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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Mount Snow Ski Area Snowmaking Water Source Alterations, Green Mountain National Forest, Windham County, VT

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for Mount Snow's proposal to upgrade its existing snowmaking system to insure more reliable and consistent snow surfaces throughout the ski season regardless of weather conditions. Existing snowmaking water withdrawals, storage facilities and on-mountain pipelines will be modified, a new water source(s) and storage facility(ies) will be designed into the system. An indirect benefit from this proposal will be to retrofit the existing system and design the new facilities so as to reduce adverse impacts on fisheries, water quality and aquatic biota which currently exist. Based upon preliminary information from a snowmaking needs and alternatives study, conducted pursuant to Vermont Water Quality Regulations, Somerset Reservoir, Harriman Reservoir and the Howe Farm have been identified in addition to eight other possible sites as potentially viable candidates for new water sources and/or storage facilities. Presently, the Mount Snow snowmaking system utilizes three artificial ponds for water storage: Snow Lake, fed by the North Branch of the Deerfield River, and Carinthia Pond, fed by an unnamed tributary to the North Branch of the Deerfield River, are both in-stream impoundments. Mirror Lake at Haystack Ski Area, fed by Cold Brook, is an off-stream impoundment. All water sources are approved and operate under Vermont Act 250 permits or State of

Vermont Water Quality Regulations, but are not consistent with current guidelines for winter conservation flows. The goal of the proposed action is to design an approach for withdrawing water from a new source, and/or to create new storage capacity, thereby allowing the current withdrawals to be brought up to present flow guidelines, and enabling Mount Snow to take Snow Lake and Carinthia Pond off-stream. This would have significant beneficial impacts to fisheries, water quality, and aquatic biota on the North Branch of the Deerfield River. The combined water available from the new source and the existing modified sources must enable Mount Snow to increase snowmaking production from the current coverage of 83% to 100% of the existing ski trail network.

Mount Snow has been operating under a Special Use Permit from the USDA Forest Service since it opened for business in 1956. Presently, alpine skiing/snowboarding and other four season resort activities are provided to the public through a permit issued by the United States Forest Service and administered through the Green Mountain National Forest. The current forty term permit was issued on December 29, 1989. In 1995, Mount Snow, Ltd. acquired the nearby Haystack Ski Area and constructed a pipeline connecting the two snowmaking systems.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received by October 13, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis to Beth LeClair, District Ranger, Green Mountain National Forest, RR #2, Box 35, Rochester, Vermont 05767.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions regarding the proposed action and environmental impact statement to Nancy Burt, Project Coordinator, Green Mountain National Forest, 231 N. Main Street, Rutland, Vermont 05701, phone: 802-747-6700.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose and Need

Mount Snow/Haystack ski area has a combined ski trail network of 635 skiable acres of which 527 acres (83% of total) are currently served by snowmaking. As currently configured,

the combined snowmaking system at Mount Snow/Haystack ski area has a storage capacity of approximately 22 million gallons and utilizes a total seasonal water volume of about 300 million gallons. This existing system is not adequate to provide snowmaking coverage on the 527 acres of ski trails currently serviced. The snowmaking system cannot meet target dates for initial trail opening, does not provide sufficient depth of snow coverage and cannot recover rapidly following thaw and melt-off events. Natural snowfall is inconsistent and often inadequate during a typical Vermont winter. Predictable snow coverage is needed if Mount Snow is to consistently provide quality winter sports recreation opportunities, be attractive to skiers/snowboarders and remain competitive with other major ski areas in New England.

Additionally, with significantly improved and upgraded snowmaking capacities at competing resorts in recent years, Mount Snow has been unable to compete effectively during periods of insufficient natural snowfall. Upgrading capacities would promote repeat visitation and continue the long-term viability of the ski area and Deerfield Valley businesses. Unless Mount Snow remains viable, the economic health of the region could be adversely affected. The financial success of the resort has a substantial bearing on the continued ability of USDA Forest Service and Mount Snow to provide quality winter sports recreation to the public as called for in the Forest Plan and Mount Snow's Special Use Permit.

Development of a new water withdrawal system would be designed to result in current withdrawals being brought up to present flow guidelines. This would enable Mount Snow to take Snow Lake and Carinthia Pond off-stream, thereby having significant beneficial impacts to fisheries, water quality, and aquatic biota on the North branch of the Deerfield River.

The Proposed Action

The proposed action is (1) to identify and develop new water sources and/or storage options and pump water for snowmaking through a buried pipeline to the Mount Snow system, (2) to upgrade existing water withdrawal and storage facilities to bring them into compliance with current state and

federal regulatory guidelines, and (3) to install air and water pipelines on existing ski terrain to increase snowmaking coverage from 527 to 635 acres. No new ski terrain is proposed.

Management Direction

The proposed action is consistent with the long-range goals for this area as defined in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Green Mountain National Forest. That Forest Plan was approved on January 15, 1987. Under that Forest Plan, the area encompassed by the Mount Snow Ski Area is assigned to management under prescription 7.1A. This management prescription emphasizes highly developed recreation, including downhill ski areas. The purpose of prescription 7.1A is to provide opportunities for recreation requiring highly developed structures and facilities, maintain a visually appealing landscape, and manage for other resource uses in a compatible way. The Forest Service does not anticipate the need for any amendments to the Land and Resource Management Plan as a result of this snowmaking proposal since all new snowmaking will be located within the boundary of the existing SUP or on private land.

The Forest Service will consider a range of alternatives to meet the objectives of this proposal. One of these will be the "no action" alternative, in which none of the proposed activities would be implemented. Additional alternatives will examine varying levels and locations for the proposed activities to achieve the proposal's purposes, as well as to respond to the issues and other resource values. Proposed alternatives have been determined by the proponent based on a preliminary Snowmaking Water Supply Needs and Alternatives Analysis, which is currently being finalized, in which twelve water sources have been studied. Various screening factors were analyzed including water availability, on-site development costs, pond volume, and environmental impacts.

The EIS will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the alternatives. Past, present, and projected activities on both private and National Forest lands will be considered. The EIS will disclose the analysis of site-specific mitigation measures and their effectiveness.

Public participation is an important part of the analysis, commencing with the initial scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7), which will occur upon publication of this notification. In addition, the public is encouraged to visit with Forest Service officials at any

time during the analysis and prior to the decision. The Forest Service will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. The proposed project will be presented at an Open House in the local area, where representatives from the Green Mountain National Forest will be available to discuss the proposed project and provide additional information.

Comments from the public and other agencies will be used in preparation of the Draft EIS. Please note that comments will be regarded as public information. The scoping process will be used to:

1. Identify potential issues.
2. Identify major issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Eliminate minor issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental analysis, such as the Green Mountain Forest Plan EIS.
4. Identify alternatives to the proposed action.
5. Identify potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect, and cumulative effects).
6. Determine potential cooperating agencies and task assignments.

Preliminary issues identified to date include:

- Is the project consistent with the Deerfield River Settlement?
- Potential effects of increased snow deposition on stream runoff.
- Potential effects on aquatic habitat.
- Potential effects on Mount Snow's ability to compete in the marketplace.

Other issues commonly associated with ski area development include: effects on cultural resources, water quality, soils, sensitive species, and scenery values. This list may be verified, expanded, or modified based on public scoping for this proposal.

The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and available for public review in March, 1998. At that time, the EPA will publish a notice of availability of the Draft EIS in the **Federal Register**. The comment period on the Draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the EPA's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register**. It is very important that those interested in management of the Mount Snow Ski Area participate at that time. To be most helpful, comments on the Draft EIS should be as site-specific as possible. The Final EIS is scheduled to be completed by June 1998.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings

related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of draft environmental impact statements must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 US 519.553 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement may be waived or dismissed by the courts. *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 45-day scoping comment period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in developing issues and alternatives.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues on the proposed action, comments should be as specific as possible. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

Dated: August 14, 1997.

James W. Bartelme,
Forest Supervisor.

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COMMITTEE FOR PURCHASE FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR SEVERELY DISABLED

Procurement List; Proposed Additions and Deletions

AGENCY: Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled.

ACTION: Proposed additions to and deletions from procurement list

SUMMARY: The Committee has received proposals to add to the procurement list services to be furnished by nonprofit agencies employing persons who are blind or have other severe disabilities, and to delete services previously furnished by such agencies.

COMMENTS MUST BE RECEIVED ON OR BEFORE: September 22, 1997.