



Existing view of Golden Peak - note cut to the summit, made in the 1960's, for a lift that was never built



Approximate view of Golden Peak once construction of proposed race course and lift to the summit is completed.

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

VHA Action Notice:

Update on Golden Peak Proposal

April 10, 2017

Since [VHA's initial reporting](#) on Vail Resort's application to expand facilities on Golden Peak last week, VHA has learned more about what is planned. This proposed project has a long history, having been included in Vail Resorts 2007 Master Plan for the mountain. There is now considerable momentum for the project from both the U.S. Forest Service and the racing community. If approved, it will convert Golden Peak into an international

level ski venue with year-long racing and training that, if not managed correctly and appropriate mitigation procedures are not adopted as a condition of approval, could have effects beyond the immediate project area.

The project requires the clear-cutting of 42 acres of pristine Aspen forest, which would remove about 80% of the forest on Golden Peak. This would require a super clear-cut to comply with FIS international race course standards, which are to be used for the construction of the new courses; those standards require de-stumping and smoothing of the surface. The above picture is VHA's best effort to show how Golden Peak might appear after the trails are cut (VHA asked for a depiction from the proponents but was informed that none would be available for at least two weeks).

Clear-cutting and smoothing such large areas with steep pitches raises environmental concerns about drainage and soil stability. This is a concern, not just for the project area, but because two of the proposed new runs will join into the existing Golden Peak race area, it is a concern all the way down to the base at Chair 6. Because of increased snow making and water injection to maintain the race courses at FIS international race conditions, the sub-soil under the courses will be super-saturated, so in addition to usual surface drainage issues, there could be significant sub-soil issues.

This is the first time that such conditions will be faced on Vail Mountain. Other race venues, such as *International* and the *Birds of Prey* courses at Beaver Creek, were one-off events, so those courses did not need to be maintained race-ready all year long. As of yet, it does not appear there are any provisions for the disposition of excess water or for reducing saturation of the sub-soil. Simply draining the excess water into the adjacent forest is insufficient and has the potential for creating erosion and mud flows. A well thought-out mitigation plan, covering the entire length of the new facility should be required.

The proposal would expand the facilities by creating four new ski trails—a Women's Downhill, a Men's Super G, a mogul run and a skier cross course. These trails are to be built to international racing standards. These facilities would be used for local, regional, national, and international ski/snowboard racing and training. Between racing events, these facilities will be used virtually every day of the season for training. Last year, for example, the Golden Peak Race Venue was utilized for races, events, and event preparation for 91 days, and 13 mogul events were held on *Cookshack*; on other days, the venues were used for training. While earlier reports indicated that there would be periods that these new trails would be open to the public, even if there were open days, the trails will be maintained in race-ready condition, which would make them unsuitable and even unsafe for recreational skiers.

At a conceptual level, the purpose of these new facilities is to consolidate all racing and race training in one location, so that race activities are separated from the general public's use of the mountain. It is believed that doing so will improve on-mountain safety and guest experiences. The project, however, only involves the new terrain, and as of yet, has not considered the potential safety effects, which the new race courses will have in the course finish arenas. Up to now, Golden Peak has only accommodated technical or relatively slower speed events. Now with international level downhill and Super G courses, it will be a new day; racers will be reaching the bottom of the courses at high speed. Reportedly, there are no plans to change or enlarge the finish corral, but even though the finish area is outside of the scope of this project, the VHA believes that the USFS should treat this project holistically and both consider and address how to maintain separation of those participants from the general public in the Chair 6 area. This is necessary for both the safety of the general public as well as the safety of racers.

In the past, Vail Resorts and Ski and Snowboard Club Vail have hosted a number of race events at Golden Peak. SSCV also has rented out the facilities to visiting groups. Rental income funds operational expenses, and if sufficient in the future, will be used to provide scholarships. With new and much improved facilities, it can only be anticipated that race events and rentals to other clubs and organizations will increase. The prospects of increased use of the new Golden Peak facilities need to be addressed, so that it does not contribute to congestion in the Golden Peak area.

The only access to these facilities will be via Chair 6, which is already a congested area. In addition to the general public using Chair 6 for access to the mountain, the children's ski school, DEVO and an adult ski school all congregate in this area. Adding to the congestion, all racers, coaches and other ski personnel and all related gear will have to assemble at the Golden Peak base. When races are conducted, the contestants will have to merge into the general skier population to access Chair 6. Again, this is outside the scope of the project, but VHA believes that a proper holistic approach requires that Chair 6 congestion issues must be considered and addressed.



Vail Valley Drive – Return of Traffic Congestion may result from the SSCV Golden Peak expansion proposal.

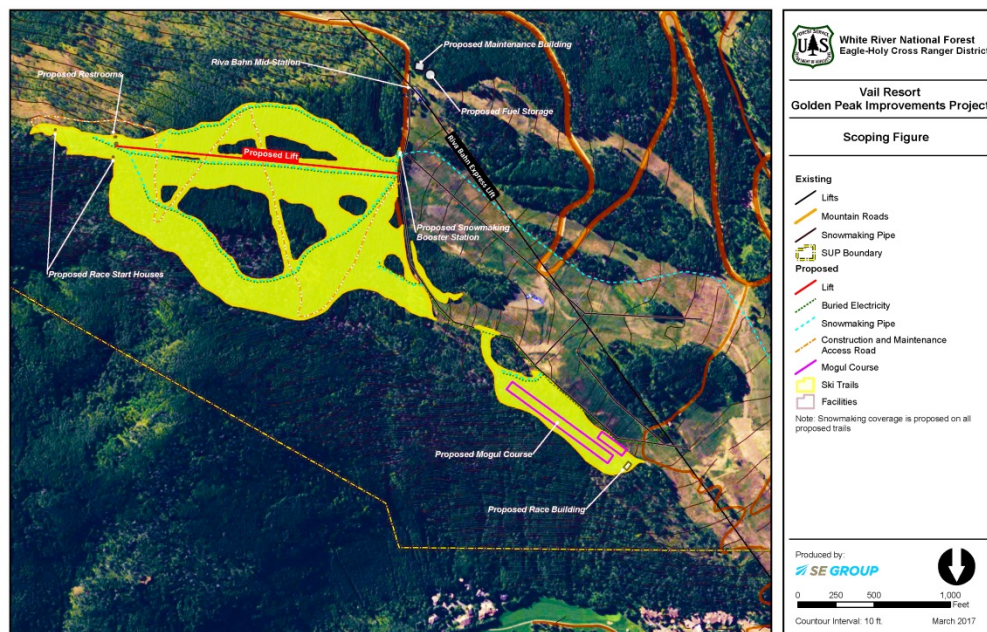
Aside from congestion at Chair 6, vehicular traffic in the Golden Peak area already exceeds capacity, even after DEVO drop-off was moved to the Vail parking structure. And, the Town's parking facilities are already stressed, resulting in ever increasing use of Frontage Road parking with its attendant public safety issues, especially on weekends when events take place. There does not appear to be any provision in the project for mitigating these effects. They should not be ignored or simply left to the Town of Vail to be dealt with. Once again, a proper holistic approach requires that these issues be considered and addressed.

It is anticipated that SSCV will have substantial say in how the facilities are managed, probably through an Operating Agreement with Vail Resorts, although there is no such agreement in place at the present time. SSCV has, however, represented that if the new facilities are constructed, it will no longer need to use *Cookshack*, *Whippersnapper*, *Black Forest*, *Giant Steps* or other trails outside of this new facility, thereby, freeing those trails for use by the general public. This beneficial effect of the project should be specifically spelled out, as a condition of approval.

The U.S. Forest Service is in the process of preparing an Environmental Impact Statement. The EIS will consider the impact of the proposed facilities on the environment as well as any “social” issues that are brought to its attention during the comment period. “Social” issues are understood to encompass the impact of this project on the surrounding area and the community. While such issues will be addressed in the EIS, they will only be addressed if they are raised in the comment period. In other words, if you remain silent, any concerns or objections you have may not be addressed in the EIS.

VHA has several concerns about this project that it believes should be addressed as part of the EIS and before any approvals are issued:

1. Drainage and sub-soil stability for both the project area and the lower portions of Golden Peak must be carefully managed to avoid erosion and mud flows, and there should be specific attention to the disposition of excess water. Merely draining excess water into the adjacent forest can have significant consequences. The proposal states that there will be drainage management infrastructure but is silent on how or where the excess water will be disposed of. These matters should be addressed.
2. Any approval of these facilities should require specific steps to mitigate congestion, both at Chair 6 and in the surrounding roadways and community. For example, all race and race training personnel could be required to park remotely, similar to what was done with DEVO; bus-only transportation to Chair 6 could be required, and there could be a designated base area for those individuals.
3. There should be specific provisions to separate race contestants and training activities from the general public in the finish area adjacent to Chair 6. At a minimum, protective barriers, staggered fencing and designated pathways to funnel participants to Chair 6 at normal slow speeds must be required.



USFS Scoping Figure for Project Locations.

If you share these concerns or have other concerns or objections to this project—whether they be about the aesthetic effects of clear cuts on Golden Peak, increased congestion and parking issues in the Golden Peak area, or any other kind of issue—it is incumbent that you make your views known to the USFS. In formulating comments, it is most effective if you begin with a reference to the Purpose and Need for the facility (Refer to the USFS Public Notice attached to VHA’s first report). For example, in expressing a

concern about water disposition, a comment could begin that one has a concern about how the EIS is going to address the new snowmaking and increased water usage. Also, if you want particular actions taken—whether it is concerning the project or mitigation efforts concerning impacts from the project—these, also, should be included in your comments.

COMMENTS ARE DUE BY MAY 1, 2017. All comments should reference the Golden Peak Improvement Project. Comments can be submitted via mail, fax, electronically, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Scott Fitzwilliams, c/o Max Forgensi, Mountain Sports/Special Uses Administrator, White River National Forest, P.O. Box 190, Minturn, CO 81645; FAX (970) 827-9343. Electronic comments including attachments can be submitted to: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=47937>

The Association urges affected parties to become involved and forward their comments to the USFS by not later than May 1, 2017.

Credit: Lead Photo - Golden Peak – EagleCountyTimes.com



Signature Golden Peak view to be significantly altered by construction of race course and lift. Area outlined in red is to be impacted by removal of a major part of the large aspen grove for a new race course and lift from existing runs to near the summit.

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