine Meadows to allow construction and operation of the proposed B2B project. The EIR and EIS will each be prepared and considered for approval separately by Placer County and the USFS, respectively. Each agency will prepare their environmental review document to comply with applicable statutory requirements, CEQA for the County and NEPA for the USFS. This notice meets the CEQA noticing requirements for a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to provide responsible agencies and interested persons with sufficient information to make meaningful responses as to the scope and content of the EIR. Your timely comments will ensure an appropriate level of environmental review for the project.

Project Description: The project proposes a Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project which would include installation, operation, and maintenance of a gondola connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. The project would also include installation, operation, and maintenance of an avalanche control system within the Alpine Meadows portion of the gondola alignment.

Project Location: The project area is located at 2600 Alpine Meadows Road, Tahoe City; 1960 Squaw Valley Road, Olympic Valley extending from the base of the Alpine Meadows Ski Area to the base of the Squaw Valley Ski Area.

For more information regarding the project, please contact Heather Beckman, at (530) 581-6286. A copy of the NOP is available for review at the Tahoe City Library, Truckee Library, Placer County Community Development Resource Agency (Auburn), Placer County Administrative Offices in Tahoe City, and on the Placer County website:

<http://www.placer.ca.gov/departments/communitydevelopment/envcoordsvcs/eir>

NOP Scoping Meeting: In addition to the opportunity to submit written comments, two public scoping meetings will be held by the County to inform interested parties about the proposed project, and to provide agencies and the public with an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and content of the EIR. The meeting will be held on Monday, May 9, 2016 from 2:00-4:00 p.m. and from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at The Resort at Squaw Creek; Monument Peak Room, 400 Squaw Creek Road, Olympic Valley.

NOP Comment Period: Written comments should be submitted at the earliest possible date, but not later than 5:00 p.m. on **May 23, 2016** to Shirlee Herrington, Environmental Coordination Services, Community Development Resource Agency, 3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190, Auburn, CA 95603. (530) 745-3132, Fax: (530) 745-3080, cdraecs@placer.ca.gov.

NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Date: April 22, 2016
To: Agencies and Interested Parties
From: Placer County
Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Proposed Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project
Review Period: April 22, 2016 to May 23, 2016

Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC (project applicant) is proposing the Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project (project or B2B), which would include installation, operation, and maintenance of a winter operations only gondola connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. The project would also include installation, operation, and maintenance of an avalanche control system within proximity to the Alpine Meadows portion of the gondola alignment. Placer County (County) has prepared an Initial Study to analyze these actions and has identified potentially significant environmental effects. The County will therefore prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) for the project to satisfy the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 et seq.), and will serve as the lead agency for CEQA compliance.

PURPOSE OF THIS NOTICE OF PREPARATION

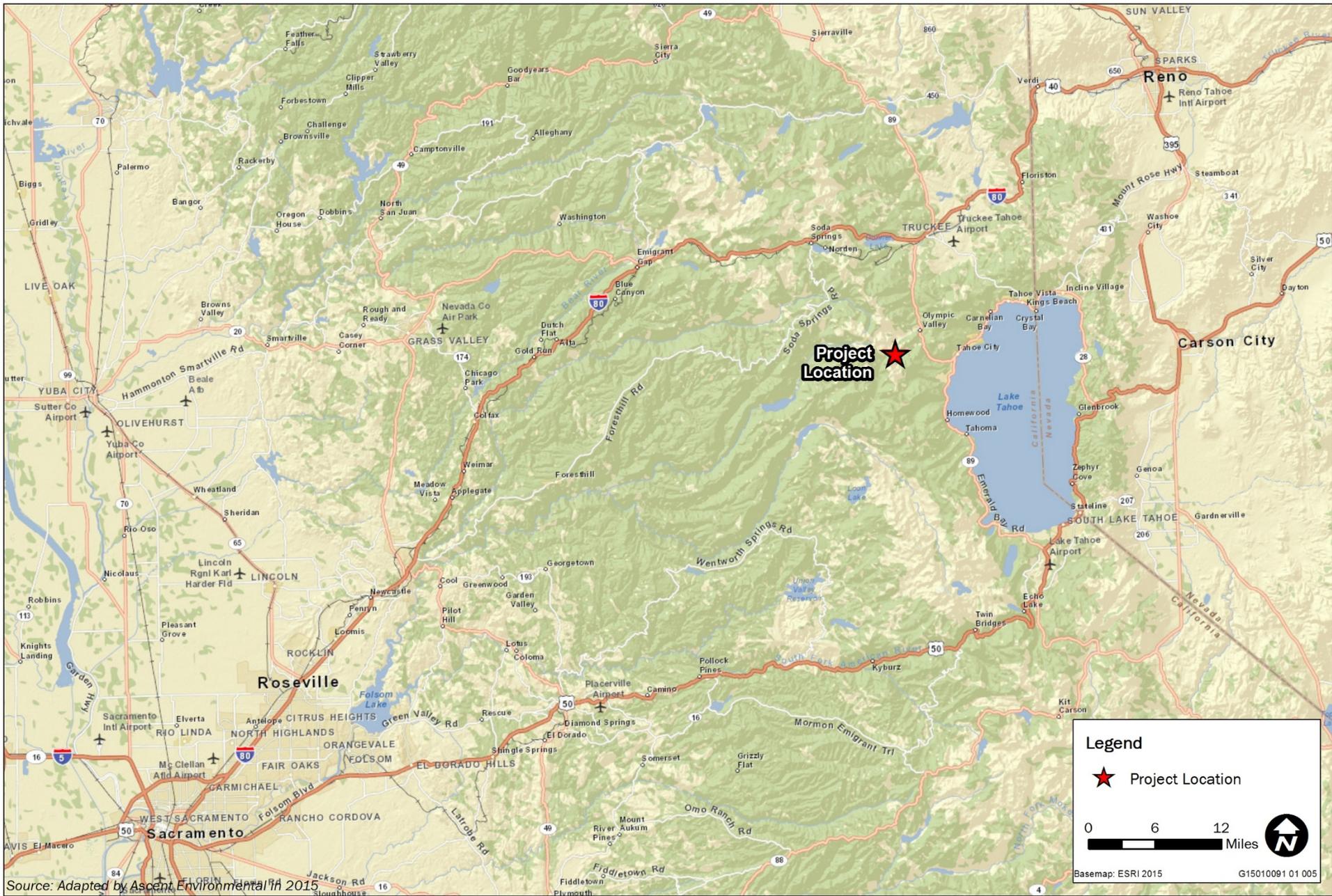
In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 15082), the County has prepared this notice of preparation (NOP) to inform agencies and interested parties that an EIR will be prepared for the above-referenced project. The purpose of an NOP is to provide sufficient information about the proposed project and its potential environmental impacts to allow agencies and interested parties the opportunity to provide a meaningful response related to the scope and content of the EIR, including mitigation measures that should be considered and alternatives that should be addressed (State CEQA Guidelines 14 CCR Section 15082[b]).

The project location, description, and potential environmental effects are summarized below. A more detailed project description is included in the attached Initial Study.

Concurrent with posting of this NOP in support of the EIR, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is publishing a separate Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EIS will evaluate the environmental effects resulting from the USFS amending the existing Special Use Permit (SUP) issued for the operation and maintenance of Alpine Meadows to allow construction and operation of the proposed B2B project. The EIR and EIS will each be prepared and considered for approval separately by Placer County and the USFS, respectively. Each agency will prepare their environmental review document to comply with applicable statutory requirements, CEQA for the County and NEPA for the USFS. For further information related to the EIS please contact Joe Flannery, Winter Sports Specialist, (530) 587-3558 ext.243, jflannery@fs.fed.us.

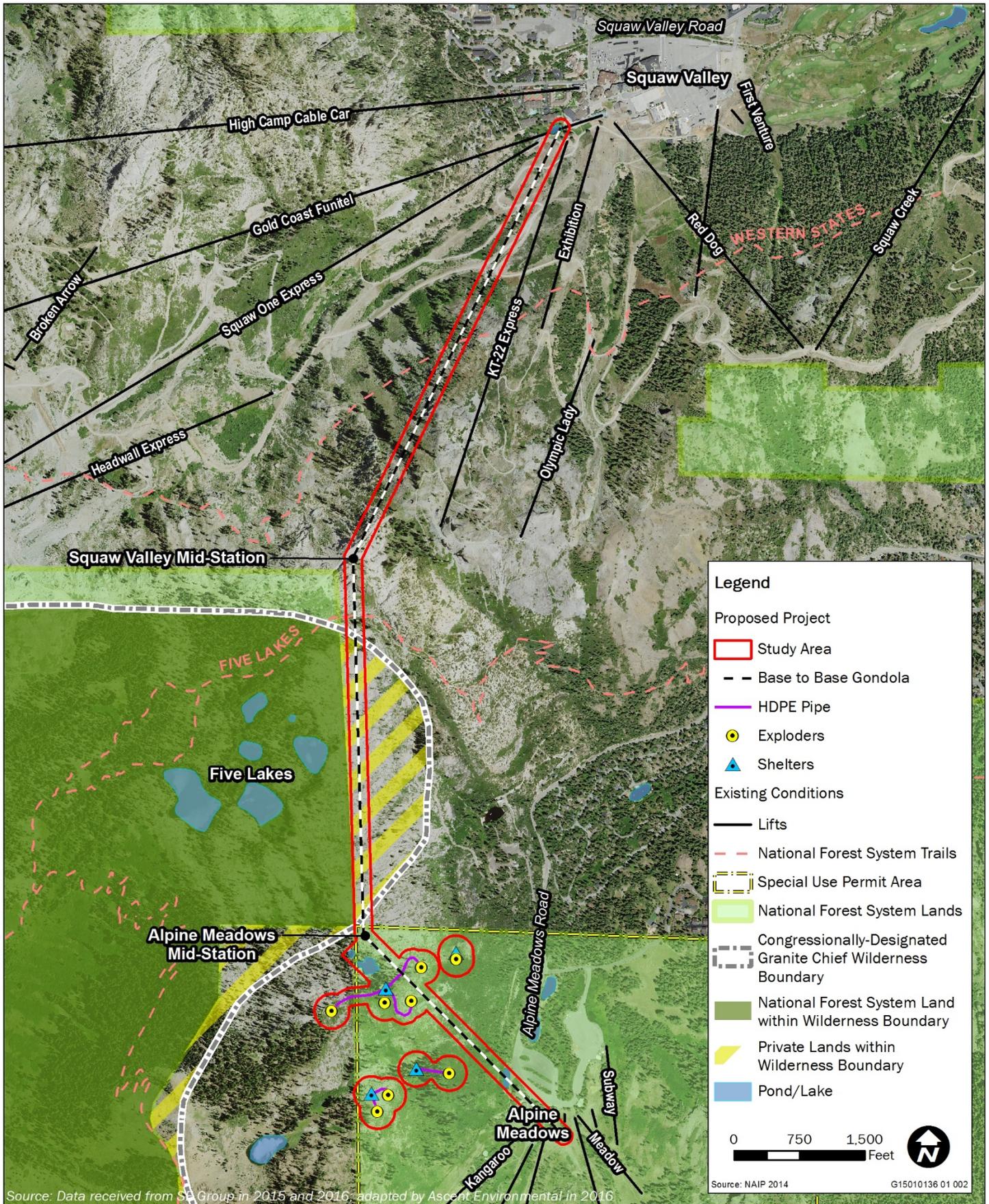
PROJECT LOCATION

The project area is located in the Sierra Nevada, in Placer County (Exhibit 1). The project would extend from the base of the Alpine Meadows Ski Area to the base of Squaw Valley Ski Area (Exhibit 2). The portion of the project area located within the Alpine Meadows Ski Area would be located on National Forest System (NFS) lands that are part of the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) and are leased by the Alpine Meadows Ski Area and subject to special use permit by the USFS. Approximately one quarter of the proposed gondola would be



Source: Adapted by Ascent Environmental in 2015





Source: Data received from SE Group in 2015 and 2016, adapted by Ascent Environmental in 2016

located on NFS lands. Immediately north of Alpine Meadows, the alignment crosses an area of private property that is not part of the Alpine Meadows or Squaw Valley ski areas. The remainder of the project area is within the Squaw Valley Ski Area and would be on private lands owned by Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC. In one portion of the private lands the project alignment crosses through the congressionally designated boundary of the Granite Chief Wilderness (GCW) that extends into this private property. However, the Wilderness Act does not apply to private property and this private property is not managed, maintained, or considered part of the GCW.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

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

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

(See Chapter 1 of the attached Initial Study for a more detailed project description.)

Base-to-Base Gondola

Facilities

The applicant proposes to install, operate, and maintain an aerial ropeway system connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base areas as well as an avalanche control system consisting of remotely operated gas-activated exploders (Gazex exploders). The proposed lift would be configured as an eight-passenger gondola and have a design capacity of approximately 1,400 persons per hour in each direction. Travel time between the ski areas is estimated at approximate 16 minutes. In total, the lift would be approximately 13,000 feet in length (based on slope length) of which, approximately 3,300 feet (25 percent) would be sited on NFS lands (i.e., in the TNF). Table 1 provides a summary of the proposed facilities and the land ownership for each facility.

Table 1-1 Project Facilities

Facility	Private Land	NFS Lands	Total
Aerial Ropeway System	9,700 feet	3,300 feet	13,000 feet
Towers	24	11	37
Terminal	1 base terminal, 1 mid-station	1 base terminal, 1 mid-station	2 base terminals, 2 mid-stations
Gazex Exploders	1	7	8

The Alpine Meadows base terminal would be located on USFS lands between the Roundhouse Express and the Hot Wheels Chair ski lifts. The Squaw Valley base terminal would be located on private lands between the bottom terminals of the KT-22 and Squaw One express ski lifts. The gondola would be designed with two mid-stations; one atop the *Saddle* trail ridgeline approximately 1,100 feet southwest of the KT-22 lift top terminal (the Squaw Valley mid-station on private lands), the other would be about 650 feet northwest of *The*

Buttress in the northern portion of the Alpine Meadows ski area (the Alpine Meadows mid-station on NFS lands [i.e., Tahoe National Forest]).

Each of the base terminals would include a deck and cabin storage areas, and the total facility (base terminal, deck, and cabin storage area) would disturb approximately 0.5 acre. Additionally, grading is proposed at the Alpine Meadows base area to improve the connectivity between the base lodge and the Summit and Roundhouse chairlifts. This project would add fill material to reduce the slope between the lodge and the chairlifts, resulting in approximately 1.6 acres of disturbance. Ground disturbance for the mid-stations would be approximately 0.5 acre each, and the tower footings would disturb a maximum of approximately 0.5 acre (37 towers x 600 square feet maximum disturbance each). In total, the proposed gondola would disturb up to approximately 4.1 acres.

Operation

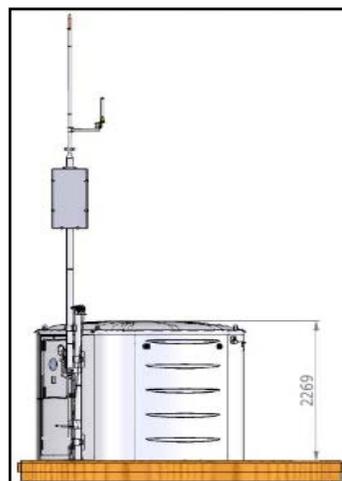
The proposed gondola would transport visitors in both directions between the two resorts. In the winter months, visitors would be able to on- or off-load from the gondola at both base terminals and both mid-stations. The gondola would typically operate each day from just before the ski areas open until just after closing, and would only operate during the ski season. The gondola cabins would be removed and stored at the base stations when not in use during the ski season and as needed during winter storm events.

Gazex Avalanche Mitigation System

Installation of the proposed gondola would necessitate changes to Alpine Meadow’s current snow safety and avalanche hazard mitigation program. Therefore, the project would include installation, operation, and maintenance of up to eight Gazex exploders (seven on NFS lands) in the vicinity of *The Buttress*, *Bernie’s Chute*, *Bernie’s Bowl*, *North Poma Rocks Gully*, *Pond Slide*, and *Poma Rocks*. Gazex exploders ignite propane and oxygen gas in a controlled volume explosion within the Gazex tubes, creating a concussive blast above the snow surface in key avalanche trigger locations. Filling of the tubes with gas and ignition is controlled remotely. Installation of the Gazex exploders would require two concrete footers for anchoring of each tube (Exhibit 3). The upper concrete footing would be approximately 3.5 feet by 8 feet, with a total disturbance area of approximately 15 feet by 15 feet. The lower concrete footing would be approximately 5 feet by 5 feet, with a total disturbance area of approximately 7 feet by 7 feet. The disturbance required for each exploder would vary depending on its location. Operation of the Gazex system would also include installation of four shelters to house propane and oxygen tanks. Each shelter would be approximately 7 feet by 7 feet and would be set on a small aboveground platform (approximately 10 feet by 12 feet), anchored for stability (Exhibit 3). Alpine Meadows ski area would ensure that all combustible gasses are removed or depleted from each shelter at the end of each ski season to diminish wildfire concerns. Refilling of the tanks would be conducted annually using over-the-snow vehicle or a helicopter to deliver full tanks to the shelters.



Typical Exploder



Typical Shelter

Exhibit 3

Typical Gazex Exploder and Shelter

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The EIR will describe the direct and indirect potentially significant and significant environmental impacts of the proposed project. Based on the results of the Initial Study prepared for the proposed project (and attached to this NOP or available on the County's website), the County has determined that the EIR will result in potentially significant environmental impacts in the following topic areas, which will be further evaluated in the EIR:

- ▲ Aesthetics
- ▲ Air Quality
- ▲ Biological Resources
- ▲ Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- ▲ Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change
- ▲ Hydrology and Water Quality
- ▲ Land Use and Planning
- ▲ Noise
- ▲ Recreation
- ▲ Transportation and Circulation
- ▲ Utilities and Service Systems
- ▲ Cumulative Impacts

Aesthetics

The project area is located within a scenic alpine setting, with steep mountains, jagged peaks, meadows, and creeks. The proposed project includes development of a gondola and avalanche mitigation system that would alter the viewshed in the project area. The project may result in adverse effects to scenic vistas, particularly as viewed from Squaw Valley Road (a County-designated scenic roadway), Alpine Meadows Road, Granite Chief Wilderness, Five Lakes Trail, and from surrounding residential areas. Development of the proposed project would change the existing visual character within the project area. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Air Quality

During construction of the proposed project, criteria air pollutant emissions would be temporarily and intermittently generated. Operation of the proposed project would result in air pollutant emissions from project-generated motor vehicle trips and stationary sources. Construction- and operations-related emissions could adversely affect sensitive receptors in the vicinity. Nearby sensitive receptors include residences, condominiums, and lodging facilities. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Biological Resources

Special-status plant or wildlife species could potentially occur in the project area. Additionally, the surrounding forested mountain areas—while disturbed due to residential development and ski use—provide habitat for special-status plant and wildlife species, and could be indirectly affected by project implementation (e.g., disturbance of nesting birds during construction). Implementation of the proposed project could result in disturbance or take of special-status species or disturbance or removal of suitable habitat for these species or interference with wildlife movements.

Aquatic features identified in the project area include freshwater ponds, bog, ephemeral streams, and drainages. The project could potentially remove, fill, or hydrologically interrupt wetlands identified in the project area and could potentially affect jurisdictional waters.

Placer County's Tree Preservation Ordinance (Placer County Code, Article 12.20) is applicable to all native, landmark trees, riparian zone trees, and certain commercial firewood operations. In accordance with the Tree Preservation Ordinance, a discretionary project shall evaluate the potential impacts to all protected trees sized 6-inches diameter at breast height or larger as part of the development review process. Implementation of the project could result in removal of trees protected under the tree ordinance. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Geology, Soils, and Seismicity

Depending on wind and rain conditions, grading activities and improvements could result in the potential for erosion and sedimentation of site soils both on- and off-site. In addition, portions of the project area are

located within the run-out areas of some avalanche zones and would include construction of new structures and uses within potential avalanche hazard areas. These impacts will be evaluated further in the EIR.

Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated by the proposed project during construction would predominantly be in the form of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Emissions would be associated with mobile-source exhaust from construction worker commute trips, truck haul trips, and equipment used in the project area (e.g., excavators, graders, helicopters). Operation of the proposed project would also result in GHG emissions from area sources including stationary equipment such as operating internal combustion engine powered generators. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The project area drains into Squaw Creek and Bear Creek, both of which drain into the Truckee River. Due to excessive sediment load, Squaw Creek is listed by the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (LRWQCB) as an impaired water body in accordance with Clean Water Act Section 303(d). Bear Creek and the Truckee River are also listed as impaired waterways on the 303(d) list. However, LRWQCB is in the process of considering delisting Bear Creek. Construction activities could result in soil erosion, siltation, or flooding. Specifically, construction activities such as grading could result in disturbance of soils and sediments that could be carried into surrounding water bodies during storm events. Further, accidental discharges of construction-related fuels, oils, hydraulic fluid, and other hazardous substances could contaminate stormwater flows or increase siltation in nearby water bodies, resulting in a reduction in stormwater quality on or downstream of the project area. New impervious surfaces that would be constructed as part of the project could increase the volume of runoff coming from the project area or alter the drainage pattern of the project area sufficiently to result in increased erosion or siltation. Runoff could contain oils, grease, fuel, sediments, brake dust, and other potential water pollutants. During storm events, these pollutants could be carried to downstream receiving waters of Squaw and Bear Creeks and eventually the Truckee River. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Land Use and Planning

The *Squaw Valley General Plan Land Use Ordinance* (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, the gondola may be considered in conflict with the SVGPLUO, and an amendment to the SVPLUO may be required.

Further, portions of the project area are located on the TNF, and the project will need to be evaluated for consistency with the Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as well as any other applicable TNF planning documents. A portion of the proposed project on private property would cross through the congressionally designated boundary of the GCW. However, the Wilderness Act does not apply to private property and this private property is not managed, maintained, or considered part of the GCW. Nonetheless, compatibility with the GCW will need to be evaluated. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Noise

Construction-related noise sources would include both mobile and stationary on-site equipment (e.g., all-terrain vehicles, helicopters, spider excavator), as well as blasting. Construction would also generate truck trips associated with the delivery of supplies and hauling away of excess fill and construction debris. Construction noise levels could potentially exceed the daytime hourly and maximum standard of 55 and 70 dBA respectively, as defined by the Placer County Code. Operation of the proposed project would result in additional employees and associated daily vehicle trips. Additionally, the project includes operation of a new gondola and Gazex exploders for avalanche control, which could generate noise that could disturb nearby sensitive land uses. The project's long-term operations could result in the exposure of people to additional long-term operational noise levels, and additional noise may exceed the applicable County noise standards. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Recreation

The proposed project may increase the use of adjacent USFS lands including the GCW by providing access to a remote area. Although this increase in use is not expected to result in the need for additional facilities that could cause a significant effect on the environment, it could result in the deterioration of existing facilities, including trails. This issue will be evaluated further in the EIR.

Transportation and Circulation

Project construction would result in construction worker commute trips and haul truck trips (for delivery and transport of materials and equipment) to and from the project area, resulting in increased traffic levels on local roadways. Operation of the project is expected to result in very few additional employee trips. It may reduce intra-resort vehicle travel, as skiers would be able to access either resort from one or the other resort by the project's new gondola. However, because the project has the potential to increase the overall attraction of both ski areas, it may increase resort visitation. Long-term project operation could result in adverse roadway conditions, including decreased level of service and increases in congestion. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

Utilities and Service Systems

The demand for additional water supply, and related effects, is tied to potential increased use of the ski areas. While increased water demand is expected to be minor, the project's effects on water demand will be evaluated in the EIR. In addition, the proposed project would require consumption of energy and fuels during construction and would increase the long-term demand for propane and electricity for operation of the project. The use of propane and electricity would be limited to the winter months; however, the project would increase the long-term demand for propane and electricity and the amount needed to serve the project is not known at this time. These issues will be evaluated further in the EIR.

Cumulative Impacts

Implementation of the proposed project could potentially result in significant impacts to the above resource areas. When taken together with the effects of past projects, other current projects, and probable future projects, the project's contribution to the overall cumulative effect of all these activities could be considerable. These issues will be evaluated in the EIR.

ALTERNATIVES TO BE EVALUATED IN THE EIR

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR Section 15126.6), the EIR will describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project that are capable of meeting most of the projects' objectives, and that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. The EIR will also identify any alternatives that were considered but rejected by the lead agency as infeasible and briefly explain the reasons why. The EIR will provide an analysis of the No-Project Alternative and will also identify the environmentally superior alternative.

POTENTIAL PERMITS AND APPROVALS REQUESTED

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

- ▲ Certification of a Final Environmental Impact Report;
- ▲ Amendment of the *Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance*;
- ▲ Conditional Use Permit; and
- ▲ Further analysis will determine if a Parking Variance is required.

In addition, the project may require permit approvals from Responsible Agencies.

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

The NOP and Initial Study are available for public review at the following locations:

Tahoe City Library
740 N. Lake Blvd
Tahoe City, CA 96145

Truckee Library
10031 Levon Avenue
Truckee, CA 96161

Placer County
3091 County Center Drive, Suite #190
Auburn, CA 95603

The NOP and Initial Study are also available for public review on Placer County's website:
<http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/CommunityDevelopment/EnvCoordSvcs/EIR.aspx>.

PROVIDING COMMENTS

Agencies and interested parties may provide the County with written comments on topics to be addressed in the EIR for the project. Because of time limits mandated by State law, comments should be provided no later than 5:00 p.m. on **May 23, 2016**. Please send all comments to:

Placer County, Planning Services Division
775 North Lake Boulevard
Tahoe City, CA 96145
Attention: Heather Beckman, Associate Planner
Telephone: (530) 581-6280 Fax: (530) 581-6204
Email: hbeckman@placer.ca.gov

Agencies that will need to use the EIR when considering permits or other approvals for the proposed project should provide the name of a contact person. Comments provided by email should include "Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project NOP Scoping Comment" in the subject line, and the name and physical address of the commenter in the body of the email.

All comments on environmental issues received during the public comment period will be considered and addressed in the Draft EIR, which is anticipated to be available for public review in fall 2016.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

Two public scoping meetings will be held by the County to inform interested parties about the proposed project, and to provide agencies and the public with an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and content of the EIR. The meeting times and location are as follows:

May 9, 2016
First meeting from 2:00-4:00 p.m. and second meeting from 6:00-8:00 p.m.
The Resort at Squaw Creek; Monument Peak Room
400 Squaw Creek Road, Olympic Valley

The meeting space is accessible to persons with disabilities. Individuals needing special assistive devices will be accommodated to the County's best ability. For more information, please contact Heather Beckman (at the contact information above) at least 48 hours before the meeting.

As stated above, concurrent with posting of this NOP and information on the scoping meeting in support of the EIR, the USFS is publishing a separate NOI to prepare an EIS pursuant to NEPA. The public scoping meeting in support of the CEQA process will also function as a scoping meeting in support of the federal EIS. Representatives from both the County and the USFS will be present at the scoping meeting to answer

questions and accept scoping input. The EIR and EIS will each be prepared and considered for approval separately by Placer County and the USFS, respectively. Each agency will prepare their environmental review document to comply with applicable statutory requirements, CEQA for the County and NEPA for the USFS. For further information related to the EIS please contact Joe Flannery, Winter Sports Specialist, (530) 587-3558 ext.243, jflannery@fs.fed.us.