



Decision Memo

Winter Park Resort Updates, Repair, Maintenance, and Parking Project

USDA Forest Service Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland Grand County, CO

Background

Winter Park Recreational Association operates Winter Park Resort (WPR) on private and National Forest System (NFS) lands under a Special Use Permit administered by the USDA Forest Service, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest. WPR is 20 miles south of Granby, Colorado.

The USDA Forest Service (USFS) received a proposal from WPR for several project actions that would increase visitor capacity, improve recreational opportunities, and update aging equipment. Certain aspects of the proposal were accepted. After receiving a description of the proposed action, the USFS worked with WPR over several months to refine the proposal and accept certain portions for analysis. The proposed aspects are:

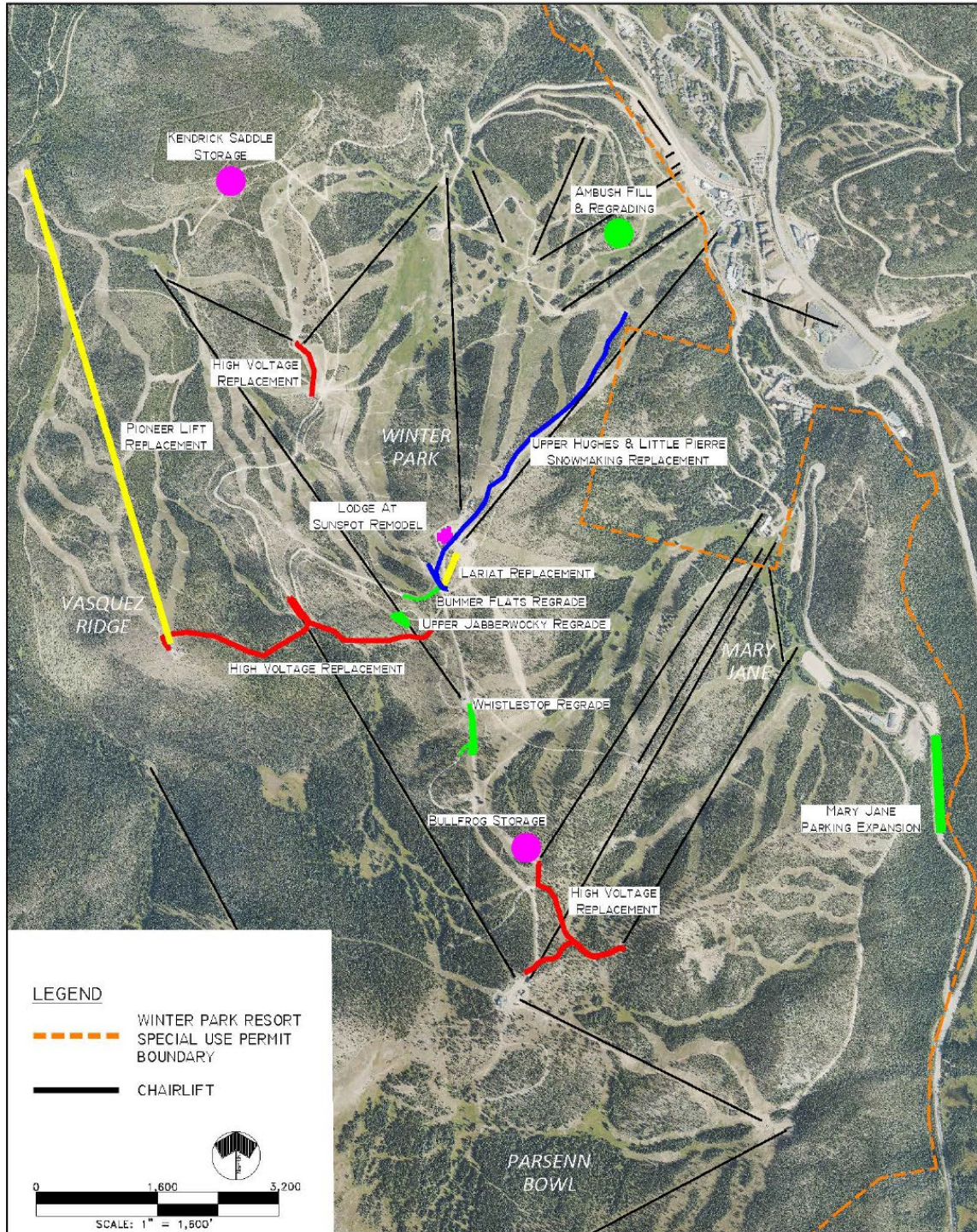
1. Updates to existing facilities including:
 - Pioneer lift replacement and modification of connected utilities
 - Lariat surface lift replacement
 - Regrades of Whistlestop, Upper Jabberwocky, and Bummer Flats ski trails
 - Ambush ski trail fill and grading
 - Lodge at Sunspot remodel
 - Bullfrog and Kendrick saddle storage
 - Booster pumphouse reconstruction
 - High voltage electrical replacements
2. Mary Jane base area parking expansion
3. Upper Hughes and Little Pierre snowmaking replacement and above-ground blockhouses

Based on the nature of the proposal, the above activities were identified to be considered as categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Certain factors and conditions are required before other portions of the proposal are accepted to be analyzed.

Decision

I have decided to authorize the proposed action to update the existing facilities, expand the parking area, and replace the snowmaking infrastructure. The high voltage electrical replacements are not authorized at this time. Details of the proposed action are as follows (see Figure 1):

FIGURE 1: MAP OF PROJECT COMPONENTS



Pioneer lift replacement and modification of connected utilities

The Pioneer Express detachable quad chairlift serves a zone of terrain with ski trails in the low intermediate to advanced skill classes. The lift was installed in 1986, has a capacity of 1,900 passengers per hour (pph), and is nearing its lifespan.

To address this issue, the aging Pioneer Express chairlift will be replaced in the same location, but with the addition of a mid-point, on-load terminal near the current Tower 7 at the top of the flat area. This terminal will allow users to return cycle ski in this zone without walking.

The new lift would be a detachable six-passenger chairlift with a capacity of 2,800 pph. The bottom and top terminals will remain in approximately the same locations as now. A limited amount of grading may occur in the proposed mid-terminal location and the existing mountain road would be realigned in this area. About 2,000 feet of high-voltage buried electric and communication utilities will be installed from the Cabin Creek warming hut up the existing mountain road to the new mid-point terminal to provide the required electricity.

Although the lift would change from a four-passenger to six-passenger chairlift, it is anticipated that no trees will need to be removed to accommodate the wider clearance required for a six-passenger chairlift except for a few smaller sapling trees. Engineering design of the new chairlift will attempt to utilize existing tower locations except for the area around the new mid terminal and the removal of the existing Tower 8, which is within an existing wetland.

Lariat surface lift replacement

The current Lariat surface lift (rope tow) will be replaced with a conveyor lift. The alignment will follow the existing alignment of the Lariat lift. The project will require approximately 0.3 acres of grading to facilitate installation of the carpet.

Regrades of Whistlestop, Upper Jabberwocky, and Bummer Flats ski trails

WPR may grade the following ski trails to improve terrain within the Winter Park development zone generally in the area above and below the top of the Olympia Express chairlift:

- Whistlestop - Grading in this area involves placing approximately 11,000 cu. yards of fill within 2.3 acres to eliminate a flat area.
- Upper Jabberwocky - Near tower 18 of the Olympia Express chairlift approximately 0.7 acres of the Upper Jabberwocky ski trail may be regraded to provide a downhill gradient for skiers.
- Bummer Flats - Two sections of the route / road between Sunspot and the bottom of the High Lonesome Express chairlift may be regraded, totaling approximately 1.25 acres.

Ambush ski trail fill and grading

WPR utilizes the Ambush ski trail as a site for a competitive mogul course. At the top of the course, WPR currently makes around 10,000 cubic yards of snow for the start platform of the course. Regrading of the Ambush Mogul course will involve placing about 5,000 cubic yards of fill material at the start platform area. The regrading effort will disturb about 0.6 acres.

Lodge at Sunspot remodel

WPR may renovate the 22,600-square-foot Lodge at Sunspot. WPR may remodel the interior of the Lodge at Sunspot, which includes building out the basement for seating and additional food and beverage operations. In addition to the interior remodel, WPR may replace the west portion of existing deck with similar materials, construct a new addition of approximately 500 square feet on the south side of the building, and build a new 395 square foot deck on the lower level. All exterior materials used for the outside improvements will match the existing architectural character and materials.

Bullfrog and Kendrick saddle storage

WPR has determined that manufactured Conex shipping containers can be used as structures to meet its on-mountain equipment storage needs. The shipping containers will be 8 feet by 40 feet in size, fully enclosed, secured with locks, and painted a dark/natural color. WPR shall work with the Forest Service to determine color specifics and any material cladding, if necessary.

Bullfrog and Kendrick Saddle sites are both disturbed, and some grading would occur at each site to provide a flat surface for placing four to five Conex shipping containers. About 2,400 square feet may be re-disturbed for containers placed at the Bullfrog site. Another 1,780 square feet may be re-disturbed at the Kendrick Saddle site.

The Conex shipping containers may be used as a short-term solution to WPR's storage needs. This authorization is limited to two years of use or less. Upon expiration of this time period, the temporary structures must be removed by WPR. Requests for extensions of this use may be considered in one-year increments if site-specific circumstances warrant additional use and WPR can show due diligence towards finding a longer-term solution. When the temporary storage is removed, WPR must revegetate the site unless it is to be used as a permanent storage facility.

Booster pumphouse reconstruction

Reconstruction of the booster pumphouse will involve replacing the existing 40-foot by 25-foot building with a 54-foot by 34-foot building. The structure will almost double in size from 1,000 square feet to 1,840 square feet. The style and aesthetic aspect of the building will remain the same as the existing structure.

Minimal grading will occur at the site. WPR will restore 8,000 square feet (0.2 acre) of Phipps Saddle (near the top of the Mad Tea Party ski trail) in combination with the pumphouse's reconstruction. WPR will coordinate with the USFS to ensure the rehabilitated site meets USFS requirements. No new disturbance nor cutting of trees will occur.

Mary Jane base area parking expansion

A large portion of Mary Jane's existing parking capacity is located along the Mary Jane access road between the Corona Lot and the base area. WPR may widen 1,250 feet of the access road just south of the entrance to the Rollins Pass lot that is used for parallel parking. By widening this segment of the road 30 feet, guests will be able to park diagonally. The additional width would increase parking by approximately 100 spaces. Construction will involve some tree cutting and placing fill in the widened area, which covers 0.9 acres.

This parking area expansion was part of a larger proposal considered in 1998. The USFS evaluated the potential environmental effects of the 4.9 acres and issued a decision memo authorizing the construction, operation, and maintenance of 4.9 acres of parking lots, including the 100-space area that WPR never constructed. Due to the potential changed conditions, the unconstructed parking expansion by the Mary Jane base area is included in this decision.

Upper Hughes and Little Pierre snowmaking replacement and above-ground blockhouses

The air and water supply pipelines on the Upper Hughes and Little Pierre trails may be replaced, consisting of 3,750 feet of air and water pipelines between the Hughes and Little Pierre blockhouses. WPR may also construct a new 11-foot by 13-foot blockhouse that will be located under the gondola at about the midway point near the top of the Little Pierre ski trail.

WPR may eliminate the underground Hughes blockhouse and replace it with an aboveground blockhouse to address confined space regulations of the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Since skier traffic prohibits the Hughes blockhouse to be moved aboveground at its current location, it must be relocated. WPR may remove the underground blockhouse and divert the Upper Hughes pipelines to a new 18-foot by 29-foot aboveground blockhouse. WPR will locate the new 522- square-foot WP Top blockhouse near the existing water treatment building and container storage area. WPR may construct nearly 1,000 feet of new pipelines to connect the Upper Hughes pipelines to the new blockhouse.

Replacement and construction of these pipelines will follow the procedures that were specified and approved in the 2013 decision memo for snowmaking line replacement at the resort. Construction disturbance is limited to a 40-foot wide corridor centered on the pipeline trench. The replacement portion of the project is expected to disturb 3.5 acres within existing ski trails. In addition, the connection to the new WP Top blockhouse will disturb 0.8 acres, most of which is already disturbed by roads, ski trails, and a lift. The project will remove no trees or involve any wetlands.

Project Design Criteria (PDC)

To minimize potential resource impacts from construction and implementation of the project, PDC will be incorporated into the approved action. PDC are devised in the pre-analysis and analysis phases to reduce environmental impacts and ensure compliance with law and/or regulations. They include, but are not limited to, best management practices (BMP), forest plan standards and guidelines, and standard operating procedures.

Most PDC are considered common practices that ski area managers have historically used in alpine and sub-alpine environments to prevent or decrease potential resource impacts. They are effective methods that can be planned and adapted to site conditions, as needed. All activity shall also comply with relevant mitigation measures contained in the 2006 Winter Park Resort Phase 1 Projects EA.

PDC are included in **Table 1**.

Project Phase	Project Design Criteria
General	Riprap or equivalent stream armoring material shall be applied to eroded streambanks at the inlet of the Little Vasquez Creek culvert just above the proposed Pioneer Lift Midload Terminal, in collaboration with Forest Service staff.
	All facilities proposed on NFS lands shall be reviewed and authorized in accordance with the Forest Plan and will be designed with natural, non-reflective colors and finishes.
	Should any unidentified archaeological resources be discovered in the course of the project, work must be interrupted until the resources have been evaluated in terms of the National Register eligibility criteria (36 CFR 60.4) in consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office and other consulting parties pursuant to 36 CFR 800.13. Also, should the consulted-upon scope of the work change, additional consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act is necessary.
Pre-Construction	Winter Park Resort shall develop a snow management plan to identify how and where snow would be stored from plowing the parking lot to prevent wetland disturbance (or if plan already exists, review for sufficiency).
	Winter Park Resort shall develop a Stormwater Pollution Protection Plan (SWPPP) to address sediment and/or magnesium chloride runoff (if proposed for use) from the proposed Mary Jane parking expansion into the Fraser River and the trees below the parking lot.
	A spill plan for construction equipment shall be approved by the USFS prior to construction.
	If tree cutting activities are proposed between May 1 and July 15, surveys for active migratory bird nests shall be conducted by a qualified biologist prior to tree cutting. Tree cutting is only allowed in conjunction with the Mary Jane parking lot expansion.
During Construction	Wetlands must be flagged within 100 feet of proposed disturbance areas. Construction fencing must be installed along perimeter of disturbance area to prevent unintended wetland impacts.
	If specific impacts to threatened, endangered, and Region 2 sensitive species and/or their habitats, including nests, are identified during project implementation, project operations in the immediate vicinity will be suspended until the Forest Service Wildlife or Fish Biologist are contacted. Project implementation may be adjusted, and timing restrictions may be applied, as determined by the Forest Service, to reduce those impacts.

	No active or inactive raptor nest trees shall be removed within the project area.
	All food and garbage will be secured in a bear proof manner on site and not left on site overnight.
	USFS approved biologists will mark known location of <i>Sceptridium</i> (<i>Botrychium</i>) <i>multifidum</i> (leathery grape-fern) to ensure that the species is not harmed by construction.
	When “over-the-snow” timber management activities are conducted, ensure that at least 1 foot of packed snow or 6 inches of frozen ground are present as a base for operations.
	Revegetate cut and fill slopes at the earliest biologically appropriate time, including graminoid and herbaceous seeding to restore forested habitat along the road.
	Revegetate disturbed areas with FS furnished or approved seed mix following final preparation. To favor insect pollinators in the project area after revegetation and wetland restoration, consider a seed mix that includes herbaceous species.
	To reduce the risk of wildlife entanglement while using wattles or other erosion control materials, ensure the use of non-plastic, loose-weave mesh which is not fused at the intersections of the weave. Jute, coconut (coir) fiber and wood (excelsior) fiber matting, or other products without welded weaves, are viable alternatives.
	Ensure equipment operators have spill containment kits and operator training on spill containment/HAZMAT.
	During construction, report potential lynx and wolverine sightings or other indications of occurrence (tracks and/or scat) to the Forest Service.
	Distribute any stockpiled upland topsoil across the disturbed areas after surface is pitted. Care shall be taken not to re-compact the area after topsoil has been placed and surface pitted.
Post-Construction	Disturbed soil will be reseeded at a biologically appropriate time with USFS approved seed mix.
	All facilities proposed on NFS lands shall be reviewed and authorized by designated forest service Landscape Architect in accordance with the ski area permit and the Forest Plan.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as *36 CFR § 220.6(e)(22) Construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, or disposal of buildings, infrastructure, or improvements at an existing recreation site either managed by the Forest Service or managed under special use authorities, 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 on recreation sites managed by the Forest Service and those managed by concessioners under a special use authorization.* This category of action is applicable because the project activities are confined to an existing recreation site (WPR), and its area is managed under a special use authorization. The area of this project is approximately 12 acres.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I considered resource conditions identified in agency procedures that were considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- *Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species* – the project area is within the Fraser Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU). The closest linkage area is the Berthoud Pass unit, 1.8 km south of the permit area, the next closest is the Fraser Valley unit, 6 km northwest. Impacts to Canada lynx were analyzed and a flowchart style “screen” determined that the project conforms to the programmatic biological opinion for Canada lynx and the associated Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment. Use of the flowchart screens is a form of informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. No critical habitat or linkage areas nearby were documented and thus no impact to such areas nor any realistic probability of harming Canada lynx are anticipated with the project.

American martin, northern goshawk, and white-tailed ptarmigan have been documented in the project area (which is the permit boundary of the ski area). Tree removal is only planned for one part of the project – the Mary Jane Parking area expansion, and there are no known nests in that area. There may be nests within the project boundary, but not in trees that may be removed and any project disturbance would occur in areas that already have frequent human presence, such that any birds nesting in that area would already be habituated to human activity. There is no confirmed presence of Regional Forester Sensitive fish, amphibian, mammal, or plant species in the project area. Project design criteria further limit the impact to species and habitat.

- *Flood plains and wetlands* – no project components would occur within a designated floodplain. Wetlands would be avoided to the greatest degree practicable. Any direct or indirect impacts would be minor and temporary, and project design features and standard best management practices would be applied to mitigate impacts, including prohibiting sediment migration from ground disturbance into wetlands or streams.
- *Municipal watersheds*—the towns of Granby, Fraser, Tabernash, and Winter Park obtain water from the Fraser River, downstream of the project area; application of project design features and standard BMPs will preclude any downstream impacts.

- *Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas* – none present.
- *Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas* – none present.
- *Research natural areas* – none present.
- *American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites* – none documented. The USFS has communicated with local Tribes about the project on March 19, 2021.
- *Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas* – the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with the analysis conducted by a third-party contractor. However, the high voltage line replacement component was not analyzed. Since no previous survey in the USFS's files have been identified, a new survey for this area is necessary even though the proposed replacement would occur within the existing line footprint. The high voltage line replacement area is currently pending a heritage survey. This portion of the proposed action has been removed from this authorization and will be addressed in the future.

Public Involvement

The USFS reached out to various stakeholders on March 3, 2021 regarding this project. The notice to review was published on the USFS website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59527>). This action was listed as a proposal on the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland's Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. Scoping included reviewing the management direction for the project area in the 1997 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland. Additional scoping and review included consultation of Forest Service specialists, the State Historic Preservation Officer, Winter Park Resort other resource data sources. No key issues were identified to warrant any further public involvement.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the 1997 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland. The project was designed in conformance with appropriate Forest Plan standards and guidelines for Management Area 8.22.

Administrative Review Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal or objection.

Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented immediately in accordance with previously identified PDC and management requirements.

If any concerns (hydrological, archaeological, or otherwise) are discovered during the pre-implementation or implementation phase, then operations will halt until the concerns are addressed.



Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Kevin Mclaughlin, District Ranger, Sulphur Ranger District, at kevin.mclaughlin2@usda.gov or 970-887-4100.

(for)

Monte Williams
Forest Supervisor

Date

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.