



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Lake Tahoe Basin Management  
Unit

35 College Drive  
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150  
(530) 543-2600

RECEIVED  
JUL 10 2009

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
BUDGET AND PLANNING DIVISION

File Code: 1950

Date: June 29, 2009

Dear Interested Individuals:

The USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) is seeking comments on Heavenly Mountain Resort's (Heavenly) 2009 Capital Projects proposal which includes:

- Installation of a new underground water supply line from the California Reservoir Dam pumphouse to the existing snowmaking infrastructure on *Orion's* trail,
- Installation of electrical power and fan gun connections on *Upper California Trail* for improved snowmaking capabilities on the upper portion of the resort and terrain served by the gondola;
- Removal and restoration of the existing tubing area, surface lift and beginner's ski and snowboard school; Relocate these improvements to an area adjacent to the existing Big Easy Chairlift;
- New snowmaking on the tubing, ski school and snowboard school area and on *Big Easy Trail* to improve snow coverage on additional teaching terrain.

The proposed projects are intended to accomplish the Master Plan objectives to improve existing facilities and infrastructure for more efficient and enjoyable use by the recreating public.<sup>1</sup> The proposed tubing, beginners ski and snowboard area and associated surface lift, and part of the new snowmaking infrastructure, would occur within the Lake Tahoe Region Planning Area (see attached map).

Heavenly's 2009 Capital Projects occur on National Forest System (NFS) lands under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service and Tahoe Region Planning Agency (TRPA). The Forest Service is lead agency for this process. Due to the minor scale and minimal amount of disturbance associated with the proposed projects, the Forest Service is considering categorically excluding these projects from review and approval under either an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment.

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or the proposed action is within a category listed in 36 CFR 220.6 (d) and (e), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. The snowmaking system upgrades (snowmaking water and electrical lines) are consistent with 36 CFR 220.6(e)(2): "Additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines

<sup>1</sup> Heavenly Ski Resort Master Plan, May 2007



*in a designated corridor.*” The relocation of the tubing and ski/snowboard school area and associated lift is consistent with 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3) *“Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land.”*

### Timing

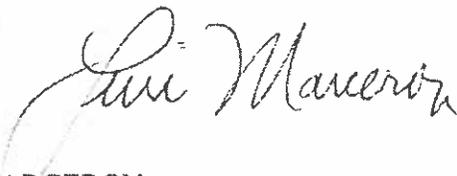
Implementation of the proposed projects would occur summer 2009.

### How to Comment and Timeframe

We are asking for your comments on this Proposed Action. This scoping notice is intended to provide those interested in, or affected by, this project with an opportunity to make their concerns known. If you have information the Forest Service may not be aware of, or feel you have issues regarding potential effects of the Proposed Action, please send your comments to Matt Dickinson, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, 35 College Dr., South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning Heavenly’s 2009 Capital Projects should be submitted by August 3, 2009. The office business hours for those providing hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may be provided during normal business hours via telephone (530) 543-2769 or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to [comments-pacificsouthwest-LTBMU@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificsouthwest-LTBMU@fs.fed.us) (please put “Heavenly’s 2009 Capital Projects” in the subject line).

Sincerely,



TERRI MARCERON  
Forest Supervisor

**Proposed Action Description  
for  
Heavenly Mountain Resort 2009 Capital Projects**

USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region  
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit  
Douglas County, Nevada and El Dorado County, CA

These projects are consistent with the improvements in Heavenly's accepted Master Plan Amendment. Construction of all proposed projects will be conducted in accordance with the revised Construction Erosion Reduction Program (CERP), as outlined in the Master Plan Amendment and 2007 Environmental Impact Statement. The following project summary describes the proposal in detail, and corresponds with the attached map.

**I. Existing Condition**

The capacity of the existing tubing area is too small and resort guests are regularly turned away because of the lack of capacity. The existing tubing area has no snowmaking, therefore, it is not open during the Christmas-New Year's holiday period and other peak times early in the season.

The existing beginner's ski and snowboard teaching area at the top of the gondola does not have adequate slope for beginner-level snowboarders.

The lack of adequate water supply for snowmaking on the upper portions of the resort that are accessed by the gondola makes it very difficult to open and consistently maintain ski terrain early in the season and during low snow conditions (e.g., *Orion's trail*, *Big Dipper trail* and *Comet trail*), and terrain that is served by the gondola (e.g., *Upper California Trail*, and *Easy Street trail*).

**II. Desired Condition**

A snow tubing area with adequate visitor capacity and snowmaking capabilities in order to allow it to open and operate during the same time period as the rest of the resort is the desired condition.

The slope of the beginner's snowboard school has adequate slope for beginner snowboarders and snowmaking capabilities in order to allow it to open and operate during the same time period as the rest of the resort.

Snowmaking on the *Silver Spur*, *Von Schmidt's Trail* and *Big Easy* trails will allow the opportunity to open ski school teaching terrain for beginner and low-intermediate level skiers earlier in the season when natural snowfall is not adequate. This will coincide with the peak Christmas-New Year's period and other peak times that occur early in the season when the demand exists for ski school opportunities, particularly from guests accessing the resort via the gondola.

The purpose for the new water line from the Cal Dam Pumphouse line is to allow faster and more reliable snowmaking operations. This is especially important during early season and low-snow conditions, and is critical to opening ski terrain on the upper portions of the resort (e.g., *Orion's* trail, *Big Dipper* trail and *Comet* trail), and terrain that is served by the gondola (e.g., *Upper California Trail*, and *Easy Street* trail).

Additional snowmaking capacity combined with the Easy Street Run Hazard prescription on Upper California Trail will result in a more consistent early-season trail condition that can be opened sooner and maintained. Adding fan gun connections on the westerly side of *Upper California Trail* will improve the depth and consistency of snowmaking coverage.

### **III. Purpose & Need**

#### **Snowmaking System Upgrades**

Components of Heavenly's existing system were installed prior to the advent of modern hardware technology and system controls. Existing systems on the upper mountain that are accessed by the gondola were sized and installed prior to the completion of the gondola. They did not account for the change in demand that occurred with the installation of the gondola. Guests increasingly expect a high quality snow surface when choosing a mountain resort, regardless of natural snow conditions. Heavenly needs to have the properly-sized infrastructure to offer dependable snow conditions throughout the season, thereby providing a consistent, high-quality recreation experience to visitors.

#### **Tubing Lift Relocation and Summer Use**

The existing tubing lift has limited capacity and has no dedicated snowmaking facilities. This situation impacts the ability to open the tubing area during the early season and during low snow conditions. When it is operating, the existing tubing area is of limited size and capacity that results in guests being forced to wait for extended periods to be able to access it, or are turned away because there is inadequate capacity. Currently the tubing facility does not have infrastructure to accommodate summer use by sightseers and gondola riders.

#### **Accessible Beginner Skiing and Snowboarding Terrain**

Beginner skiers and snowboarders are currently limited to isolated learning areas and teaching zones. There are presently no beginner-level snowboard areas with the proper slope angle that can serve guests who use the Gondola as their point of access to the resort.

### **IV. Proposed Action**

#### **Snowmaking System Upgrades**

The existing snowmaking system on Heavenly's upper mountain was installed prior to modern technology and system controls. As a result, many elements of Heavenly's snowmaking system are not as reliable or energy efficient as they could be. Additionally, snowmaking water supply lines were sized and installed prior to the construction of the

gondola, which has substantially altered the location and the manner in which early season skiing occurs, and therefore, snowmaking coverage needs. Increased snowmaking water supply throughput (i.e., larger diameter pipe) would improve Heavenly's ability to provide consistent, high-quality snow conditions in the upper portion of the resort and on terrain served by the gondola.

#### **Underground Snowmaking Water Supply Line**

Heavenly proposes to install an 8,000 foot underground water supply line from the California Reservoir Dam pumphouse to existing snowmaking infrastructure on *Orion's* trail. The proposed supply line would allow faster and more reliable snowmaking operations on the following trails: *Orion's*, *Big Dipper*, *Comet*, *Easy Street* and the *Upper California Trail* (see the attached map). Note, ground disturbance in addition to the proposed underground snowmaking line would not occur on the *Big Dipper* or *Comet* trails. Installation of the proposed underground snowmaking water supply line would necessitate a 30-foot wide disturbance corridor primarily within previously disturbed corridors (e.g., roads and ski runs). No tree removal would be required for the proposed snowmaking supply line. The snowmaking water supply line would avoid known populations of Tahoe Draba, consistent with the Tahoe Draba Protection mitigation measure contained in the 2007 Master Plan Amendment.

#### **Underground Electrical Line**

In addition to the snowmaking line, electrical power and fan gun connections will be added to the *Upper California Trail* segment in order to improve snowmaking capabilities on the trail. This will allow snowmaking to augment coverage when natural snowfall is low, permitting early season trail use. The electrical power line can be placed in the same trench as the water supply line on the *Upper California Trail* segment. From the *Upper California Trail* to the *Dipper Express* (approximately 750 feet) the electrical line would be placed in a trench necessitating a 20 foot disturbance corridor. The electrical line would avoid known populations of Tahoe Draba, consistent with the Tahoe Draba Protection mitigation measure contained in the 2007 Master Plan Amendment.

#### **Snow Tubing and Beginner Ski and Snowboard School Areas**

Heavenly proposes to relocate the existing snow tubing area and lift, and beginner's ski and snowboard school, to an area adjacent to (west of) the existing *Big Easy* chairlift. The restoration plan for the existing tubing area, adjacent the gondola top terminal, would be approved by the Forest Service. The greater amount of area available at the proposed location would accommodate the snow tubing and ski and snowboard facilities. Further, the proposed relocation would more efficiently accommodate guests, while improving the overall guest experience. These facilities are consistent with the adopted Master Plan.

This proposal incorporates a shared "magic carpet" surface lift that is enclosed for weather protection. The lift will be approximately 400-450 feet in length. The ski and snowboard school area will use terrain on one side of the lift, while the other side would be used by snow tubing guests. Four 30-foot wide snow tubing lanes will be implemented in conjunction with the winter operation of the tubing lift. The lanes would be constructed from snow, configured side-by-side in a curving fashion in order to provide

space near the bottom of the run to slow down and safely come to a stop. The curving layout of the tubing runs will use less energy to construct than a straight-line configuration because less snow is necessary for curing lanes than is necessary for buildup of a reverse-sloping run out area. Large rocks and hazards would be removed from the tubing/teaching terrain consistent with the Easy Street Hazard Reduction Plan available in Appendix 2-C of the Master Plan Amendment.

The tubing lift would also be used in the summer for gondola riders and sightseers. Summer tubing would occur on four straight, 8-foot wide lanes of plastic material known as Neveplast. They will total approximately 32 feet in overall width by 460 feet in length (equal in length to the tubing lift), requiring approximately 0.3 acre of ground disturbance. Summer tubing visitors would be directed to the recreation area with appropriate signage and fencing.

Underground snowmaking lines (6 inch air and water lines) are proposed to serve both the proposed snow tubing facility and the ski and snowboard teaching area. Snowmaking line would be extended from the existing snowmaking system that presently serves the *Easy Street* trail (under the Big Easy Chairlift). The total length of the snowmaking line extension for the tubing/teaching area will be approximately 600 feet. Electrical lines associate with the tubing/teaching area would be placed in the same trench as the snowmaking line. An additional 50 feet of trench would be required to connect the electrical lines from the Big Easy Trail, to the tubing/teaching area.

Total disturbance associated with the tubing and teaching terrain would be approximately 3.1 acres and approximately 225 trees. A maximum of 10 trees greater than 30 inches diameter at breast height would be removed for the installation of the tubing and ski/snowboard teaching terrain.

### **Big Easy Snowmaking**

Underground snowmaking lines (6 inch air and water lines) are also proposed to be added from the top of the Big Easy lift on the *Silver Spur* trail, to *Von Schmidt's Trail*, and then down the *Big Easy* trail in order to provide snow coverage for the ski school teaching terrain. The total line length for the *Silver Spur* and *Von Schmidt's* trail extensions will be approximately 1,700 feet and would be placed in existing ski trails, roads, and utility corridors as well as in undisturbed areas (approximately 0.8 acre of new disturbance).

## **V. Project Design Features**

- In the event historic properties are discovered during the implementation of this undertaking, all project related work must stop immediately, the LTBMU's Heritage Resources personnel be notified at once and the procedures as set forth in Section 800.13 of the Council's regulations must be implemented in accordance with the guidance as stated in this sub-section.
- All vehicles, especially large vehicles, should be cleaned when they come from a known weed infested area. Equipment will be considered clean when visual inspection does not reveal soil, seeds, plant material, or other such debris. When

working in known weed infested areas equipment shall then be cleaned at a washing station before moving to other National Forest System lands which do not contain noxious weeds.

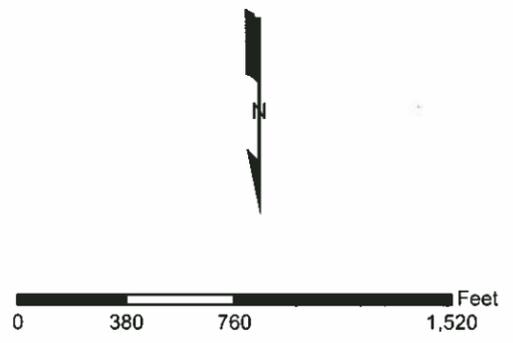
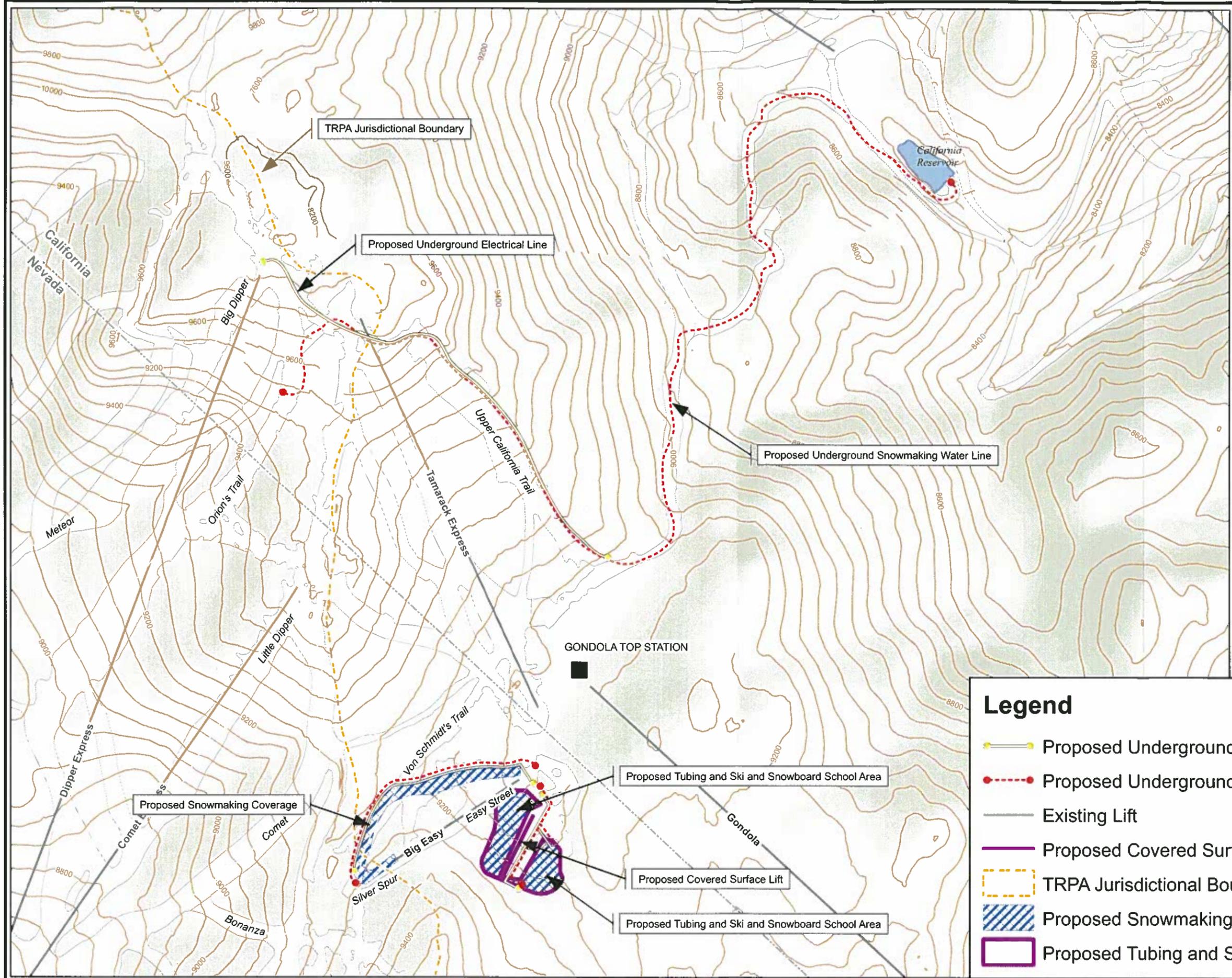
- All earth-moving equipment, gravel, fill, or other materials are required to be weed-free. Use onsite sand, gravel, rock, or organic matter when possible. Otherwise, obtain weed-free materials from gravel pits and fill sources that have been surveyed and approved by a botanist or ecologist at the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.
- Use weed-free mulches, and seed sources. Salvage topsoil from project area for use in onsite revegetation. All activities that require seeding or planting must utilize locally collected native seed sources when possible. Plant and seed material should be collected from or near the project area, from within the same watershed, and at a similar elevation when possible. Persistent non-natives such as *Phleum pratense* (cultivated timothy), *Dactylis glomerata* (orchard grass), or *Lolium* spp. (ryegrass) will not be used. This requirement is consistent with the USFS Region 5 policy that directs the use of native plant material for revegetation and restoration for maintaining “the overall national goal of conserving the biodiversity, health, productivity, and sustainable use of forest, rangeland, and aquatic ecosystems”. Seed mixes must be approved by a Forest Service botanist.
- After the project is completed monitor for 3 years to ensure additional weed species do not become established in the areas affected by the project and to ensure that known weeds do not spread.
- Install bear-proof garbage dumpsters at the newly developed year round recreational site as part of the long-term refuse management goals. Integrate wildlife educational opportunities focused on minimizing human-wildlife conflicts through containing and removing refuse consistently promotes natural wildlife feeding behaviors.
- Remove all refuse generated from project activities every day to avoid human-wildlife conflicts and/or utilize bear proof dumpsters to conceal human refuse at the construction site.
- If any nests are located during California spotted owl and northern goshawk surveys, a Limited Operating Period (LOP) will be implemented. Adequate advance notice will be made for closure of the area prior to commencement of the LOP.
- Smaller material (generally less than 6”) would be chipped and left in place along with small logs. Larger material (generally >6”) would be hauled off-site.
- Surveys for Tahoe draba (*Draba asterophora* v. *asterophora*) will be performed prior to construction of the proposed 2009 Capital Projects. MPA 07 Mitigation Measures 7.5-20 Protect Tahoe Draba Populations within Heavenly Mountain

Resort, Veg 1-A Tahoe Draba Long-Term Conservation Strategy and Veg 1-B Minimize loss/Degradation of Sensitive Plant Species will be followed in order to protect sensitive plant species.

- Surface disturbance activities would begin after May 1 and no later than October 15, depending on weather conditions unless a grading ordinance exemption is obtained from the TRPA.
- In areas where mechanical equipment is used for lift construction, it may require subsoiling, blading, returning the area to existing grade, and/or providing ground cover to return the area to the condition that existed prior to lift installation. The need for rehabilitation work would be determined by a Watershed Specialist.

## **VI. Decision**

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or the proposed action is within a category listed in 36 CFR 220.6 (d) and (e), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. The snowmaking system upgrades (snowmaking water and electrical lines) are consistent with 36 CFR 220.6(e)(2): *“Additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor.”* The relocation of the tubing and ski/snowboard school area and associated lift is consistent with 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3) *“Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land.”*



**Legend**

- Proposed Underground Electrical Line
- Proposed Underground Snowmaking Water Line
- Existing Lift
- Proposed Covered Surface Lift
- TRPA Jurisdictional Boundary
- Proposed Snowmaking Coverage
- Proposed Tubing and Ski and Snowboard School Area
- Proposed Tubing and Ski and Snowboard School Area