

Northstar plans to expand terrain, lift access

By Kathryn Reed

New lifts, increased terrain and a better experience – those are some of the goals of Northstar.

The Truckee ski resort is in the midst of getting environmental documents for the Northstar Mountain Master Plan approved. Comments will be taken for another week. The final environmental impact report is expected in the spring, with necessary approvals shortly thereafter.

But what gets built first remains to be seen. Officials said it's too early to say how specific projects will be prioritized.

A gondola is proposed to take people from the lower parking area to the village. Parking and traffic have been major complaints of guests ever since the village was built. The village and additional lodging wiped out a significant amount of parking that was close to the base area.



Northstar's proposed lift and on-mountain improvements.

It's likely a lift would start in the village to take riders

to the top of Lookout Mountain. Right now that area takes a few lifts before it can be accessed.

Expanding the resort to include Sawtooth Ridge has long been talked about. The proposal calls for 300 acres to be incorporated into the ski boundary.

Northstar is mostly on private land and is outside the Lake Tahoe Basin. This is why the U.S. Forest Service and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency are not involved.

“Our priorities remain in line with the initial goals of the Northstar Mountain Master Plan, which are to implement a plan consistent with habitat and land use goals defined in the Northstar Habitat Management Plan; and to offer a better balance of beginner, intermediate, and expert terrain in order to improve and extend the vacation experience for the destination guest and day use skier,” Northstar COO Bill Rock told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The primary project objectives contained in the EIR and proposed NMMP (are to) maintain Northstar’s competitiveness as a resort destination by upgrading existing services, amenities, and operations. This includes providing a better balance of skier amenities, improving lift technology, and increasing the variety and mix of recreational activities.”

Northstar’s eventual expansion will require more electric power for new lifts as well as increased snowmaking.

While Liberty Utilities, the electric company for the resort as well as all of Truckee and the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, is looking at revamping its lines in Truckee-North Lake Tahoe.

“The proposed NMMP improvements would connect to existing electrical infrastructure and would not require new distribution facilities, upgrades to the Northstar substation or any other off-site improvements,” Rock said.

Liberty and Northstar have told *Lake Tahoe News* that the resort's plans have nothing to do with the utility company's wanting to upgrade its system. It's a matter of being able to keep providing consistent power – a reliability issue that Liberty says needs addressing today under current conditions.

"We expect that building out the additional improvements proposed in the master plan will increase electrical power consumption over existing levels. This is disclosed in the draft EIR and determined to be a less-than-significant impact," Rock said. "Ski related equipment such as chairlifts and snowmaking guns are continually being improved in terms of energy efficiency in order to reduce both consumption and operating expenses. Northstar intends to take full advantage of the improvements in these technologies over time in order to realize the benefits they offer. In addition, the California Building Code sets strict limits on the energy efficiency of each new building that is constructed, for example new on-mountain skier service buildings and warming huts."

Liberty's feeder tie between Northstar and Truckee is a 14.4 kilo volt line.

"This project again is not driven by Northstar load additions. It is another reliability issue that exists today and is being addressed," Rock said. "Based on information supplied by Liberty Utilities, the current Northstar substation is at roughly 50 percent of its capacity on a peak winter day."

Northstar is doing its part to try to conserve energy. Older snowmaking guns have been replaced with energy-efficient models and the underground parking garage was recently upgraded with energy-efficient lighting.

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Notes:

- Comments are being taken until Jan. 13. They may be emailed to cdraecs@placer.ca.gov.
- The draft environmental impact report is online.
- There will be a public hearing about the document Jan. 9 at 10:20am in the Placer County Planning Commission Hearing Room, 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn.