



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White River
National Forest

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File Code: 1950/2720

Date: November 21, 2013

Dear Interested Public:

Arapahoe Basin Ski Area (A-Basin) has submitted a proposal to the White River National Forest (WRNF) to pursue approval of proposed projects included in its 2012 Master Development Plan (MDP). The WRNF has accepted this proposal and is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze and disclose the potential environmental effects of implementing the projects.

All of the proposed projects are within A-Basin's existing Forest Service-administered Special Use Permit (SUP) boundary. The Proposed Action includes providing lift service and developed terrain within The Beavers area (including The Steep Gullies) – both of which are currently beyond the controlled/patrolled portion of A-Basin's operational boundary.¹ The Proposed Action also includes improvements to the lift network and snowmaking water storage system and enhancements to four-season recreation opportunities within the SUP area. The Proposed Action is designed to provide lift served access to additional advanced terrain within the existing SUP boundary, while maintaining the integrity of the unique characteristics for which A-Basin is known.

The Purpose and Need for Action and the Proposed Action are discussed in the following sections. At this time, I am soliciting comments from the public on this project. Details on how to comment are found at the conclusion of this scoping notice.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

Dating back to 1982, six avalanche fatalities have occurred in the backcountry immediately adjacent to A-Basin's operational boundary – five in The Steep Gullies and one in Beaver Bowl. Currently, the Beavers can be accessed legally through backcountry access points located along the western extent of A-Basin's operational boundary. From these points, skiers may exit the controlled/patrolled portions of A-Basin's operational boundary to access adjacent backcountry terrain in The Beavers, the Steep Gullies and the Rock Pile. In particular, these areas receive heavy backcountry use by the public once the snowpack is sufficient. The Proposed Action proposes to incorporate The Beavers into A-Basin's operational boundary to improve the safety of recreating in that area.

Documentation of the popularity of The Beavers can be traced back to the 2002 WRNF Forest Plan FEIS, which provides detailed information on "Future Expansion" areas at existing ski areas across Eagle, Garfield, Pitkin, and Summit counties. Related to A-Basin's SUP area, and specifically related to planned projects discussed in this proposal, the 2002 Forest Plan FEIS states:

"The Beavers are popular with backcountry skiers and snowboarders who access the site from Arapahoe Basin ski area. Steep north-facing chutes above treeline with numerous rock outcrops characterize the terrain. Most skiers hike or hitchhike uphill to return to their vehicles. Avalanche risk to the public is

¹ A-Basin's SUP boundary includes 1,821 acres of NFS lands. However, within the SUP boundary, A-Basin conducts snow safety and maintains a ski patrol presence within its *operational boundary*. Terrain beyond the operation boundary is considered backcountry (regardless of whether is it within or outside of the SUP boundary).



potentially high. The risk could be partially mitigated if the Beavers site was developed for skiing as part of the ski area’’²

Bringing The Beavers into A-Basin’s operational boundary would provide the area with snow safety operations and ski patrol services consistent with statements made in the 2002 WRNF Forest Plan FEIS.

In addition to safety, A-Basin’s market is unique in that it is strongly skewed toward advanced ability level skiers as compared to the majority of ski resorts in the Central Rocky Mountain region, who primarily accommodate intermediate skiers. As visitation increases in the future, A-Basin needs to ensure that its reputation for advanced terrain with low trail densities is not only maintained, but improved. It is therefore reasonable to look to opportunities within the existing SUP area for opportunities to meet the needs of A-Basin’s market.

Finally, guest expectations continue to evolve and ski areas must constantly focus on raising service standards and improving the overall recreational experience. By upgrading, supplementing and removing outdated infrastructure within the ski area, improving snowmaking efficiencies and providing activities to enhance the four-season recreation experience on NFS lands, A-Basin can continue to raise service standards while maintaining the unique A-Basin experience.

There are six primary needs that are addressed by the Proposed Action:

- 1. Provide The Beavers with snow safety operations and ski patrol services consistent with statements made in the 2002 WRNF Forest Plan FEIS.³**
- 2. Accommodate existing and future demand for high Alpine and open bowl skiing while protecting and enhancing the distinctive skiing experience that A-Basin provides.**
- 3. Improve access to Montezuma Bowl.**
- 4. Upgrade and remove existing lifts, as needed.**
- 5. Improve water storage capacity for existing snowmaking operations.**
- 6. Enhance four-season recreational opportunities.**

PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action includes the following elements. The attached figure identifies the locations of all proposed projects within the context of A-Basin’s 1,821-acre SUP area.

1) Incorporate The Beavers and The Steep Gullies into A-Basin’s Operational Boundary

The Proposed Action includes a strategic plan to develop lift service within Beaver Bowl and associated glades, while keeping The Steep Gullies as hike-back only. The entire area is proposed to be patrolled and avalanche control/snow safety work would be conducted throughout the proposed terrain. To minimize or mitigate potential effects to wildlife from incorporating this terrain into the operational boundary, conservation measures are being considered. The conservation measures will be further defined in conjunction with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners.

² 2002 WRNF Forest Plan, p. 3-462

³ Ibid.

Beavers Lift

With a single chairlift – the Beavers Lift – over 400 acres of terrain can be served in The Beavers. The proposed fixed-grip chairlift would serve the intermediate, advanced intermediate, and expert terrain within Beaver Bowl (refer to the attached figure). The chairlift would gain approximately 1,500 vertical feet and would be designed with an hourly capacity of 1,800 people. While skiers could round-trip ski Beaver Bowl via the proposed Beavers Lift, those who enter The Steep Gullies would need to hike to Pallavicini for lift service. (Refer to the attached figure.)

There is power at the summit area, and power for the proposed Beavers Lift would originate from the top of the Lenawee mountain lift. This would require a roughly 400-foot underground spur from the Lenawee Mountain lift.

Terrain

With this proposal, the operational boundary would increase by approximately 434 acres. The following table provides a breakdown of the approximate skiable acreage by terrain type that would become lift-served in The Beavers area.

Terrain Type	Acreage
Developed Trails	67 acres
Open Bowl Terrain	90 acres
Tree Skiing	125 acres
Hike-Back Terrain	152 acres
<i>Total</i>	<i>434 acres</i>

Four defined trails (B-1 through B-4) are planned in Beaver Bowl, totaling approximately 67 acres of terrain (composed of approximately 33 acres of intermediate, 15 acres of advanced intermediate, and 19 acres of expert).

Beyond the four trails that are proposed, approximately 367 acres of undeveloped terrain would become accessible to guests within The Beavers area. Undeveloped terrain is in the form of open bowls (e.g., Beaver Bowl), tree skiing (natural and improved glades), and hike-back terrain – all of which are rated as expert. This caters to A-Basin's unique demographic, as evidenced by the high use this area has historically received. Refer to the attached Figure for details.

To accommodate evacuations of injured skiers by A-Basin ski patrol, an emergency egress route has been proposed in The Beavers. As depicted on the attached figure, the emergency access route is proposed from the bottom terminal of the Beavers Lift, tying into a hike-back route that leads to the Pallavicini lift corridor. The emergency access route would be constructed to a width of 30 feet to accommodate snowcats.

Two picnic table decks would be constructed in The Beavers area to provide guest service seating. The decks would be located to take advantage of the high Alpine views and natural windbreaks. Each deck would be approximately 12 feet by 20 feet to accommodate 2 to 3 picnic tables and/or chairs.

Strategic grading is proposed in the following areas: at the top and bottom terminals of the proposed Beavers Lift, in the upper portions of proposed Trails B-2 and B-4, and in limited areas along the emergency egress route.

Backcountry Access

With incorporation of The Beavers into A-Basin's operational boundary, the existing Forest Service backcountry access points along Cornice Run and adjacent to Pallavicini would be unnecessary. The existing access points to Thurman's Bowl and Montezuma Bowl would remain and an access point to The Rock Pile would be added as shown on the attached figure.

Ski Patrol

Due to the nature of the terrain and The Beavers terrain/snowpack characteristics, an avalanche control/snow safety program would be developed. To accommodate the additional ski patrol effort in The Beavers, the Snow Plume Refuge would be expanded to provide storage facilities for toboggans and equipment at the summit of the ski area. The minor expansion would require a disturbance area of approximately 300 square feet.

2) Lift Network Improvements

Zuma Access Surface Lift

Access to Montezuma Bowl from the Lenawee Mountain and Norway lifts requires "skating" or walking along a 400-foot long catwalk. The catwalk is slightly uphill for those going from "the front side" to Montezuma bowl. While some skiers are able to "skate" along the catwalk, most guests (both skiers and snowboarders) choose to either stay in their gear and shuffle their way to the other end of the catwalk or remove their gear and walk. Moving along the catwalk is especially difficult on fresh snow or windy days.

Therefore, a surface lift is proposed to be installed on the catwalk alignment between the Lenawee Mountain lift and the top terminal of the Zuma lift. This 360-foot long surface lift would provide transportation along the catwalk for skiers accessing Montezuma Bowl from Lenawee.

Power for the surface lift would tie into either the Lenawee or Zuma lift top terminal.

Pallavicini and Molly Hogan Lift Replacements

The Pallavicini and Molly Hogan lifts were both installed in 1978 and are now over 35 years old. While these two lifts are in logical alignments and service their associated terrain well, they are reaching the end of their operational expectations and are in need of replacement.

The proposal includes replacing Pallavicini and Molly Hogan in similar alignments with lifts that would provide similar hourly capacities (1,200 and 1,000 people per hour, respectively). At the top terminal of Pallavicini, grading would extend approximately 350 feet along the ridge to the south to help facilitate seasonal construction of a snow road in this area.

Norway Lift Removal

The Norway chairlift was also installed in 1978. In addition to being antiquated, the Norway chairlift provides redundant service to the Lenawee Mountain chairlift, which was installed in 2001 and provides critical lift service to the summit area and Montezuma Bowl. Because of Norway's age and redundancy, it is only operated during peak weekends and holidays, and is becoming obsolete.

Instead of replacing the Norway lift, A-Basin proposes to remove the lift entirely. This is due to two reasons: 1) its redundancy with the Lenawee Mountain lift; and 2) potential transition of some Lenawee/Norway skiers to The Beavers area, further decreasing the utility of this lift. Removal of Norway would only occur following installation of The Beavers Lift and replacement of the Pallavicini lift.

3) Snowmaking Water Storage

A-Basin currently has approval to divert water from the North Fork of the Snake River to make snow. A 5.5 acre foot storage reservoir, located adjacent to the maintenance building at the base area, is used to provide storage for A-Basin's snowmaking system. This storage is inadequate during periods when conditions allow A-Basin to operate its snowmaking system at full capacity. A-Basin is proposing to expand the existing storage reservoir to provide 30 additional acre feet of storage. *No additional snowmaking coverage is proposed as part of this project.*

4) Zip Line Tour and Challenge/Ropes Course

Zones have been identified east of the Black Mountain Express as the optimal location, Alpine setting and unique topography for a zip line tour and challenge/ropes course. Using the Black Mountain Express for guest transport, the proposed zip line tour would resemble one of two concepts:

1. Zip Line Tour: Guests would descend to the base area on multiple, interlinked zip lines while escorted by A-Basin guides. The tour would span ski trails and, in some cases, wooden bridges would be constructed to connect segments of the course. The zip line tour would likely require a time commitment of between one and two hours.
2. Two-Stage Zip Line: This would parallel the Black Mountain Express and would provide a shorter-duration, faster, descent to the base area.

Both the "tour" and the two-stage zip line options would be able to operate in summer and winter. Dedicated towers would need to be constructed to support the zip line infrastructure.

In addition to the proposed zip line tour, a challenge/ropes course is proposed to be located adjacent to the base area in the tree island with Gracie's Grove, east of the lower portion of Black Mountain Express. The challenge course would consist of high and/or low elements using a variety of materials including trees, utility poles and steel structures. Low elements take place on the ground or only a few feet above the ground. The high elements of the course would incorporate belay and safety systems using wire rope, friction devices, and climbing harnesses.

5) Non-Significant Forest Plan Amendment

Based on the Proposed Action there may be a need to do a site-specific Forest Plan Amendment to address Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment Standard All S1.

COMMENT PERIOD

The WRNF is requesting that comments on this proposal be submitted by January 17, 2014. The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to have early and meaningful participation on these proposals and to learn more about the projects. Comments from this scoping period will be used to help formulate the foundation of the upcoming environmental analysis by identifying resource issues and, potentially, developing additional action alternatives.

A public open house regarding this proposal will be held at the Silverthorne Library on **December 3, 2013 between 4:30 and 6:30 PM**. Representatives from the WRNF and A-Basin will be present to answer questions and provide additional information on this project.

To be most effective when submitting comments, please include: (1) name, address, email address, and organization represented, if any; (2) the title of the project for which the comment is being submitted; and (3) specific facts, concerns or issues, and supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments will be accepted. Comments should be submitted to my attention: Scott Fitzwilliams, Forest Supervisor, c/Joe Foreman, White River National Forest, PO Box 620, Silverthorne, CO 80498; FAX (970) 468-7735 or by e-mail to: wrf_scoping_comments@fs.fed.us (please include 2013 A-Basin 2013 Improvements EIS in the subject line).

For more information about the project, please contact: Joe Foreman, Winter Sports Permit Administrator, Dillon Ranger District, 680 Blue River Pkwy, PO Box 620, Silverthorne, CO 80498. Mr. Foreman can be reached by phone at (970) 262-3443 or by email at jgforeman@fs.fed.us.

Those who submit comments will have eligibility to file an objection under 36 CFR §218.8. There will be an additional opportunity to comment when the Notice of Availability of the draft EIS is published in the Federal Register. For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting written comments must either sign the comment or verify identity upon request. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements in 36 CFR §218.25(a)(3). Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Individuals who do not submit comments but wish to remain on the project mailing list should contact Joe Foreman (contact information noted above).

SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND DECISION TO BE MADE

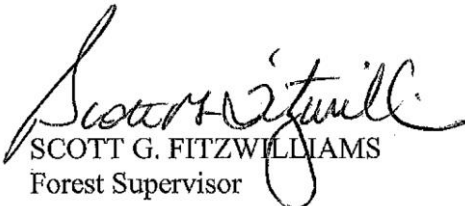
The Proposed Action will be analyzed within an EIS, which will contain full disclosure of potential impacts on the human, physical and biological environment. A result of public scoping may be the generation of alternative(s) to the Proposed Action that address specific resource issues yet still meet the Purpose and Need for Action.

The EIS will culminate with a Record of Decision being issued. Based on the analysis presented in the EIS, I will decide whether to authorize an action alternative, a modified action alternative (if needed), or the no-action alternative. If an action alternative is selected, the Record of Decision will include: details on the location(s), physical parameters(s), and scheduling of any approved projects; as well as any mitigation measures and monitoring requirements that may be necessary to meet Forest Plan and other legal direction.

A Record of Decision is anticipated to be released in the winter of 2015.

Thank you for your participation in this project and your interest in the management of your public lands.

Sincerely,



SCOTT G. FITZWILLIAMS
Forest Supervisor

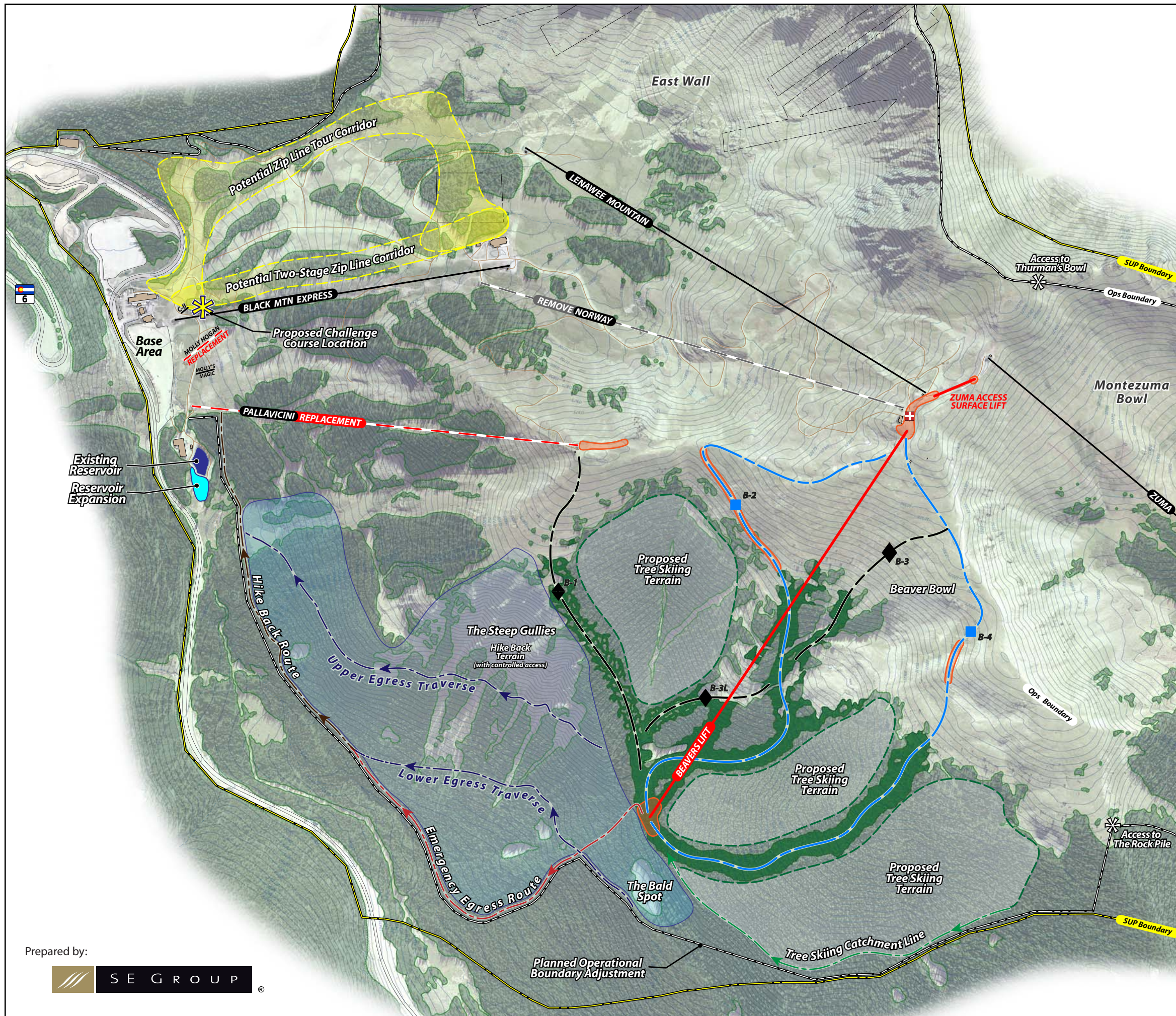
Enclosure

cc: Jan Cutts, Joe G Foreman, Shelly L Grail



2013 A-BASIN IMPROVEMENTS EIS

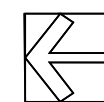
NOVEMBER 2013



LEGEND

	Existing Lifts		SUP Boundary
	Proposed Lift Removal		Proposed Operational Boundary
	Proposed Lift Replacements		Backcountry Access Point
	Proposed Lifts		Mountain Access Roads
	Existing Trail		Existing Reservoir
	Proposed Trail Clearing		Proposed Reservoir Expansion
	Proposed Tree Skiing Terrain		Proposed Trail Grading
	Proposed Challenge Course Location		Potential Zip Line Corridors

Prepared by:



25' Contour Interval

