

Public slow to weigh in on Northstar's expansion

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Electrical transmissions and connectivity of the various land holdings were the two main concerns brought up at the Wednesday scoping session of the Northstar Mountain Master Plan.

Of the approximately 20 people at the Nov. 28 meeting, only two members of the public spoke.

Dave McClure of Tahoe Vista would like to see a power consumption table based on what the ski resort is using today and what it expects to use if the proposed new lifts were operational.

He also asked planners to explain how the CalPeco transmission upgrades will play into this. CalPeco is the parent company of Liberty Utilities, which provides electricity to the California side of Lake Tahoe as well as to the Truckee area.



Gerry Haas with Placer County on Nov. 28 goes over Northstar's proposals. Photo/LTN

Ann Nichols, representing the North Tahoe Preservation Alliance, wants a map that shows Northstar's plans, but one that also includes the CalPeco line, the timberland production zone, along with adjacent parcels and their uses.

The comments will be addressed in the environmental document.

Nichols also brought up the issue of whether the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency will be involved with any of this because she said Mount Pluto – the highest point on the mountain – is considered to be in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Northstar is in Truckee; where the tentacles of TRPA do not reach.

Gerry Hass, senior planner with Placer County, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting that his department has contacted TRPA. There has been no definitive ruling as to whether any of the proposed plans are technically in Lake Tahoe. He pointed to a map showing the changes for the Mount Pluto area on the Truckee side, not the Tahoe side of the peak.

Wednesday's meeting was to gather input from people regarding environmental impacts of the plan. It had nothing to do with the merits of the plan.

Most of Northstar, which is privately held property and not U.S. Forest Service land, is zoned forestry. A portion, mostly on the perimeter, is considered timberland production zone. These TPZ areas are what necessitate a special use permit.

"... such uses and facilities are already permitted by Alpine, Sierra and Lassen counties. Placer County is not being placed in a position of approving a TPZ that has not already been implemented by other surrounding counties," Jessica VanPernis, spokeswoman for Northstar, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting. "Further, Northstar is the only existing resort in Placer County with TPZ lands within its boundaries, therefore limiting the proposed ski lifts, trails, snowmaking and

related facility uses to Northstar.”

Of the proposed seven new lifts, it's possible five would be built in the short term. They are all labeled with letters for now – which ironically is how Northstar used to label all of its chairlifts.

What's called the C Lift would start on the north side of Sawmill Lake (the reservoir used for snowmaking) and would end just below the current Vista Express. The base of the lift area might have campsites and could be where the cross country center would be relocated.

On the opposite side of the mountain two lifts and a surface lift are being talked about so the Sawtooth Ridge area would be opened up. This would add 550 acres of terrain, but little actual trail creation would be done in order to retain the remote wilderness experience.

The J Lift would go from the village to Lookout Mountain.

Five skier bridges are proposed. They would need to be sturdy enough to hold a snowcat.

Haas said widening of trails is proposed mostly on existing routes.

Expanding the current restaurant at the top of Mount Pluto is planned. Adding a warming hut to the backside is also on the drawing board.

People have until Dec. 6 to comment on what Vail Resorts, owners of Northstar, want to do at the Truckee-area resort in the next 15 years. In the spring the draft environment impact report is expected to be released for a 45-day comment period. Future meetings are planned before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. More information is online. Here is a map of the proposed changes.

The EIR will tackle the usual spectrum of concerns – from

aesthetics to air quality to biological and cultural resources – along with any comments people submit.

No written comments had been received before the meeting. Haas said that's pretty typical with a plan like this – comments tend to come in closer to the deadline.