
File Code: 2720

Date: March 31, 2025

Subject: Sandia Peak Ski Area Improvement

Dear Interested Parties:

The USDA Forest Service, Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands would like to invite your participation in the scoping process for a project proposed at the Sandia Peak Ski Area. Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the purpose of scoping is to identify significant environmental issues deserving of study and to determine which issues can be deemphasized to narrow the scope of the analysis. Unless extraordinary circumstances are identified, the project is proposed to be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) under the following category:

36 CFR 220.6 (e)(22): Construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, or disposal of buildings, infrastructure, or improvements at an existing recreation site, including infrastructure or improvements that are adjacent or connected to an existing recreation site and provide access or utilities for that site. Recreation sites include but are not limited to campgrounds and camping areas, picnic areas, day use areas, fishing sites, interpretive sites, visitor centers, trailheads, ski areas, and observation sites. Activities within this category are intended to apply to facilities located at recreation sites managed by the Forest Service and those managed by concessioners under a special use authorization. Examples include but are not limited to:

(viii) Replacing a chair lift at a ski area

The Forest Service would like to consider your comments or concerns before making a decision and affirming the use of the categorical exclusion summarized above.

Proposed Action

Sandia Peak Ski Area is proposing to completely replace Lift 1. The replacement will include removal of the top and bottom terminals, as well as the building housing the bottom terminal. The existing pedestrian walkway/stairs at the top terminal would be replaced with a modernized pedestrian bridge that is ADA-compliant and connects to the proposed top terminal. An approximately 3,800 square foot cabin storage building is proposed and would be immediately adjacent the bottom terminal disturbance area.

The project will also include the removal and replacement of all existing chairlift towers along the existing Lift 1 route. Larger tower footings would also need to be installed but would cumulatively total about 0.1 acres of disturbance. Total ground disturbance encompassing of the



terminals, ancillary facilities, and lift corridor itself would be 8.7 acres. The new chairlift will be a Telemix system and will be capable of running both traditional ski lift chairs and enclosed gondolas.

Purpose and Need

The existing Lift 1 at Sandia Peak Ski Area was installed in 1980 and was decommissioned in 2017. When operational, its capacity was limited to 566 persons per hour, taking 15-minutes of ride time to reach the summit. The new lift system would be approximately 7,400 feet long and increase capacity to approximately 2,400 persons per hour and will only take 7 ½ minutes to reach the summit. The intermittent gondola cabins will also allow for non-winter sport guests to access the summit restaurant from the base of the ski area and will conversely allow guests that take the Sandia Peak Tramway to the summit, downhill access to the ski area base lodge.

The replacement of Lift 1 was identified in the 2016 Sandia Peak Master Development Plan (MDP), which was accepted by the Cibola National Forest in January 2018. Objectives from the 2016 MDP which pertain to this project include:

- Provide upgraded facilities in order to improve the quality of the alpine ski experience
- Increase year-round utilization of existing infrastructure
- Provide additional recreation opportunities for Tram passengers

Project Location

The Sandia Peak Ski Area is located on the Sandia Ranger District in the Sandia Mountains east of Albuquerque, New Mexico, approximately 7-miles west along NM-536 (also known as the Sandia Crest Highway). Township 11N. Range 5E, Section 38, New Mexico Principal Meridian, Bernalillo County, New Mexico (see attached project map). The proposed project would be within Sandia Peak's existing special use permit (SUP) area, which is administered by the Cibola National Forest. The bottom terminal of Chairlift # 1 is adjacent to the base lodge and the top terminal is at the summit of the ski area, adjacent to the Tram station and Ten 3 Restaurant.

Decision Framework

The Responsible Official for this analysis and decision is Heidi McRoberts, Forest Supervisor, Cibola National Forest & Grasslands. The Responsible Official will decide whether to proceed with this action, or to do nothing at this time.

How to Comment and Timeframe

You are invited to comment on our proposal. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments are all welcome. For your comments to be useful we need them by April 30, 2025. Please email your comments to richard.wilhelm@usda.gov (plain text (.txt), rich text (.txt), or Word (.doc, .docx). Written comments should be addressed to Sandia District Office, 11776 NM-337, Tijeras, New Mexico 87059). Please state Sandia Peak Ski Area Improvements in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Considering legislation approved in 2014 (Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 and the Agricultural Act of 2014), the Forest Service no longer offers notice, comment and appeal opportunities for categorically excluded projects pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215, effective March 5, 2014. The Forest Service continues to offer public involvement opportunities for categorically excluded projects as provided for in the agency's NEPA Procedures, see 36 CFR 220.4(d) (SOPA) and 36 CFR 220.4(e) and 220.6(c) (scoping). We will consider all comments that we receive, including those submitted anonymously, but only those who provide contact information will be notified of the decision. Please note that all comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection.

For questions and comments, please contact Richard Wilhelm, Lands Special Uses Program Manager at (505) 346-3842 or richard.wilhelm@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

KEN BORN
District Ranger
Sandia Ranger District
Cibola National Forest & Grasslands