

August 24, 2010

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SALT LAKE RANGER DISTRICT

**AUG 27 2010**

WASATCH-CACHE NATIONAL FOREST

Salt Lake Ranger District  
Catherine H. Kahlow  
District Ranger  
6944 S. 3000 E.  
Salt Lake City, UT 84121

Dear Cathy,

Please find a copy of Snowbird Ski and Summer Resort's Master Development Plan Amendment Proposal enclosed.

We feel that it effectively addresses the challenges we face in moving into a new decade in our partnership with the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, providing a quality recreational opportunity to the American public.

We look forward to working with you as we move ahead with the process. Please let me know that our next step should be.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Bob Bonar  
COO/President  
Snowbird Ski and Summer Resort

cc: Steve Scheid

doc. encl.

# **SNOWBIRD SKI AND SUMMER RESORT MASTER DEVELOPMENT PLAN AMENDMENT PROPOSAL**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Snowbird Ski and Summer Resort's (Snowbird) current Master Development Plan (MDP) was accepted by the then separate Wasatch-Cache and Uinta National Forests (now the merged Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest; UWCNF) in 1995. Following completion of an environmental impact statement (EIS) in 1999, elements of the MDP on National Forest System lands were authorized in a December 1999 Record of Decision (ROD).

Over the course of the subsequent 10 years, most of the major elements of the current MDP have been completed and others have been partially completed. Of the remainder, Snowbird intends to proceed with some while others are no longer under consideration. During that same interval, a number of changes have occurred in the standards and preferences of our skier market, the land-use and regulatory setting of the lands on which we operate, and the climate. As a result of these factors, we feel it is necessary to update our MDP at this time to bring it into alignment with our current management plans and priorities.

Under the following headings, this proposal summarizes the current status of development at Snowbird, in terms of the MDP and other projects we have completed that were not in the plan. It then lists proposed projects on National Forest System and private land and outlines the nature and rationale for each.

Note that Snowbird is not formally proposing any of these projects at this time. Once the UWCNF has accepted this amendment proposal, we will move ahead with more detailed planning and discussion with the agency as appropriate.

## **DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY**

The following summarizes the status of projects in our current MDP and others proposed and approved since the MDP was completed. The codes in parentheses after project names are those used to denote the projects in the MDP EIS and ROD.

### **EIS Authorized Projects Completed**

- Mineral Basin Expansion (Mineral G; MBX and Baldy Express)
- Gad Valley Parking Lot and Entry 1 Regrade (Base B)
- Hidden Peak Hiking Trail Construction (Hidden C)
- Hidden Peak Skier Access (Hidden D)
- Lower Men's Downhill Chute Widening (Peru D)

### **EIS Authorized Projects Partially Completed**

- Snowmaking (area wide)
- Cat Staging Area (Alt E)
- Gad Valley Day Lodge (Base C)

### **EIS Authorized Projects Not Completed but Still Pending**

- Hidden Peak Facilities Upgrade (Hidden A)
- Little Cloud Lift Upgrade and Realignment (Gad O)
- Barrier Free Trail Extension (Gad D)
- Madam Annie's Modification (Gad F; modify the top of West 2<sup>nd</sup> instead)
- Skier's Access to Upper Emma (Gad H)
- Blackjack Road Modification (Peru A)

### **EIS Authorized Projects Not Currently Being Considered**

- Middle Bassackwards Modification (Gad A)
- Big Emma NASTAR Race Course Improvements (Gad L)
- Upper Regulator Traverse Construction (Gad J)

### **Additional Projects Authorized and Completed**

- Peruvian Express
- The Tunnel (private land)
- Half Pipe
- Hidden Peak Warming Hut Remodel
- Mineral Basin Snowmaking (private land)

### **Additional Projects Authorized and Not Completed**

- Peruvian Snowmaking/Utility Corridor

## **PROPOSED AMENDMENT**

The following projects constitute our MDP amendment proposal. We anticipate completion of these projects within the next 10 years. These are conceptual projects at this point, and none have been designed or engineered. This work will be completed once the amendment is accepted and the projects are prioritized and scheduled. Formal proposals to the UWCNF will be prepared and submitted accordingly. See the attached map for project locations.

- Special Use Permit (SUP) expansion or land exchange in Mineral Basin, Mary Ellen Gulch and a portion of the American Fork Twin Peaks
- New American Fork Twins Tram, Mary Ellen Gulch Lift, and Mineral Basin Express Extension or Short Fixed-grip Double Chair
- Mary Ellen Gulch and Sinners Pass Skiway/Roads
- Beginner Skiing Area Below Entry One
- Conveyor Lift in Gad Valley
- Baby Thunder Yurt
- Night Skiing from the top of Gadzoom Lift down Lunch Run, Bassackwards and Big Emma
- Lift Maintenance Shop and Office Expansion of the Lower Gad Valley Pump Station
- Gad Valley Day Lodge Adaptive Sports Expansion
- Bike Trails and/or Park
- Relocation of Lunch Run Summer Road
- Remodel of Mid Gad Restaurant
- Gad II Upgrade
- Outdoor Deck for General Gritts

Basic details of these projects and our rationale for proposing them are as follows.

### **Mineral Basin, Mary Ellen Gulch and portion of American Fork Twin Peaks SUP Expansion or Land Exchange**

Over the years Snowbird has acquired a number of mining claims dispersed within National Forest System lands in the Wasatch Range. Those in Mineral Basin and Mary Ellen Gulch offer the potential for a logical and beneficial growth of the resort. As a result, Snowbird seeks to add about 780 acres to our ski area boundary, including 387 acres (49.6%) of National Forest System land and 393 acres (50.4%) of our private land in Mineral Basin and Mary Ellen Gulch. This addition would be in the best interest of Snowbird and the public for several reasons, including the following:

- It offers Snowbird the most practical means of meeting increasing demand for lift-served terrain, allowing access to adjacent, easily developed terrain that is in less demand by other users than Tri-Canyon Area alternatives.
- It would consolidate a complex mix of National Forest System and private lands within the SUP boundary, improving the overall utility and management of these lands
- If done through an SUP expansion, it would provide Snowbird access for the "reasonable use" of our private inholdings, as stipulated in the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA, 1980).
- If done through a land exchange, it would place sensitive habitats and resources under UWCNF management. Perhaps most importantly, nearly all of the holdings Snowbird would offer in an exchange are in Salt Lake City's municipal watershed. The city is understandably concerned over potential development in the watershed, and shifting these inholdings to UWCNF management would preclude their development.
- Similarly, some of the inholdings we would offer are within current wilderness areas or areas included in the wilderness proposal currently under Congressional consideration. The exchange would consolidate and simplify management of existing and potential wilderness areas. Similarly, Snowbird's management of the upper American Fork Canyon terrain gained through the exchange would limit snowmobile access to Twin Peaks Wilderness, solving an ongoing management issue for the UWCNF.
- Our private inholdings and surrounding National Forest System lands include several historic mining sites known to contribute to American Fork water quality issues. Snowbird has a well documented track record of successful clean-up operations, and the addition would provide an incentive for similar efforts.

This addition to the ski area could be accomplished through expansion of the SUP boundary or a land exchange involving other Snowbird-owned lands in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons.

### **New Tram, Mary Ellen Gulch Lift, and Mineral Basin Express Extension or Fixed-Grip Double**

To address the demand for more lift-served terrain Snowbird proposes to install a lower capacity tram from Hidden Peak to the top of the American Fork Twin Peaks (located east of the summit of the West Twin Peak) and a chairlift from Mary Ellen Gulch to Sinners Pass (on the ridgeline between Mineral Basin and Mary Ellen Gulch). The existing Mineral Basin Express lift would also be extended by about 2,000 feet by moving the lower terminal down the canyon. Alternatively, a fixed-grip double chair on the

same alignment might be considered. These lift projects would be within the ski area boundary following the expansion described above.

Much of Snowbird's privately owned land in Mary Ellen Gulch lies in the upper portion of the canyon. The proposed tram to the top of the American Fork Twins is necessary to provide reasonable skier access to those private holdings. The proposed chairlift from Mary Ellen Gulch to Sinners Pass would provide skier egress back to Mineral Basin as well as round-trip skiing on Mary Ellen Gulch's lower, northern slopes. Once skiers were back in Mineral Basin, the Mineral Basin Express extension or new double chair would facilitate their return to Hidden Peak to repeat the circuit, access other parts of the ski area, or return to the base area.

#### **Mary Ellen Gulch and Sinners Pass Skiway/Roads**

To provide skier, snowcat, and service access to Mary Ellen Gulch and from Sinners Pass, we propose two skiway/service roads. The first would connect the existing Path to Paradise with the miners' road in Mary Ellen Gulch. The second would originate at Sinners Pass and descend to the base of the extended Mineral Basin Express lift. It would be mostly on private property.

#### **Beginner Skiing Area below Entry One**

Snowbird is famous for its "steep and deep" terrain but lacks adequate developed beginner terrain, which is vital to meeting the needs of our diverse skier market and to recruiting new skiers. Chickadee lift is the only beginner area available, and its steep grade (approximately 30 percent), has always limited Chickadee's suitability for beginning skiers. We propose to develop the only terrain within the Special Permit Boundary appropriate for a true beginner area. The site is on the north side of Little Cottonwood Creek directly across from the Baby Thunder pod. This area has 10-to-15-percent grades. The project would involve a surface lift and a bridge spanning Little Cottonwood Creek.

#### **Conveyor Lift in Gad Valley**

The amended MDP will effectively address Snowbird's need for appropriate beginner terrain through development of the proposed beginner area below Entry 1 described above. However, implementation is likely several years out. In the meantime, Snowbird proposes to install a conveyor lift (a slow-moving band flush with the snow surface that beginners step onto, ride up a gentle grade, and step off of) immediately north of the Mid Gad chairlift, roughly midway between the lower chairlift terminal and Little Cottonwood Creek. It would provide first-time skiers the opportunity to get a feel for being on skis or boards, riding a lift, and sliding on a very mild grade – a "bunny hill."

#### **Baby Thunder Yurt**

Snowbird's Mountain School youth programs use the Baby Thunder pod extensively. To make these programs as pleasant and effective as possible, we propose to construct a yurt in the Baby Thunder area to provide young skiers a place to warm up and get a hot drink during lessons.

#### **Night Skiing in Gadzöom**

Night skiing has become a very popular recreational opportunity. This is reflected in the added skier-day use at resorts that currently provide night skiing, including Brighton locally, Keystone in Colorado, and numerous eastern ski areas. At present, Snowbird provides night skiing on its beginning Chickadee lift only. In an effort to provide an enhanced skiing experience, we propose to install night lighting from the top of the Gadzoom lift to the bottom of Gad Valley. This area would meet a number of criteria for night use:

- The Creekside Lodge is a logical staging/service venue.
- The big Emma terrain park would be utilized.
- There are no residences or lodges that would be affected in Gad Valley.

- New lighting technology would help reduce any off site impacts.
- Young participants in Snowbird Race Team would have the opportunity to train at night rather than just mornings, making the program much more effective.

### **Lift Maintenance Shop and Office Expansion of the Lower Gad Valley Pump Station**

Limited shop space is an ongoing constraint at Snowbird. The existing lift maintenance shop is on the second level of the Snowbird Center, which presents operational problems during the summer and winter. The existing vehicle maintenance shop at the bottom of Gad Valley supports both our vehicle maintenance (wheeled and over-the-snow) and snowmaking programs. It also provides office and crew space for these and other programs. It is inadequately sized to efficiently support all these programs, and its location, across the main public circulation route from the mountain, results in circulation problems.

To address these constraints, we propose to expand the existing Gad Valley pump house, more than doubling its size with a two-story addition abutting the existing structure to the east. The lower level would accommodate three shop bays. This shop space would support the lift maintenance program. The upper level would include office space and accommodations for crews when SR 210 is closed. The advantages of this approach to securing the needed shop space include the following:

- It would shift lift maintenance program away from the congested Snowbird Center to a safer, more out-of-the-way location, decreasing conflicts with other guest services and operational functions.
- It would entail expanding an existing structure rather than developing a new site.
- Utilities including power, water, and sewer are already in place.
- The site is centrally located, between Gad Valley and Peruvian Gulch.
- As the site is on the mountain side of the road, cross traffic to the existing shop would be reduced.

### **Gad Valley Day Lodge Adaptive Sports Expansion**

Snowbird sponsors Wasatch Adaptive Sports, a charitable foundation established in 1977 to help fill the need for affordable recreational and educational programs for children and adults with special needs. The program has grown dramatically in terms of the range of activities it offers and demand for them both winter and summer. As a result, additional space is needed for program administration and implementation. The Gad Valley Day Lodge (Creekside Lodge) offers the most appropriate venue.

The 1999 MDP ROD authorized a 12,500-square-foot structure, and Snowbird subsequently completed the first phase, about 8,000 square feet. It is our intent to complete build-out of this popular facility as approved, in terms of size and services provided. We propose to add an additional 4,000 square feet, extending the structure to the west, to accommodate the adaptive sports program. The additional space would provide office, meeting/classroom, storage, and utility space.

Beyond the lodge expansion itself, we propose to construct an accessible ramp, providing an alternative to the existing stairway from the deck on the south side of the lodge to the south side of Little Cottonwood Creek. This ramp would complement the adaptive sports expansion and the conveyor lift described above, making most Gad Valley facilities accessible to beginning skiers and visitors with special needs.

### **Bike Trails and/or Park**

The development of the specialized types of mountain bicycles has created new recreational opportunities, increasing participation in this burgeoning sport as well as demand for trails. Some ski areas have responded by developing mountain bike trail systems, while in Little Cottonwood Canyon and other areas the problems associated with user created or "outlaw" trails on National Forest System lands are getting worse every year. These trails pose both ecological and safety concerns that a properly constructed and managed trail system in the canyon would help avoid, providing another, legal option to practice the sport. We developed a new single-track trail last summer and another is in the planning and permitting stage. We propose to build on these initial steps, phasing in various skill levels of bicycle trails starting at the Snowbird Center and running throughout Gad Valley. An advanced trail would have lift service from the top of the Tram.

#### **Relocation of Lunch Run Summer Road**

Snowbird's summer roads follow old mining roads or the Gad Valley sewer/high voltage lines. One such road that accesses the top of Gadzoom lift, the Valley Howitzer, and the base of Little Cloud lift is the Lunch Run road. The road grade is very steep, with grades up to 75 percent. This road has been a problem for years, being difficult to maintain and a hazard to drive up or down. Snowbird is proposing a new road alignment.

#### **Remodel of Mid Gad Restaurant**

Mid Gad Restaurant is one of the original buildings built at Snowbird. It has two levels with 6,400 square feet on the upper level and 3,200 square feet on the ground level. The top level has the kitchen and main dining area. The bottom level has bathrooms, a mechanical room, a small ski demo area, and an attached deck. Seating is a major constraint on busy days, especially when there is inclement weather. Snowbird is proposing to remodel and update the building, staying in the same footprint and enclosing the remaining 3,200 square feet on the ground level.

#### **Gad II Upgrade**

Gad II lift is 37 years old, one of the first lifts installed at Snowbird. Maintenance and parts availability are becoming a concern. There are also clearance issues when Snowbird gets over 300 inches of snow, and the top ramp is too long and steep, making it difficult to maintain adequate snowcover throughout the day. Due to these issues, we are proposing to upgrade the lift from a fixed-grip double to a detachable quad and address the clearance and unloading ramp issues.

#### **Outdoor Deck for General Gritts**

General Gritts is a very popular year-round grocery store and deli located on Level 1 of the Snowbird Center. Due to the added events in the summer on the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of the Center, outdoor seating has been reduced. In response, we are proposing a 900-square-foot outdoor deck adjacent to General Gritts, providing seating primarily for grocery and deli customers just outside the store. There would be very little earth disturbance and no tree removal.

#### **CONCLUSION**

We believe that these projects comprise necessary and appropriate upgrades to our 10-year-old MDP. Consistent with the advice of UWCNF officials, we have presented the major elements of our proposed MDP update to local governments, environmental groups, and other entities in a number of forums over the past year. While some concerns have certainly been expressed, the overall response has been supportive. Once this amendment is accepted, we will move ahead with prioritizing and planning these projects. Detailed proposals for specific projects or groups of projects will be prepared and submitted to the UWCNF to initiate the environmental review and agency authorization process.