

Letter: Environmental analysis lacking for ski resort summer plans

To the community,

The applicant should include the Forest Flyer coaster amenity in the Northstar Mountain Master Plan EIR, and not as a separate mitigated negative declaration.

When individually considered, this amenity will not be subjected to potential cumulative effects as an additional recreational activity along with several new ski lifts, additional residential housing, etc., in the NMMP. The NMMP EIR will examine both project and program level components, identify feasible mitigation measures and will evaluate the project's potential to contribute to cumulative impacts. Why is this any different than erecting a ski lift?

This is a new amenity that does not currently exist in or nearby the Tahoe region and has never been analyzed before or codified by Placer County. Calling this an accessory use and not truly defining how a recreational amenity, which is defined by applicant and county as like a ski tower/lift, is not adequately analyzing the impacts or defining this as an accessory use. If this amenity is not expected to generate more visitors, thus additional revenue, then it would not be built.

The first phase of Vail Resort's Epic Discovery includes approximately \$25 million to transform the summer experience at six of its mountain resorts (Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Keystone, Heavenly and Northstar). Plans for each mountain include a selection of ziplines, rope courses, signature climbing walls, Forest Flyers, summer tubing, expanded hiking and mountain biking trails and education

centers. Each of these new activities will capitalize on the existing summer visitation at each resort and leverage existing infrastructure, creating the opportunity for high-impact and high-return projects.

Comments related to the initial study and checklist: previous environmental document, CEQA Section 15168 relating to program EIRs indicates that where subsequent activities involve site-specific operations, the agency would use a written checklist or similar device to document the evaluation of the site and the activity, to determine whether the environmental effects of the operation were covered in the earlier program EIR.

The following documents serve as program-level EIRs from which incorporation by reference will occur: Placer County General Plan EIR and Martis Valley Community Plan EIR. Neither document should be considered as environmental impact analysis for a Forest Flyer, as neither document envisioned or discussed this specific amenity called a Forest Flyer, so the two documents are not applicable and cannot be used as tiered environmental analysis.

In the FAQ section of the Northstar Master Plan, it is stated: "How do the proposed project improvements move Northstar in the direction of more of a destination resort than a day ski area? The proposed project improvements will provide resort guests with a wider, more diverse array of terrain offerings and recreational activities, facilitating an improved and extended vacation experience for the destination and day use guest."

I attended the NTRAC meetings. The split vote for recommendation did not include a discussion on environmental impacts as stated in the staff report.

At Heavenly, ziplines, Skycycle Canopy Tour, Forest Flyer, Observation Tower, Rope course and more is planned. What's next for Northstar? The Northstar Master Plan is not ready for

prime time. Sorry – this doesn't lend credence to allow piecemeal planning for mountain amenities.

I'll close with one of my favorite comments from the Breckenridge Peak 6 EIR.

“Our national forest is not an amusement park. The unique features of ‘nature’ should be preserved and promoted and the ‘man-made’ impact mitigated. I support many of the proposed resort expansions, but cannot support zipline tours or elevated rail flyers that exist primarily to provide an adrenaline rush (speed, height, etc.) to amuse or entertain visitors. These types of ‘rides’ are mechanical, commercial, amusement activities and do not further the goals of natural appreciation or environmental sensitivity. Neither are they location-dependent – they can be found anywhere in the U.S. Save our national forests. And promote the ‘inherent’ beauty and values that exists in nature and the “human-powered” recreational activities that will nurture our next generation earth stewards.”

Ellie Waller, Tahoe Vista