

DECISION MEMO

Silver Fir Chairlift Replacement Project
USDA Forest Service
Snoqualmie Ranger District, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
Kittitas County, Washington
E ½ Section 16, T22N, R11E

Introduction

As Forest Supervisor for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, I have carefully reviewed the activities proposed in the *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement Project. In reaching a decision I considered public, agency, and Tribal comments. I also consulted with members of my staff, reviewed potential effects, and considered the relationship of the project to Forest Plan (as amended) direction and Federal law and regulations.

This Decision Memo (DM) documents my decision to approve the replacement of the *Silver Fir* Chairlift at the Summit-of-Snoqualmie Ski Area.

Background

This decision is in response to a request by Ski Lifts Inc. (the ski area operator) to replace the existing *Silver Fir* triple chairlift with a detachable four person (quad) chairlift in the exact same alignment. This lift replacement was originally proposed as part of the 1998 Master Development Plan (MDP) and has been included in the NEPA process for the MDP. The *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement has been identified by Ski Lifts, Inc. as a priority project in the MDP. The MDP NEPA process was initiated in 1999 and is anticipated to be completed in the fall of 2008. During this process the *Silver Fir* replacement was included in the Draft EIS and received favorable comment from the public during scoping and/or following the release of the Draft EIS. Throughout the process there were no negative comments regarding this specific proposal (available in the project record).

The need to replace the *Silver Fir* chairlift has become imminent from both an operational and recreational perspective (see Purpose and Need below). The MDP EIS process to provide recreational improvements to the ski area has taken 10 years to complete. By making a separate decision regarding the *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement, Ski Lifts, Inc. has indicated they will be able to implement the project this summer in time for the 2008-2009 winter season. The replacement of this lift would not occur until the 2009-2010 season at the earliest if it remained in the MDP EIS process. The proposal to replace the *Silver Fir* chairlift will result in minimal environmental impact and no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude the use of a CE to implement the project, therefore I have decided to remove the replacement of the *Silver Fir* chairlift from the MDP EIS and make a decision on it separately.

Purpose and Need

Ski Lifts, Inc. has submitted a request to replace the existing *Silver Fir* Chairlift (Figure 2) with a detachable four passenger (quad) chairlift within the existing alignment. The current *Silver Fir* chairlift is old, poorly located, and reduces the quality of the recreation experience. This chairlift is prone to frequently break down, creating long lift lines and long lift rides (often up to 45 minutes). The location of the existing lower terminal of *Silver Fir* requires skiers to hike several hundred feet from the parking lot to the bottom terminal with the last hundred feet requiring guests to gain approximately 30 feet in elevation. This detracts from the recreational experience for guests with ski gear and/or children as it requires significant effort to reach the bottom terminal.

Currently, skiers are required to negotiate an up hill climb to access the bottom terminal of the *Silver Fir* lift. There is a need to provide easier access to the bottom terminal of the chairlift from the parking lot for ski area users. Replacement of this lift would relocate the bottom terminal to a location along the edge of the parking lot at approximately 35 feet lower in elevation. This would improve the recreation experience of skiers using the chairlift, as it would remove the up hill climb skiers with equipment and children currently negotiate to access the lower terminal location.

The *Silver Fir* chairlift has been included in the MDP EIS process, which has been on-going for 10 years. Ski Lifts, Inc. has indicated that over this time the *Silver Fir* chair has become less and less reliable. There is a need to replace the chairlift as soon as possible to provide reliable operation for the 2008-2009 winter season. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the on going MDP EIS process, approval of the *Silver Fir* replacement as a separate project is needed. By approving this project through the CE process, Ski Lifts, Inc. has indicated they will be able to implement this project prior to the 2008-2009 winter season. If the *Silver Fir* replacement was to remain in the MDP EIS process, it would not be implemented until the 2009-2010 season at the earliest.

Location

The *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement Project is situated in the Cascade Mountain Range of western Washington, approximately 46 miles east of Seattle in a portion of the E ½ of Section 16, T22N, R11E (see CE - Figure 1) and is accessed via Interstate 90 (I-90). It is located on the Cle Elum Ranger District of the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests (OWNF) on National Forest System lands. The operation of the *Silver Fir* chairlift is authorized under the Special Use Permit (SUP) held by Ski Lifts, Inc., and administered by the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, U.S. Department of Agriculture – Forest Service (Forest Service). As the administrator of the SUP the supervisor of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF) is the deciding official. This decision pertains to a federal action that affects NFS lands within the existing SUP boundary.

Decision

I have decided to implement The Summit-at-Snoqualmie Ski Area's *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement project.

My decision includes the following:

- Replacement of the existing *Silver Fir* fixed grip triple chairlift with a detachable four passenger (quad) chairlift within the existing alignment.
- Relocation of the *Silver Fir* bottom terminal 35 feet down slope of the existing bottom terminal to an existing disturbed area adjacent to the *Silver Fir* parking area (see CE - Figure 3 and 4).
- Upgrading the capacity of the existing *Silver Fir* chairlift from an existing CCC of 710 to 930 once the new lift is installed.
- Installation of a subsurface power line to the bottom terminal from the existing utility network.
- Unbolting and removal of existing lift towers for storage.
- Installation of 15 new lift towers requiring a maximum of 100 square feet of disturbance per tower (See CE – Figure 3 and 4).
- Approximately 1.34 acres of ground disturbance along the entire lift corridor and the removal of approximately 10 trees for terminal installation.

My decision is based on the following lift and terminal construction techniques:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructed on-site. • Replacement of the upper lift terminal will require approximately 0.5 acre of ground disturbance. • Replacement of the lower lift terminal will require approximately 0.75 acre of ground disturbance. • Excavation for lift terminals will be done by trackhoe. Equipment will access the site via existing roads and ski trails. • No tree removal or grading will occur in streams or wetlands. Silt fence will be installed between wetlands and ground disturbing activities. • Spoils from upper and lower terminal excavation will be used in terrain modifications on private land at the Summit Central Terrain Park or stored and stabilized at the existing soil stockpile in <i>Silver Fir</i> parking lot 2. • Spoils stored at Lot 2 or within the Terrain Park will be stabilized for long term storage with Erosion and Sediment Control BMPs per the Management Requirements in this decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lift towers will be constructed off-site and airlifted in for final placement from the <i>Silver Fir</i> parking lot. • Grading for lift towers will occur in the existing lift corridor in areas already disturbed by ski area facilities (i.e. existing lift towers and ski trails). • The 15 new lift tower footings will be excavated by hand or by excavators, including walking articulated backhoe equipment depending on site conditions and accessibility. • Grading and excavation for new lift towers will be limited to a maximum of 100 square feet per tower. • No tree removal or grading will occur in streams or wetlands. Silt fence will be installed between wetlands and ground disturbing activities. • Spoils from footings will be spread over the tower site and the site revegetated and mulched.
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I find this action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment because the proposed action qualifies for an exclusion under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, section 31.2, Category #3 - *Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land.*

I find this categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. My decision was influenced by the fact that within the Project Record no scoping comments or public comment letters were received in opposition to the modification of the *Silver Fir* chairlift or any potential environmental consequences related to implementation of this project.

Project Design Features

The following project design features are integral components of this decision.

Management Requirements

Management requirements are used to minimize potential environmental impacts of the project and to improve existing conditions. I find that the implementation of a project-specific Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will reduce the amount of sediment potentially reaching streams by requiring the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) in project specific plans. Research has indicated that silt fences trap 90 percent or better of sediment from hillslope erosion. Revegetation of exposed hillslopes has been shown to reduce erosion by greater than 70 percent using native vegetation. As such, the use of BMPs during construction will reduce potential sediment mobilization from the site. All measures listed below are integral parts of this decision to be adhered to and incorporated into the implementation of this project.

Watershed Resources

- Field-certified, weed-free straw will be applied to a depth of 3 inches on all disturbed sites that have no other erosion control mulch prescription. Applications will be made prior to heavy rainstorms during construction and after construction is complete to protect water quality.
- A project-specific Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be developed and approved by the Forest Service and then implemented for the proposed project before any construction begins. The SWPPP will specify the use of appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) (e.g., sediment traps, waterbars, wattles, or silt fencing) to trap sediment and prevent sediment deposition in streams.
- Excess soil material from construction sites will be transported to a suitable upland site, as specified in the project-specific Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and approved by the USFS, so that it is stored outside of stream or ditch corridors, wetlands and Riparian Buffers.
- If flooding or weather results in water quality not meeting current State standards for surface water quality, operations will stop until the conditions improve and the site stabilization has been approved by USFS personnel. Work stoppage procedures will be established in project-specific SWPPPs.

- A Spill Prevention and Response Plan will be developed and approved by the Forest Service as part of SWPPPs. Petroleum products will not be discharged into drainages or bodies of water. No fuels will be stored within Riparian Buffers. All petroleum products will be secured in self-contained safety cans.

Vegetation

- If any new populations of special-status plant species are encountered during the construction process, work shall be suspended in that area until the MBSNF botanist is consulted.
- Applicable best management practices (BMPs) will be implemented during replacement of the *Silver Fir* chairlift to minimize the introduction and establishment of noxious weeds as directed by Executive Order 13112 (1999) and USFS regional policy. Provisions in the *Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests Weed Management and Prevention Strategy and Best Management Practices* (USFS 2002) and the *MBSNF Forest Plan's Strategy for New Invaders* (USDA 2005) would be applied to prevent the establishment and spread of noxious weeds.
- An Erosion Control Plan will be included in the SWPPP for construction documents for proposed projects. The plan will include revegetation techniques and will be approved by the USFS before any ground disturbance occurs. Techniques will include redressing disturbed areas with salvaged topsoil, applying mulch (straw or other material approved by the USFS) over the area to be revegetated, applying seed mixes as outlined in other mitigation measures, and using fertilizer where appropriate to ensure growth of germinated seeds.
- During the engineering design phase for chairlift construction, towers will be designed to be placed outside of sensitive plant populations if engineering design allows.
- Project-specific SWPPPs will specify that silt fences and hay bales from USFS-approved sources will be installed around wetlands adjacent to construction areas.

Heritage Resources

- If a previously unidentified cultural resource(s) is discovered during project implementation, or if an identified resource(s) is affected in an unanticipated way, the activity shall be stopped in the area of the find and make a reasonable effort to secure and protect the resource(s). The Heritage Specialist shall be notified and the Forest will fulfill its responsibilities in accordance with the Programmatic Agreement and other applicable regulations.
- As early as practicable prior to implementation, Ski Lifts, Inc. will contact the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe Cultural Resources Director and provide the project schedule, to allow monitoring for cultural/heritage resources.

Geology and Soils

- Manage stormwater runoff at the project site to limit stormwater/soil exposure sediment loss.

- Replant all disturbed areas as rapidly as possible minimizing the length of time that there are bare soils associated with construction and grading.

Watershed Resources

- In areas where clearing and grading are proposed adjacent to wetlands, additional structural erosion control measures will be implemented as necessary.
- Project-specific SWPPPs will specify that supplies and materials needed to complete erosion control measures will be onsite prior to initiating soil-disturbing activities.
- No staging areas, spoils piles, or storage of other construction-related materials will be sited within Riparian Buffers.
- The number of vehicle trips across project sites will be limited to the minimum necessary. Existing/proposed roads will be used to convey construction equipment and materials to individual project sites.

Vegetation

- Construction equipment will utilize existing roads or be lifted to steep slope sites by helicopter.

Standard Operating Procedures

- Construction documents will be prepared and stamped by a professional engineer, as necessary, and approved by the USFS.
- Construction will not begin until authorized by the USFS and approved by all applicable Federal, State, and local agencies.

Mitigation Measures

The management requirements and standard operating procedures listed above will provide adequate protection of existing resources during construction activities.

Rationale for Decision

The purpose of this project is to provide the public a quality recreational opportunity in a natural outdoor setting on NFS lands, consistent with the direction in the Forest Plans of the MBSNF and OWNF. This project will correct a deficiency in the lift network as the *Silver Fir* chairlift frequently breaks down, creating long lift lines and long lift rides. This project will enhance the recreation experience by realigning the *Silver Fir* bottom terminal to remove the short but steep up-hill hike skiers are required to make to reach the terminal.

This project was scoped during the Summit-at-Snoqualmie MDP NEPA process beginning with the publication of a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on January 29, 1999. In addition the *Silver Fir* replacement was included in the Draft EIS for the MDP (released in December 2005) During this public

process the Forest received numerous comments about the quality of the recreation experience at The Summit-at-Snoqualmie and five comments specifically mentioned the condition of the *Silver Fir* as a detracting factor in the skier's experience. For example, one person commented that replacing the chairlift would provide much needed capacity and would address the long lift lines at *Silver Fir* found on the weekends. Another commented that the ride time was exceptionally long on *Silver Fir*. Several people applauded the *Silver Fir* chairlift modification stating that "Weekend lift lines at Silver Fir (as of yesterday) were 35 minutes" and "A newer faster lift would alleviate this problem" and "Changing this chair to a detachable quad would make us and a whole lot of other skiers and boarders happy. There is plenty of terrain to support the increased volume that a quad would provide." Within the Project Record no comment letters were received against the modification of the *Silver Fir* chairlift or any potential environmental consequence related to implementation of this project.

These comments have been included in the project record of this decision. My decision to approve the chairlift replacement will immediately address concerns expressed by the public.

Reason for Categorically Excluding the Action from Additional Documentation

Specific actions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS). Agency policy at Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 30, section 30.3, states that a proposed action may be categorically excluded from documentation only if the action is within a category listed in FSH 1909.15, sections 31.1b or 31.2; and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in significant individual or cumulative environmental effects.

The proposed action qualifies for this exclusion under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, section 31.2, Category #3 - *Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land.*

Finding of No Extraordinary Circumstances

I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect (as defined in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30). My determination is based on interdisciplinary team review and analysis and documents in the Project Record, as summarized below for each extraordinary circumstance in FSH Chapter 30.

- a) **The project has been analyzed to determine effects on threatened or endangered species, and their critical habitat** – On May 20, 2008, the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest submitted a Biological Assessment to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requesting consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species. This consultation addressed potential affects to species and critical habitat administered by USFWS for The Summit-at-Snoqualmie MDP proposal (which included the *Silver Fir* chairlift modification).

At the May 20, 2008 Level 1 meeting, the USFS and USFWS agreed to the effect determination of the proposed lift replacement on threatened and endangered species. The final Biological Assessment was submitted on May 20, 2008 stating that The Summit-at-Snoqualmie Ski Area MDP proposal “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, bull trout, grizzly bear, and gray wolf. The proposal will “no effect” on Canada lynx and critical habitat for marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl. A formal letter of concurrence from USFWS is expected by June 27, 2008.

For Forest Service Sensitive Species, the project “may impact individuals but will not contribute to a trend toward federal listing” to Townsend’s big-eared Bat, Fisher, wolverine, northern goshawk, great gray owl, Van Dyke’s salamander, and Larch Mountain salamander (see Project Record).

The project “may impact individuals but will not contribute to a trend toward federal listing” to the following rare or uncommon wildlife species: terrestrial mollusks, silver-haired bat, and Hoary bat (see Project Record).

For Management Indicator Species, the project “may impact individuals, but would not affect species viability in the project area” to pileated woodpecker, elk foraging and cover habitat, mule deer foraging and cover habitat, mountain goat and American marten (see Project Record).

The project “may impact individuals but will not contribute to a trend toward federal listing” to the following USFWS Species of Concern: peregrine falcon, olive-sided flycatcher, harlequin duck, long-eared myotis, long-legged myotis, Yuma myotis, Cascade frog, and neotropical migratory birds (see Project Record).

For plants, no sensitive vascular plants, bryophytes, lichens, or fungi are known to occur within the project unit. Implementation of this project will have no impact on threatened, endangered, sensitive, or other rare/uncommon species.

For fish, the project “may effect, but not likely to adversely affect” bull trout as described in the Biological Assessment for the Summit-at-Snoqualmie MDP Proposal, which addresses the *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement (see project file). There would be no impact to USFS Sensitive or MIS species as a result of the *Silver Fir* lift replacement project. There will be no impact to Essential Fish Habitat as defined under the Magnuson-Stevens Act as no anadromous salmonids are present within the project unit.

Details are contained in the biological evaluations and biological assessments in the Project Record.

- b) **Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds** –No municipal watersheds occur in the project area. Wetlands occur along the lift corridor and near the bottom terminal location, but will be avoided completely.

- c) **Congressionally designated area such as wilderness, wilderness study area, or National Recreation Area** – No Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas are present.
- d) **Inventoried Roadless Area** - There are no inventoried roadless areas within 20 miles of the project area.
- e) **Research Natural Area (RNA)** - The project area is not located within any Research Natural Areas (RNA) or potential RNA's.
- f) **American Indian religious or cultural sacred sites.** – The Federal government has trust responsibilities to Tribes under a government-to-government relationship to ensure that the Tribes reserved rights are protected. Consultation with Tribes helps ensure that these trust responsibilities are met. The Forest consulted with appropriate Tribes and interested persons and no significant effects were determined (Heritage Specialist Report). There are no known Native American religious or cultural sacred sites present.
- g) **Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas.** - In accordance with the 1997 Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the Pacific Northwest Region (R6), the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, further consultation is not required for this project. The *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement Project meets Stipulation III.A.2. of the PA under Appendix B - Recreation #1, and is excluded from case-by-case review by the SHPO. There are no known archaeological sites, historic properties or traditional cultural areas. The Forest Heritage Specialist based this determination on heritage resource field inventory completed for the Ski Lifts Master Development Plan, which originally included this project (Nelson, M. 2008), and on consultation with the Snoqualmie Tribe, the Yakima Indian Nation the Tulalip Tribes, and interested persons.

Public Involvement

The proposed *Silver Fir* chairlift modification was described in The Summit-at-Snoqualmie MDP proposal which had significant public involvement. A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the *Federal Register* on January 29, 1999 regarding *The Summit-at-Snoqualmie Master Development Plan Proposal*. The MDP proposal was provided to the public agencies and Tribes for comment during scoping and government to government consultation. Issues identified from the scoping process were used to guide the completion of the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for The Summit-at-Snoqualmie Master Development Plan Proposal*, which included the *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement project.

The Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on December 23, 2005 (Volume 70, Number 246) and initiated an extended 60-day public comment period that ended on February 16, 2006. The full Draft EIS (hardcopy and/or compact disk) or internet download instructions were distributed to over 1,598 individuals, organizations and other agencies on December 19, 2005 and the Draft EIS was posted on the USFS website.

In response, during the public comment period to the Draft EIS, a total of 1,503 comment letters were received. Out of the 1,503 response letters, 1,137 comments were identified by the USFS as substantive comments according to guidance contained at 40 CFR 1503.4 (b). The substantive comments which referenced the *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement are included in the project record of this decision.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below.

Wenatchee National Forest Plan, as Amended

The Snoqualmie Pass Adaptive Management Area (SPAMA) was identified by the **1994 amendment to the Forest Plan** as a CEA; an area critical to maintaining connectivity of spotted owl populations and other organisms closely associated with late-successional forests, between the northern and southern Cascade Mountains. Consequently, the standards and guidelines established for LSR and the ACS would serve as the baseline standards and guidelines for the SPAMA, with the exception that more restrictive standards and guidelines apply to recreational uses and facilities, and the expansion of special uses, such as ski areas and utility corridors, within CEAs.

The *Silver Fir* chairlift modification authorized by this decision is located on OWNF lands which are allocated to AMA (ST-1 – Scenic Travel). SPAMA allows for new recreation uses and facilities as long as they are "neutral or beneficial to late-successional habitat." I find that the replacement of an existing chairlift within the existing alignment is neutral to late-successional habitat because it will maintain current habitat conditions in the project area.

Riparian Reserves/Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) Objectives

I find that the *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement Project will be consistent with Riparian Reserve Standards and Guidelines and ACS objectives.

Objective 1: *Maintain and restore the distribution, diversity, and complexity of watershed and landscape-scale features to ensure protection of the aquatic systems to which species, populations and communities are uniquely adapted.*

The *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement project will not result in measurable changes to the distribution, diversity, and complexity of watershed and landscape scale features. At the site scale, there will be no change to the riparian conditions. There will be no measurable impact to in-stream aquatic habitats or the aquatic community. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 1 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 2: *Maintain and restore spatial and temporal connectivity within and between watersheds. Lateral, longitudinal, and drainage network connections include floodplains, wetlands, upslope areas, headwater tributaries, and intact refugia. These network connections must provide chemically and physically unobstructed routes to areas critical for fulfilling life history requirements of aquatic and riparian-dependent species.*

The spatial and temporal connectivity of habitats and functions within and between watersheds will be maintained by minimizing the clearing and grading in Riparian Reserves. To the extent possible new chairlift towers will be located outside Riparian Reserves. Floodplains and wetlands will not be affected at the landscape scale, and as no new roads or trails are authorized no connections to drainage networks will be affected. At the site scale, equipment accessing the work site via existing ski trails will cause a short-term (length of the installation) obstruction to limited-mobility riparian dependent species. Connectivity conditions related to the existing road system will remain unchanged. There will, therefore, be no measurable or observable impact to the life history requirements of aquatic or riparian dependent species. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 2 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 3: Maintain and restore the physical integrity of the aquatic system, including shorelines, banks, and bottom configurations.

Disturbance within Riparian Reserves will be limited to the replacement of lift towers and a small amount of tree removal to widen the lift line where needed, so the physical integrity of aquatic systems will be maintained within the *Silver Fir* pod. Tree removal within Riparian Reserves would occur where necessary to widen the lift corridor to accommodate the larger cross-arms of a high speed quad chair. Ground disturbance will be minimized during project construction so that sediment delivery to wetlands will be nominal. No stream crossings or new roads will be constructed to access the project, therefore at the site or watershed scale there will be no measurable effect to the physical integrity of aquatic systems. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 3 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 4: Maintain and restore water quality necessary to support healthy riparian, aquatic, and wetland ecosystems. Water quality must remain within the range that maintains the biological, physical, and chemical integrity of the system and benefits survival, growth, reproduction, and migration of individuals composing aquatic and riparian communities.

Implementation of the *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement project is not expected to contribute to the listing of any stream on the Department of Ecology's 303(d) list since there will be no new point sources of pollution and no measurable or observable impact to water quality is expected. Temporary increases in sediment detachment will result at the site scale during construction activities; however the implementation of erosion and sediment control BMPs, management requirements and other management provisions will reduce the potential for sediment yield to streams at the site scale. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 4 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 5: Maintain and restore the sediment regime under which aquatic ecosystems evolved. Elements of the sediment regime include the timing, volume, rate, and character of sediment input, storage, and transport.

The *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement project will not alter the sediment regime of the at the 5th field watershed scale. At the site scale, temporary increases in sediment detachment would occur during

construction. Implementation of erosion and sediment control BMPs, management requirements and other management provisions will reduce the potential yield to aquatic systems at the site scale. Following construction, long term stabilization of the site is expected to reduce sediment detachment to existing levels. The implementation of the *Silver Fir* replacement project is not expected to have any effect on the timing, volume, rate, and character of sediment input, storage and transport of sediment. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 5 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 6: *Maintain and restore in-stream flows sufficient to create and sustain riparian, aquatic, and wetland habitats and to retain patterns of sediment, nutrient, and wood routing. The timing, magnitude, duration, and spatial distribution of peak, high, and low flows must be protected.*

Aquatic systems within at the site scale have been impacted by past management activities (e.g., facilities, parking lots, road network, timber harvest). Large wood is currently not available in most of the project area; shade is recovering slowly; and the amount of hydrologically immature land cover has increased. Disturbance within Riparian Reserves will be limited to the replacement of lift towers and a small amount of tree removal to widen the lift line where needed, so the physical integrity of aquatic systems will be maintained within the *Silver Fir* pod. The *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement project is not expected to affect the timing, magnitude, duration, and spatial distribution of peak, high, and low flows in the watershed. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 6 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 7: *Maintain and restore the timing, variability, and duration of floodplain inundation and water table elevation in meadows and wetlands.*

The project will not affect floodplain inundation as there are no floodplains present at the site scale. Lift towers will be located outside of wetlands and meadows in order to maintain the integrity of these features. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 7 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 8: *Maintain and restore the species composition and structural diversity of plant communities in riparian areas and wetlands to provide adequate summer and winter thermal regulation, nutrient filtering, appropriate rates of surface erosion, bank erosion, and channel migration and to supply amounts and distributions of coarse woody debris sufficient to sustain physical complexity and stability.*

The project will not affect the species composition and structural diversity of plant communities in riparian areas and wetlands at the site scale. Disturbance within riparian areas will be limited to the replacement of lift towers and a small amount of tree removal to widen the lift line where needed. There would be no disturbance within wetlands. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 8 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Objective 9: *Maintain and restore habitat to support well-distributed populations of native plant, invertebrate and vertebrate riparian-dependent species.*

The *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement project will have no effect on the distribution of native plant populations, or riparian-dependant species. Implementation of the project will not result in any change in the timing, duration, or magnitude of low flow and peak flow events in the watershed. Disturbance within riparian reserves will be limited to the replacement of lift towers a small amount of tree removal to widen the lift line where needed. Therefore, the physical integrity of aquatic systems will be maintained within the *Silver Fir* pod. The replacement of an existing chairlift within the same alignment will not prevent attainment of Objective 9 at the 5th field watershed scale.

Organic Administration Act

This Act is the basic authority for authorizing use of National Forest System lands for uses other than right-of-ways. The regulations at 36 CFR 251 guide the issuance of authorizations under this Act. This decision is consistent with this Act.

Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands) and Clean Water Act

Executive Order 11990 directs federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, both long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands. The Clean Water Act provides a regulatory framework for evaluating and authorizing activities that affect Waters of the United States (waters). The *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement Project does not include any action in waters for the construction of facilities, and is not expected to require a permit through the USACOE or any other regulatory agencies. I have decided that this proposal will comply with Executive Order 11990 and the Clean Water Act.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The process for this analysis followed the regulations and direction outlined in 40 CFR parts 1500-1508, Forest Service Manual 1950, and Forest Service Handbook 1909.15. There has been opportunity for public involvement during the course of the analysis. Because of these factors, I find this decision fully complies with NEPA.

Endangered Species Act

The District Wildlife and Fisheries Biologist and the Forest Botanist analyzed the project in regards to the Endangered Species Act. Effects determinations and USFWS and NMFS concurrences are described in the “Extraordinary Circumstances” section of this document (pp. 8 and 9).

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

Section 106 (NHPA) consultation was completed under the 1997 Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the Pacific Northwest Region (R6), the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The Forest Heritage Specialist determined that the *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement is an “undertaking” pursuant 36 CFR 800, and certified that in accordance with the PA, further SHPO consultation is not required. The *Silver Fir* Chairlift Replacement project meets

Stipulation III.A.2. of the PA listed in Appendix B Recreation #1 and is excluded from case-by-case review by the SHPO (see project file). Documentation of the field inventory of the Area of Potential Effect is included in The Summit-at-Snoqualmie Heritage Report (Nelson, M. 2008) R2008060500043. The project file contains documentation of consultation with the Snoqualmie Tribe, the Yakima Indian Nation and the Tulalip Tribes, and interested persons. Concerns raised during consultation are incorporated in the mitigation measures. I find this decision fully complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Magnuson-Stevens Act

There will be no impact to Essential Fish Habitat as defined under the Magnuson-Stevens Act as no anadromous salmonids are present within the project unit. The project “may effect, but not likely to adversely affect” bull trout as described in the Biological Assessment for the Summit-at-Snoqualmie MDP Proposal, which addresses the *Silver Fir* chairlift replacement (see project file).

Other Relevant Laws and Regulations

I have considered all other relevant laws and regulations that this project may affect. This includes, but is not limited to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, the Clean Air Act as amended, the Invasive Species Executive Order 13112, Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898, Protection of Migratory Birds Executive Order 13186, Protection of Floodplains Executive Order 11988, Indian Sacred Sites Executive Order 13007, and the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

I have concluded that my decision to approve the proposed action with the necessary management requirements and other management provisions meets all applicable laws, regulations, and land policies, and is in the public interest.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f) - Decisions and actions not subject to appeal

“The following decisions and actions are not subject to appeal under this part, except as noted:

(f) Decisions for actions that have been categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS pursuant to FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, section 31.”

Ski Lifts Inc., the affected applicant, may alternatively appeal this Decision pursuant to 36 CFR 251, Subpart C. Any written notice of appeal of this Decision by the applicant under 36 CFR 251 must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 251.90, Content of Notice of Appeal. The notice of appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked, hand delivered, sent electronically, or faxed to the Appeal Reviewing Officer 45 days of the publication date of the legal notice for this Decision in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. The Appeal Reviewing Officer for this project is: Regional Forester, ATTN: 1570 Appeals,

USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623, FAX, (503) 808-2255; email, appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

Simultaneously, a copy of the appeal should also be mailed to Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie Forest Supervisor Y. Robert Iwamoto, 2930 Wetmore Avenue Suite 3A, Everett, WA 98201; sent electronically to: appeals-pacificnorthwest-mtbaker-snoqualmie@fs.fed.us; Faxed to: (425) 783-0214; or hand delivered to the above address between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday except legal holidays.

Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Sean Wetterberg, Forest Winter Sports Specialist, at the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Supervisor's Office, 2930 Wetmore Avenue, Suite EA, Everett, WA; by telephone at (425) 783-6022; or by e-mail swetterberg@fs.fed.us.

/s/ Y. Robert Iwamoto

Date June 26, 2008

Y. ROBERT IWAMOTO

Forest Supervisor

Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest

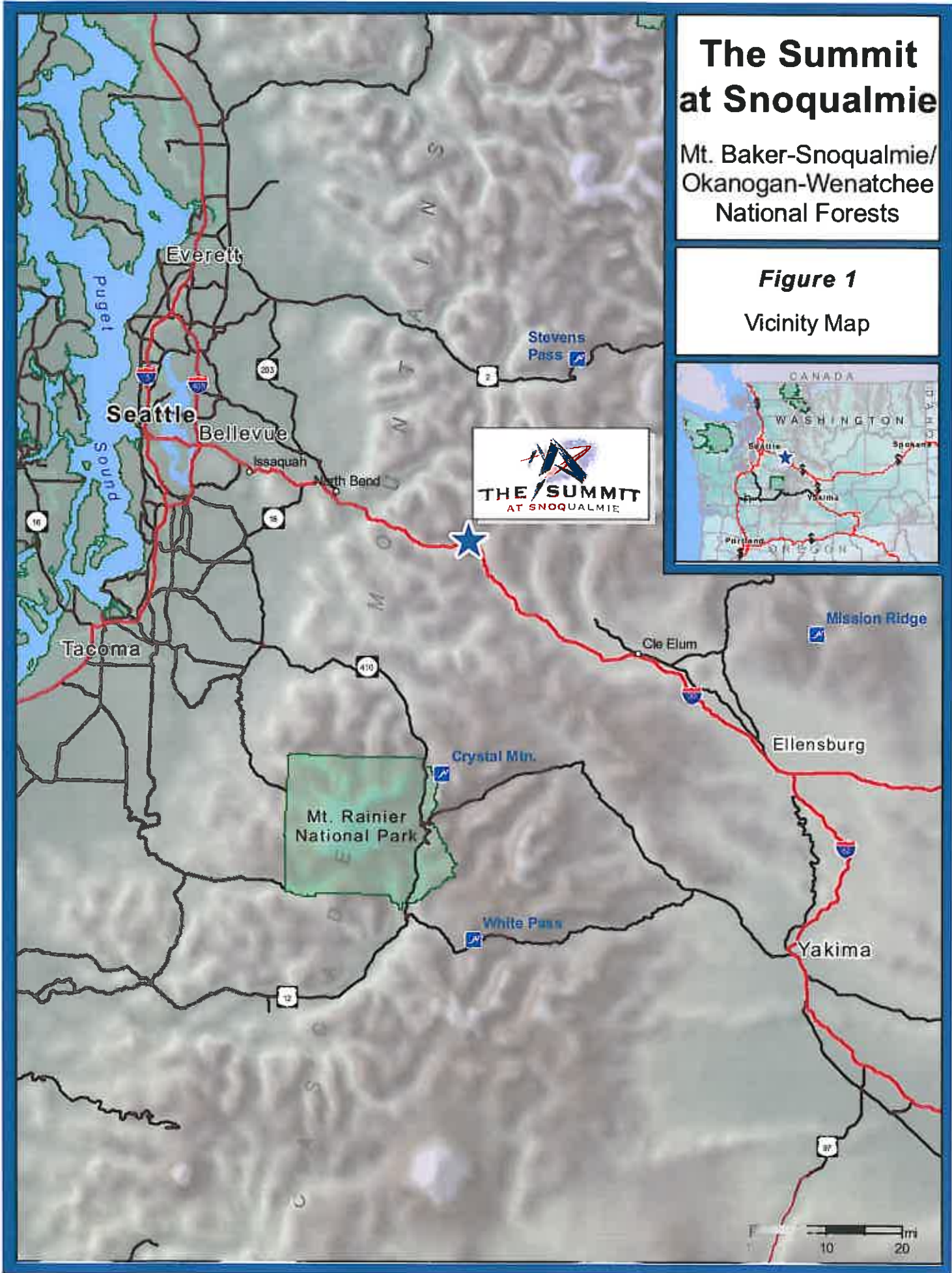


The Summit at Snoqualmie

Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie/
Okanogan-Wenatchee
National Forests

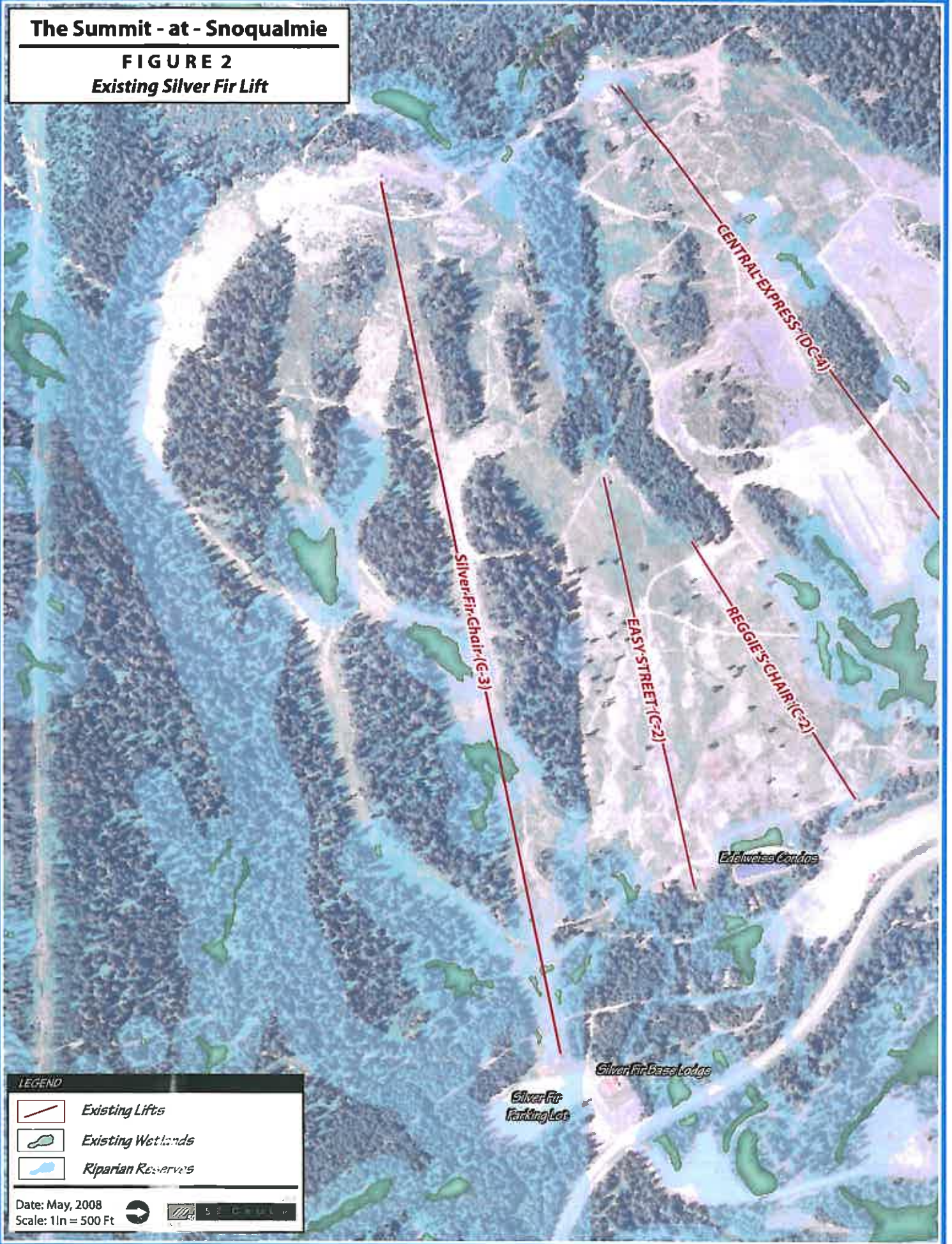
Figure 1

Vicinity Map



The Summit - at - Snoqualmie

FIGURE 2 Existing Silver Fir Lift



LEGEND

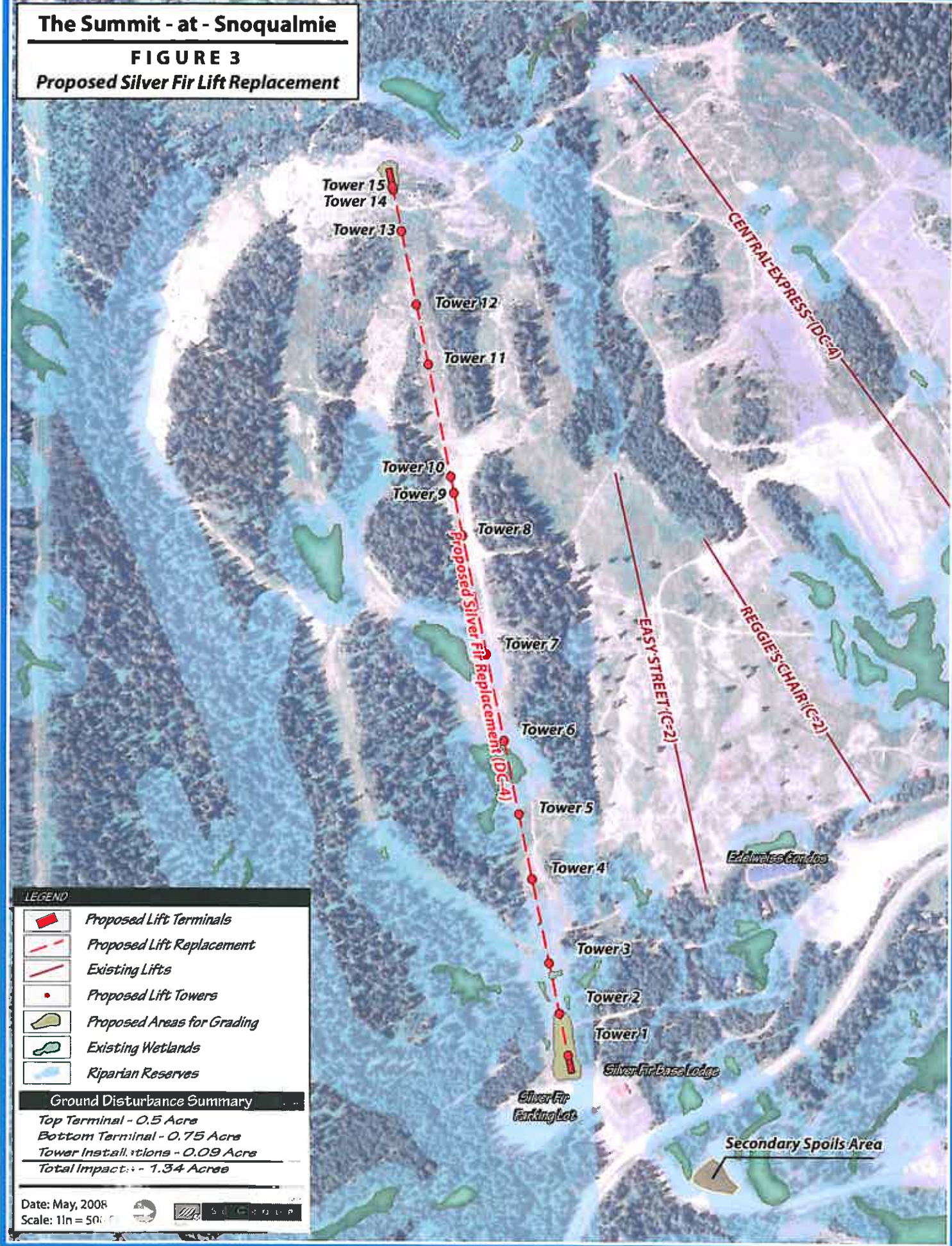
-  Existing Lifts
-  Existing Wetlands
-  Riparian Reserves

Date: May, 2008
Scale: 1In = 500 Ft



The Summit - at - Snoqualmie

FIGURE 3 Proposed Silver Fir Lift Replacement



LEGEND

- Proposed Lift Terminals
- Proposed Lift Replacement
- Existing Lifts
- Proposed Lift Towers
- Proposed Areas for Grading
- Existing Wetlands
- Riparian Reserves

Ground Disturbance Summary
Top Terminal - 0.5 Acres
Bottom Terminal - 0.75 Acres
Tower Installations - 0.09 Acres
Total Impact: - 1.34 Acres

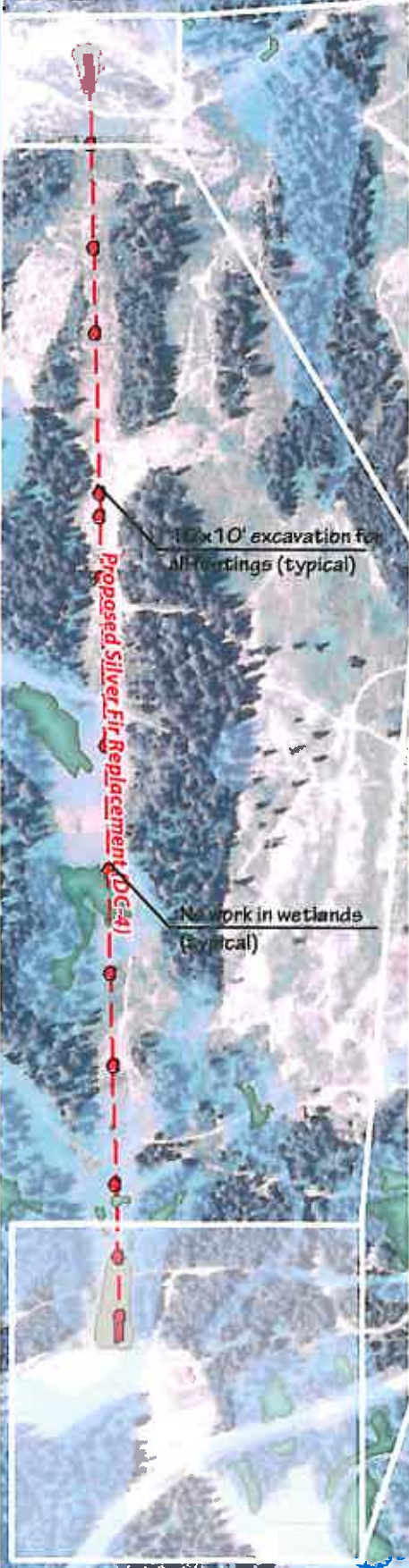
Date: May, 2008
Scale: 1In = 500'



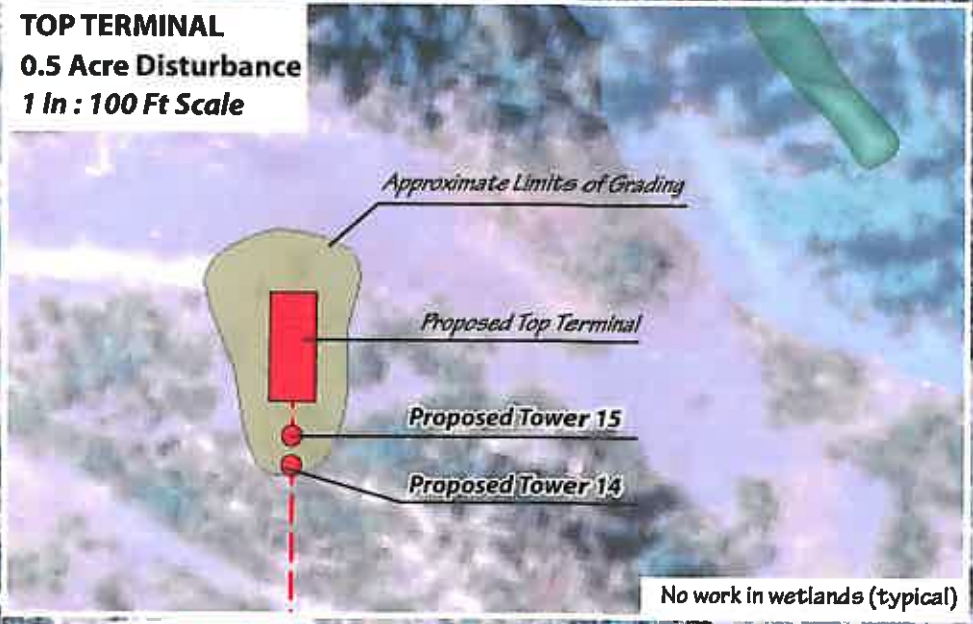
The Summit - at - Snoqualmie

FIGURE 4

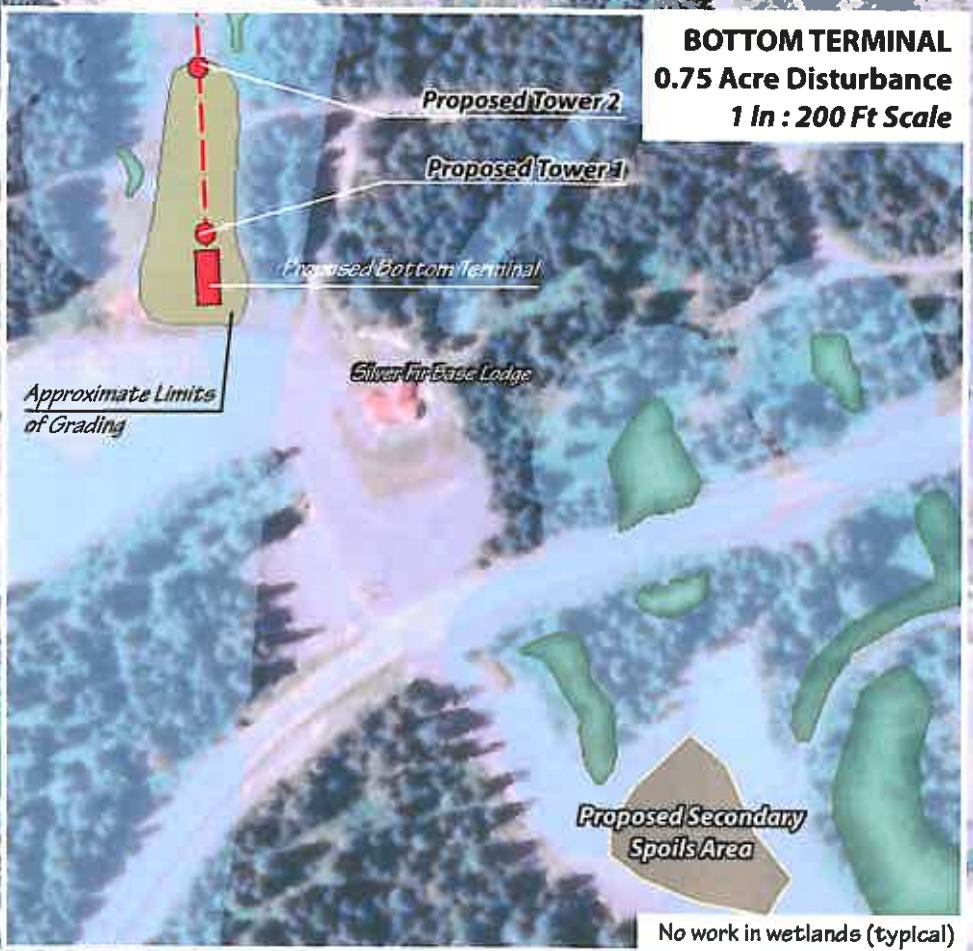
Proposed Terminal Detail







TOP TERMINAL
0.5 Acre Disturbance
1 In : 100 Ft Scale



BOTTOM TERMINAL
0.75 Acre Disturbance
1 In : 200 Ft Scale



-  Proposed Lift Tower Locations - 10'x10' excavation for footings (Typical)
-  Proposed Areas for Grading
-  Existing Wetlands - No work in wetlands (typical)
-  Riparian Reserves

Date: May, 2008
Scale: 1In = 500 Ft

