

Heavenly plans to widen trails, reduce hazards



Heavenly Mountain Resort wants to remove obstacles and put some snowmaking underground. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

Heavenly Mountain Resort wants to cut down trees, move boulders and relocate snowmaking equipment all in the name of creating a better experience for skiers and snowboarders.

For this next phase of the master plan, the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is taking comments on the draft environmental assessment until Dec. 22.

The work is slated for next year. A price tag for the construction has not been disclosed.

Heavenly has a number of locations where it's rather dangerous

because so many people are in a narrow area. That’s why the resort wants to do this work, the goal being to give skiers more room to spread out.

The plan is to remove congestion on 49er, Orion, Big Dipper, Cascade, Sam’s Dream, Ridge Way, Ridge Run, Olympic Downhill, \$100 Saddle, Powderbowl, Comet and Bonanza. These 12 trails encompass 25.3 acres.

| Table 1. Ski Trail Widening Locations | |
|--|---------------------|
| Run | Area (acres) |
| 49er (IW-1) | 0.3 |
| Sam’s Dream (IW-2) | 1.2 |
| Cascade (IW-3) | 0.3 |
| Ridge Run (IW-4) | 2.9 |
| Upper Powderbowl (IW-5) | 1.0 |
| Ridge Way (IW-6) | 0.3 |
| Lower \$100 Saddle (IW-7) | 0.5 |
| Comet (OW-1) | 3.3 |
| Orion’s (OW-2) | 10.9 |
| Big Dipper (OW-3) | 1.2 |
| Lower Olympic Downhill (OW-4) | 3.2 |
| Bonanza | 0.2 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>25.3</i> |

Note: Comet, Orion’s, Big Dipper, Lower Olympic Downhill and Bonanza area located outside the Lake Tahoe Basin Boundary.

Source: *USFS*

According to the draft EA, “Lower Orion’s and Lower Olympic Downhill would require grading to match the widened area to the grade of the existing ski trail. Widening proposed for Ridge Run would expand the skiable boundary, but would be located within the existing special use permit boundary.”

When this project was out for scoping in the spring nine comments were submitted to the Forest Service.

“Some of the issues received, such as limiting ticket sales to manage congestion and user experience, and issues around charging fees for uphill skiing access, were deemed to be

outside the scope of the proposed action,” according to the Forest Service.

The USFS is advocating for tree removal and the other work desired by Heavenly.

“There are identified locations on sections of key ski trails that, as a result of bordering forested areas, are not sufficiently wide enough to accommodate existing use levels and the desired flow of skiers and snowboarders during peak daily and seasonal periods,” the EA states.

Most of the resort operates on USFS land under a 40-year special use agreement that expires in 2042.

“Tree removal would be conducted over snow and skidded behind a snowcat over compacted snow. The trees would then be chipped and reused as mulch and soil amendment. Exposed boulders posing a safety hazard would be removed during the summer with excavators and placed in existing depressions along the edges of the widened trails,” the environmental document says.

| Table 2. Run Hazard Reduction Locations | | |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Run | Proposed Area (acres) | Mitigated Area (acres) |
| Upper California Trail (IH-1) | 7.3 | 3.35 |
| Cascade (IH-2) | 3.5 | 3.49 |
| Sam’s Dream (IH-3) | 2 | 2 |
| 49er (IH-4) | 2.4 | 2.4 |
| Advanced Round-a-bout (IH-5) | 3.3 | 3.3 |
| Little Dipper (OH-1) | 4.9 | 4.9 |
| Upper Stagecoach (OH-2) | 8.1 | 8.1 |
| Meteor (OH-3) | 3.3 | 3.3 |
| *Ridge Run (IW-4) | 2.9 | 2.89 |
| *Upper Powderbowl (IW-5) | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| *Lower Olympic Downhill “S Curves” (OW-4) | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>41.9</i> | <i>37.93</i> |

Note: Little Dipper, Upper Stagecoach and Meteor area located outside the Lake Tahoe Basin Boundary.

*Minor run hazard reduction activities (e.g., boulder removal or capping) would also occur on Ridge Run, Powderbowl, and Olympic downhill within the proposed trail widening areas.

Source: *USFS*

Getting rid of obstacles would occur on: Little Dipper, Meteor, Cascade, Sam's Dream, California Trail, Stagecoach, Advanced Roundabout, Ridge Run, Powderbowl and Olympic Downhill.

A result of getting rid of the boulders and downed trees would mean the depth of snow needed to ski that run would be dramatically reduced. This then reduces the amount of snowmaking needed and could open terrain sooner.

The resort is projecting to save 10.9 million gallons of water and 365,000 kilowatts of electricity by lessening the need for snowmaking on these select trails.

About 5,800 feet of snowmaking equipment would be moved to accommodate the widening and obstacle removal projects. Plus, much of it will be put underground.

The draft EA is available **online**.