Dear Interested Party:

The Carson National Forest has prepared a preliminary environmental assessment (EA) for the Red River Ski Area Multi-Season Improvement Project. We are sending you this letter to notify you of the availability of the preliminary EA and the opportunity to comment on the proposed project. You are receiving this letter because of your demonstrated interest in this project and/or the affected resources. If you would no longer like to receive this type of correspondence, please reply with the subject title UNSUBSCRIBE to: comments-southwestern-carson-questa@fs.fed.us.

The project proposes to amend Red River Ski Area’s (RRSA) special use permit (SUP) to include multi-season improvement projects from the 2014 accepted Master Development Plan (MDP). The proposed multi-season projects include trail grading and widening, the addition of gladed terrain, an interpretive hiking trail, a mountain biking trail, and additional snowmaking infrastructure. All of the proposed projects are contained within RRSA’s existing SUP area, which is administered by the Carson National Forest, or on existing lands owned by RRSA. The ski area is located in the Town of Red River, New Mexico. Proposed project activities would occur in sections 1 and 2 of Township 28 North, Range 14 East, and in section 35 of Township 29 North, Range 14 East, New Mexico Principal Meridian.

What Activities are Proposed?

Trail Grading and Widening

Re-grading is proposed in two areas on Lariat, on the Hollywood terrain park, and on The Face near the base of Platinum Chair. Existing electric lines in the areas proposed for grading and widening will be re-routed within the disturbed area. Trail grading and widening would be completed using a mini-excavator. Disturbed areas would be re-seeded, matted, mulched, or stabilized in another suitable fashion following implementation.

Grading and widening of Lariat is proposed between the Kit Carson trail and the Copper Chair, where the trail crosses a steep portion of the mountain. The widening project would require an existing retaining wall to be relocated to the new downhill edge of the trail. The retaining wall would be approximately 700 feet long. Rolling grade dips, waterbars, or another suitable erosion-control measure would be installed in order to disperse surface water flow. Approximately 0.3 acre of clearing and approximately 1.3 acres of grading would occur for this portion of the project.

Grading would occur on approximately 0.9 acre of Lower Lariat near the Bad Medicine Glades along a switchback that is currently uneven and difficult for beginners to navigate. There is no tree removal planned for Lower Lariat portion of the trail grading and widening projects.

The existing Hollywood terrain park, located on Broadway ski trail, would be re-graded and some “table-top” features would be created from local soils (soil would be sourced on-site within the terrain park and The Face re-grade) to reduce the amount of snow required to create the features. The alignment of the Hollywood terrain park jumps would be relocated from under the chairlift to a more appropriate alignment nearby. Approximately 2.6 acres of re-grading and 0.6 acre of tree removal and grading would
occur in the terrain park. BMPs for erosion control (including installation of waterbars and/or rip-rap) would be applied in this area to arrest existing soil erosion.

Re-grading is proposed on approximately 1 acre of The Face trail (0.2 acre is on private lands that are not included in this analysis). Grading would come to within approximately 50 feet of the Red River, and would include installation of suitable sediment-retention features to reduce the potential for sediment input into the Red River. This analysis would only authorize actions on NFS lands.

**Gladed Terrain**

RRSA has designated two areas within the existing SUP to be thinned for gladed skiing: Downtown Glades and Bad Medicine Glades. The area where the proposed Downtown Glades would be located would encompass approximately 3 acres of forested area just uphill of the base of the existing Copper Chair between Downtown and Sidewinder trails. The proposed Bad Medicine Glades would encompass approximately 9 acres of forested terrain currently accessible from the Platinum Chair down the ridgeline from the existing Bad Medicine trail.

The gladed skiing areas would be created by removing selected vegetation and trimming the lower branches on some trees to create skiable terrain between standing trees extending down the fall line of the slope. The majority of trees removed would be smaller than 10 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh), and the resulting spacing between trees would range from 10 to 40 feet to form skiable lines. The ski area would work with the Carson National Forest to devise a thinning strategy that would accommodate both the resort’s operational and recreational needs and the Carson National Forest’s forest health objectives according to silvicultural prescription. Habitat management requirements for protected species would also be included in the silvicultural prescription for tree removal in these areas.

In both of the proposed gladed areas, tree felling would be performed by hand using chainsaws. Heavy equipment is not expected to be used within the wooded areas. Some of the debris would be chipped and spread or lopped and scattered throughout the gladed area. Material unsuitable for the treatments mentioned above would be transported to the base area for removal or burned as appropriate in accordance with a burn plan produced in coordination with the Forest Service. Any material to be removed from NFS lands would be done so by means of purchase, in accordance with current regulations.

**Interpretive Hiking Trail**

An interpretive hiking trail from the top of the mountain to the base area is proposed. The proposed trail would require grading and tree removal. The tread width would be 3 feet, with clearing of up to 5 feet for a length of approximately 4.5 miles. Disturbance is anticipated to be less than 3 acres. Tree removal would be kept to a minimum; debris would be chipped and spread or lopped and scattered throughout the area, transported to the base area for removal, or burned as appropriate in accordance with a burn plan produced in coordination with the Forest Service. It is anticipated that this trail will be constructed by a combination of machine (mini-excavator) and by hand. Wetlands would be avoided by the trail alignment; no impacts to wetlands are anticipated. Signage would be included at the beginning of and along the trail to identify closures, mark the shared hiking and mountain biking trails, and provide educational opportunities.

**Mountain Biking Trail**

The proposed mountain biking trail would be constructed at a 5 percent average grade and would utilize natural benches, where possible, for a length of approximately 6 miles. The tread width of the proposed trail would be approximately 4 feet, with 1-foot shoulders; disturbance is anticipated to be less than 5 acres. Clearing and limbing would occur within this corridor. It is anticipated that this trail would be constructed by a combination of machine (mini-excavator) and by hand. Wetlands would be avoided by
the trail alignment; no impacts to wetlands are anticipated. Signage would be included at the beginning of and along the trail to identify closures, educational opportunities, and areas where biking and hiking activities share the trail.

Snowmaking Coverage

Additional snowmaking infrastructure (snowmaking and an electrical line) is proposed on Moonshadow near the Green Chair. Installing the new infrastructure would require approximately 1.3 acres of disturbance for the trench (1,400 feet in length and 40 feet wide), temporary storage of dirt excavated from the trench, and construction access along the length of the trench. No additional snowmaking water or water rights are associated with this proposal. This proposed activity only expands coverage, not quantity of snowmaking or water right allocation, which is administered by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer.

Full details are available in the preliminary EA which is available online at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=48878. The preliminary EA and supporting documentation is also available for review upon request at the Questa Ranger District office located at 184 SR 38, Questa, NM 87556. Questions regarding this project may be directed to: Kevin Lehto, 575-586-0520.

The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and not authorized under the HFRA and is subject to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Specific written comments (36 CFR 218.2) on the proposed project will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of this notice in The Taos News. If the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

As defined by 36 CFR 218.2, only individuals or entities who submit timely and specific written comments about this proposed project or activity during this or another public comment period established by the Responsible Official will be eligible to file an objection. Other requirements to be eligible to submit an objection are defined by 36 CFR 218.25 (a)(3) and include name, postal address, title of the project and signature or other verification of identity (upon request) of the individual or entity who authored the comments. Individual members of an entity must submit their own individual comments in order to have eligibility to object as an individual. A timely submission will be determined as outlined in 36 CFR 218.25 (a)(4). It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including name and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not receive subsequent project information and will not be eligible to file an objection under 36 CFR 218.

Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the
comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address by the end of the 30-day comment period.

Comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider (36 CFR 218.2).

Specific written comments must be submitted via mail, fax, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: James Duran c/o Kevin Lehto, by mail: P.O. Box 110, Questa, NM 87556; in person: 184 State Road 38, Questa, New Mexico; or fax: 575-586-2010. Electronic comments including attachments may be submitted by email in word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html) to comments-southwestern-carson-questa@fs.fed.us.

Please state “Red River Ski Area Multi-Season Improvement Project” in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Sincerely,

JAMES D. DURAN
Forest Supervisor