

## **SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On August 9, 2001, Core Mountain Enterprises, LLC, submitted an application to the USDI-Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for authorization of long-term commercial use of about 1,300 acres of BLM administered land by the Silverton Outdoor Learning and Recreation Center (SOLRC). The project site is in southwestern Colorado, about 6 miles north of Silverton. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), the BLM initiated an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to analyze and disclose the environmental impacts of issuing the requested authorization.

SOLRC currently operates at a small scale on private land and on BLM land used under annual permits. Their proposal to expand onto BLM-administered land would substantially increase the unique recreational and educational opportunity available to the public at the center, capitalizing on the San Juan Mountain's rugged beauty, steep and challenging terrain, abundant snowfall, and intact high-elevation ecosystems. In terms of winter recreation, the centerpiece of SOLRC's operation, the requested authorization would allow a one-of-a-kind melding of minimal ski area infrastructure with otherwise undeveloped terrain. The intended result would be an affordable opportunity for advanced and expert skiers to obtain an extreme, backcountry type experience previously available only to helicopter and cat skiers at a high price or to those with the specialized knowledge, equipment, and stamina to access high-elevation backcountry on their own. (Note that the term "skiing" is used in this document to include alpine skiing, alpine touring, telemark skiing, snowboarding, and other snow-sliding sports.) The requested use authorization would also increase the scope of year-round educational and summer recreational opportunities available at SOLRC.

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

The Proposed Action is BLM issuance of authorization for long-term commercial operations on the 1,300 acres of public land as requested by SOLRC. SOLRC's request is for a 40-year authorization, but the term and other administrative details of the authorization would be at the discretion of the agency, documented in the ROD or subsequent agreements between the BLM and SOLRC. The following elements of the SOLRC operation would be authorized on BLM administered land:

- Use of approximately 1,300 acres of BLM administered land for skiing in the winter, hiking in the summer, and educational programs year-round.
- Unrestricted skier access to all permit-area terrain not closed or otherwise restricted by SOLRC for snow safety reasons.
- Use of the permit area by up to 475 SOLRC guests per day.
- Up to 17 temporary foot/skier bridges across Cement Creek within the permit area of which six would be on BLM land.

- A summer and winter mountaineering route following the ridgeline south from the upper terminal of the chairlift, eastward across the top of Storm Peak, then northward and westward around the permit area boundary to tie into CR 52 near Gladstone.
- A hiking trail from the ridgeline near the upper lift terminal down into the Colorado Basin, connecting with County Road 52 (CR 52).
- A small solar-powered radio repeater on public land near the existing radio reflector on 13,053 Peak (an unnamed peak northwest of Storm Peak, within the permit area).

Note that the Proposed Action includes only those elements of SOLRC's planned development that involve BLM administered land. Other elements involve private land only, including a permanent base lodge, 10 yurts or cabins for overnight accommodation, and two rope tows on the ridgeline adjacent to the upper chairlift terminal. These elements do not require federal agency approval and may be completed regardless of the BLM's decision regarding the Proposed Action. Therefore, these private-land elements are addressed in this analysis as part of the No-Action Alternative.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The CEQ regulations for implementing NEPA direct that agencies define the underlying purpose and need to which they are responding in preparing an EIS (40 CFR 1502.13). In this instance, SOLRC submitted an application for authorization to conduct long-term commercial operations on BLM administered lands. SOLRC's objective is to establish a viable business enterprise, drawing on the project area's outstanding natural resource base to provide unique forms of mountain recreation and education.

The BLM is responding to SOLRC's application in accordance with NEPA, analyzing and disclosing the environmental impacts of issuing the requested land-use authorization. A successful operation would further the BLM's objective of providing a broad range of recreational opportunities on the lands under their administration.

If the BLM decides to issue the requested authorization based on this analysis, an amendment of the *San Juan/San Miguel Planning Area Resource Management Plan (RMP)* will have to be completed to include SOLRC's programs among the recreational offerings on public lands in the planning area before the authorization can be completed.

## **DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

The decisions to be made in consideration of this EIS are whether, and under what conditions, to authorize SOLRC's requested long-term use of the permit area and whether to amend the RMP to allow for the proposed activities. The agency official making these decisions will be the BLM Colorado State Director.

The decision maker may select a combination of elements of the Proposed Action and the alternatives if the environmental impacts of the combined elements are adequately assessed and disclosed in this EIS. The decision maker may also choose to adopt some or all of the mitigation measures identified in this EIS or to require additional measures.

The land-use authorization will be issued under the authority of FLPMA, section 302(b), as implemented through regulations under 43 CFR Part 2920, Leases, Permits, and Easements. The decision to amend the RMP to allow for the proposed activity will be made under 43 CFR 1610.5-5, Resource Management Plan Approval, Use, and Modification - Amendment. The decision will be documented in a Record of Decision that will be prepared and released at the conclusion of this EIS process.

## **ISSUES ADDRESSED**

Public involvement is a central component of the NEPA process, and several opportunities for participation by interested individuals, organizations, and agencies are being provided through the course of this EIS process. To date, two formal scoping comment periods and several public meetings have been completed to assist the BLM in identifying the environmental issues and concerns to be addressed through this NEPA process. The first scoping period was from August 9 through September 7, 2001, following initiation of the original EA process that was originally initiated to address this project. Public meetings were held during this period at Durango (August 22) and Silverton (August 23). The BLM received a total of 139 scoping responses comprising 408 specific comments. The substantive issues identified are summarized below.

### *Watershed Resources*

The Cement Creek watershed has been severely impacted by mining activity, and a number of concerns were raised regarding additive impacts due to the proposed SOLRC operation. These concerns included: the potential for human waste to contaminate water, increased soil erosion due to construction and bicycle use, and the water quality impacts of avalanche-control explosives. Concern regarding the availability of adequate potable water for SOLRC was also noted.

### *Vegetation*

The permit area comprises different vegetation types, ranging from wetland and riparian areas in Colorado Basin and along Cement Creek, through upper montane spruce-dominated forest, to alpine communities at higher elevations. Comments cited potential impacts of construction and summer recreation on special status plant species (i.e., federal and state listed threatened and endangered species as well as BLM and Forest Service identified sensitive species), on alpine vegetation communities, and on wetlands and riparian areas.

### *Wildlife*

Associated with the project area's diverse vegetation communities are a range of wildlife species. Potential impacts to special status species, particularly Canada lynx, were identified as a key concern. Potential impacts to elk, grouse, ptarmigan, subnivian species, and aquatic species were noted, and assessment of the effects of summer recreation, winter recreation, avalanche control, and facility construction on these species was requested.

### *Land Use*

Public land and resources in and adjacent to the proposed project area provide for a number of current uses, including various forms of dispersed recreation, livestock grazing, and mining related activities. There are also a number of private inholdings within the proposed permit area. These are patented mining claims, some of which have not been developed beyond the level necessary to secure the original patent, while others have been developed with recreational or year-round residences. Right-of-way authorizations exist in the vicinity of the proposed permit area for roads (SH 110A, CR 52, and access roads), powerlines, telephone, and communication sites. Concerns regarding the Proposed Action's impact on land use involved changes in public

land access and use, the impacts to existing uses of public lands, SOLRC's ultimate objectives, and impacts to other private property and property rights within the proposed permit boundary.

*Socioeconomics*

The potential for positive impacts to the depressed economies of Silverton and San Juan County was the basis for many expressions of support for the project. Specific issues raised included effects on local business, resident and visitor populations, and local schools. Potential increases in property values, taxes, and the cost of public services, including search and rescue and emergency medical services, were also noted, as was the availability of adequate emergency medical services.

*Recreation*

Comments in this category cited the unique nature of the SOLRC skiing experience (i.e., advanced, lift-served backcountry skiing with limited associated infrastructure), its lower level of impact on the environment, and its lower price relative to other resort or commercial guided skiing options. The main issue raised was whether SOLRC would in fact attract enough guests to achieve the desired purpose and need and to justify the allocation of public resources. An adequate balance between on-mountain and base-area capacities at SOLRC was also a cited concern. (Note: the issue of access to the permit area by other recreationists is addressed under Land Use.)

*Safety*

The proposed permit area is subject to frequent and severe avalanche hazard, and the primary safety issue raised was snow safety. Specific concerns included SOLRC's capability to adequately provide for the safety of their guests and the issue of liability for avalanche related injuries. The potential hazard to SOLRC visitors posed by abandoned mines was cited, as were the potential for collisions between SOLRC skiers and snowmobilers on CR 52 and the potential for heightened wildfire hazard due to increased visitation.

*Transportation*

Access to the project area from Silverton is via SH 110A. Commentors questioned the capacity of the road to handle the additional traffic, the adequacy of parking for SOLRC, the impact of avalanche control efforts and associated closures on traffic parking, and how emergency access would be maintained.

*Aesthetic Resources*

The relatively undisturbed, natural character of the project area accounts for much of its attraction to recreationists, sightseers, other visitors, and residents. The potential impacts of construction noise and dust, avalanche control explosives, and proposed structures on the area's aesthetic values were noted by commentors, as was concern over the long-term visual impact if the operation should fail.

*Cultural Resources*

The project area includes several historic mining sites. Potential impacts to such sites were a cited concern.

**SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION, ALTERNATIVES, AND MITIGATION**

SOLRC's proposal to the BLM constitutes the Proposed Action addressed in this EIS. NEPA also requires that the impacts of not undertaking a proposed federal action be analyzed to provide

a baseline for impact assessment. The No-Action Alternative (Alternative A) in this case is not issuing the requested land-use authorization, effectively restricting SOLRC’s operation to private lands. Of the issues identified through scoping and summarized above, only snow safety was determined to be an alternative-driving issue. One alternative (Alternative B) centered on providing only guided skiing on BLM administered land to address safety concerns. Another alternative (Alternative C) was developed as a hybrid, authorizing both guided and unguided skiing depending on snow stability conditions. These alternatives are summarized in Table S-1.

|   | <b>Proposed Action</b>  | <b>Alt. A – No Action</b> | <b>Alt. B – Guided Only</b>  | <b>Alt. C – Guided and Unguided</b>   |
|---|---|---------------------------|--|---|
| Approximate acreage of public land in permit. | 1,300   | None.                     | 1,300  | 1,300   |
| Snow safety approach.                         | Resort style hazard reduction, focusing on avalanche control.               | Same as Proposed Action.  | Backcountry style hazard avoidance, focusing on stability testing. | Integrated resort style and backcountry style.  |
| Projected daily visitation on BLM land.       | 475   | 0                         | 100 (based on skier:guide ratio of 8:1)                            | 475   |
| Adjunct facilities on public land.            | Mountaineering route, hiking trail, foot/skier bridges, and radio repeater. | None.                     | Same as Proposed Action.   | Same as Proposed Action, plus alternative skiing, hiking, and biking trail from lift top to base area, including portions on public land. |
| Helicopter use on public land.                | No.   | No.                       | Yes.   | No.   |
| Tree thinning on public land.                 | No.   | No.                       | No.  | Yes.  |

NEPA requires that an EIS identify and assess a full range of mitigation measures to avoid or reduce the adverse environmental effects of a proposed federal action. The agency decision maker then adopts some or all of the identified measures in the ROD. Thirty-eight mitigation measures were identified and assessed in the course of this analysis. These measures address impacts in the areas of watershed resources, vegetation, wildlife, land use, recreation, safety, transportation, aesthetic resources, and cultural resources. Any or all measures may be required by the decision maker under the Proposed Action or any alternative selected in the ROD.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Table S-2 summarizes the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives identified through this analysis.

| <b>Table S-2. Summary of impacts of Proposed Action and alternatives.</b> |   |  |  |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Alternative/<br/>Impact<br/>Type</b>                                   | <b>Proposed Action</b>  | <b>Alt. A –<br/>No Action</b>  | <b>Alt. B –<br/>Guided-Only Operation</b>  | <b>Alt. C – Integrated<br/>Guided and Unguided<br/>Operation</b>  |
| <b>Watershed<br/>Resources</b>  | In addition to watershed impacts described under the No-Action Alternative, disturbance on public land would occur during trail construction (about 0.5 acres) and placement of up to six temporary foot/skier bridges. Explosives use and residue would be the most extensive under the Proposed Action, but notable adverse water quality impacts are not anticipated. The safety mitigation measure calling for an access road would create an additional 3 acres of surface disturbance (about 60 percent on public land). Impacts to sediment concentrations manageable with suggested mitigation. | Adequate culinary water supply would be available for base-area facilities. Most watershed impacts would occur under this alternative. Construction of base area structures and rope tows would disturb a total of about 0.4 acres of private land. A total of six temporary foot/skier bridges would be placed on private land. The extent of impacts from explosives residue would be limited to private land and would consequently be less than any other alternative. | Impacts from explosives residue would be somewhat less extensive than the Proposed Action due to the reduced level of avalanche control associated with guided-only operation. Otherwise similar to the Proposed Action. | Construction of the alternative lift trail for hiking/biking would disturb an additional 0.6 acres. Otherwise similar to the Proposed Action. |
| <b>Vegetation</b>   | In addition to vegetation disturbance described under the No-Action Alternative, hiking trail construction would disturb 0.5 acres of alpine vegetation. Summer recreation activities could result in additional  | Most project elements generating vegetation impacts would occur under this alternative. Construction would disturb 0.4 acres in the base area, in addition to the 7.4, 1.3, and 3.9 acres of clearing and grading that have previously   | Similar to the Proposed Action.  | About 0.4, 0.1, and 0.1 acres of additional disturbance in the upper montane spruce forest, forest clearings, and alpine communities,         |

| <b>Table S-2 (cont'd). Summary of impacts of Proposed Action and alternatives.</b> |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Alternative/<br/>Impact<br/>Type</b>  | <b>Proposed Action</b>   | <b>Alt. A –<br/>No Action</b>   | <b>Alt. B –<br/>Guided-Only Operation</b>  | <b>Alt. C – Integrated<br/>Guided and Unguided<br/>Operation</b>  |
| <b>Vegetation<br/>(cont'd)</b>   | trampling disturbance. The access road proposed as safety mitigation would result in 1.8, 0.5, and 0.7 acres of cut-and-fill disturbance on a steep slope in the upper montane spruce forest, forest clearings, and alpine communities, respectively. No impacts to wetlands, and no known impacts to Special Status plants are projected.   | occurred on private land in the upper montane spruce forest, forest clearings, and alpine communities, respectively. Summer recreation impacts to alpine communities would be reduced by restricting trails and organized activities to private land, although some guests would likely follow the ridgeline up from the top of the lift. No impacts to wetlands, and no known impacts to Special Status plants are projected.  |  | respectively, due to construction of the alternative lift trail for hiking/biking. In addition, thinning (up to 20 percent stem removal) would take place on 182 acres of montane spruce forest. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action.   |
| <b>Wildlife</b>  | Project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, Canada lynx. Potential impacts would be minimized by suggested mitigation. Potential impacts to other federal, state, and BLM species of concern would be minor or nonexistent, depending on species presence. Short-term impacts and potential displacement of species of high public interest could occur. Potential impacts to aquatic species would be negligible and mitigable. Impacts to subnivean species would not change notably from natural conditions. | Human-wildlife encounters and other associated recreation disturbances are not anticipated on public land, as the project area would be limited to SOLRC land. Snow-compacted corridors could increase due to concentrated use of terrain. Minor water depletions associated with the culinary well would contribute to cumulative downstream impacts to endangered fish species. Potential impacts to aquatic habitat and subnivean species would be less than under the Proposed Action. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action. | Potential noise disturbance to wildlife from helicopter use. Potential human-wildlife encounters on public land in the winter would be less than under the Proposed Action because winter recreation on public land would be more dispersed and involve fewer people. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action. | Human-wildlife encounters and other associated winter recreation disturbances would be greatest under Alternative C, because of the large amount of available ski terrain and high number of skiers anticipated. Thinning could affect forested habitat to some degree. In summer wildlife encounters on public land could increase with the construction of a new hiking/biking trail under the chair lift. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action. |

| <b>Table S-2 (cont'd). Summary of impacts of Proposed Action and alternatives.</b> |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Alternative/<br/>Impact<br/>Type</b>  | <b>Proposed Action</b>   | <b>Alt. A –<br/>No Action</b>   | <b>Alt. B –<br/>Guided-Only Operation</b>  | <b>Alt. C – Integrated<br/>Guided and Unguided<br/>Operation</b>  |
| <b>Land Use</b>  | Winter recreational access to public land would be restricted. Summer access would not be affected. Road access would be affected during closures of SH 110A or CR 52 for avalanche control. Private property rights and development potential would not be impacted. Private property boundary management would continue as under current permit. Grazing and mining operations would not be impacted. Use of the project area for commercial recreation could potentially be impacted.                         | Public lands surrounding the permit area would be available for public use, but access would be periodically limited by temporary closures of SH 110A and CR 52. Road closures and associated access impacts would be less frequent than under the Proposed Action. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action.  | Potential for private property closure violations would be less than under the Proposed Action since skiers would be guided. Potential impacts to commercial recreation would be less. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action.  | Similar to the Proposed Action.   |
| <b>Socio-<br/>economics</b>  | Annual visitation projected to reach 15-25,000 skier visits, with increased demand for goods and services and population increases due to increased employment. Direct winter employment: 24 full-time and five part-time. Direct summer employment: 14 full-time and one part-time. Short-term and long-term housing needs would be met by surrounding communities. Impacts to community services would be met by existing infrastructure. Skier spending and summer visitation would strengthen local economy. | Annual visitation less than Proposed Action projection, with slightly increased demand for goods and services and slight population increase. Direct winter employment: six full-time and four part-time. Direct summer employment: 10 full-time and 2 part-time. Slightly increased demand for housing and community services. Local economy strengthened less than under Proposed Action and action alternatives. | Annual visitation less likely to reach upper range of skier visits projected under Proposed Action, with less demand for goods and services and less population increase. Direct winter employment: 17 full-time and 10 part-time. Direct summer employment: 14 full-time and one part-time. Skier spending and summer visitation would strengthen local economy less than Proposed Action. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action. | Annual visitation more likely to reach or exceed 15-25,000 skier visits than under Proposed Action, with highest demand for goods and services and greatest population increases. Direct winter employment: 28 full-time and seven part-time. Direct summer employment: 14 full-time and one part-time. |



| <b>Table S-2 (cont'd). Summary of impacts of Proposed Action and alternatives.</b> |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Alternative/<br/>Impact<br/>Type</b>  | <b>Proposed Action</b>   | <b>Alt. A –<br/>No Action</b>   | <b>Alt. B –<br/>Guided-Only Operation</b>  | <b>Alt. C – Integrated<br/>Guided and Unguided<br/>Operation</b>  |
| <b>Socio-<br/>economics<br/>(cont'd)</b>   |  |   |  | Skier spending and summer visitation would strengthen local economy the most. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action.  |
| <b>Recreation</b>  | Annual visitation projected at 15-25,000 skier visits per season. SOLRC would offer a unique skiing product that would dovetail with current market trends indicating that skiers are seeking a backcountry skiing experience. Summer demand would be increased by addition of hiking trail, mountaineering route, and expansive terrain for educational programs. balance between ski area capacity and infrastructure. | Skiing would be limited to private land. Limited terrain would result in high skier densities on trails, packed snow conditions, and long lift lines. Base facilities would be inadequate to serve peak day visitors. SOLRC would be unlikely to attract the number of guests projected under the Proposed Action because the type of recreation product offered would be better provided by regional resorts. Summer demand largely restricted to scenic lift rides. Base area capacity potentially in excess of on-mountain capacity. | Up to 100 skiers would use public land in guided parties (based on 8:1 skier:guide ratio). A helicopter would be authorized to transport skiers and conduct snow safety work. Low skier density and professional assistance from guides would provide a desirable skiing product for those in the guided skiing groups.<br><br>The remaining 375 guests would be required to remain on private land. Lower skier densities would result in a better skier experience than under the No-Action Alt., but this experience would be similar to that at regional resorts, and SOLRC would be unlikely to achieve the visitation levels projected under the Proposed Action. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action. | Use of the entire permit area for unguided or guided skiing would be authorized based on snow safety conditions. Using both options would attract more visitors and make more terrain open, in general. SOLRC would be able to offer a unique skiing experience, and visitation would be similar to or exceed the Proposed Action. Addition of alternative hiking/biking trail would add to summer recreational opportunities. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action. |

| <b>Table S-2 (cont'd). Summary of impacts of Proposed Action and alternatives.</b> |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Alternative/<br/>Impact<br/>Type</b>  | <b>Proposed Action</b>   | <b>Alt. A –<br/>No Action</b>  | <b>Alt. B –<br/>Guided-Only Operation</b>  | <b>Alt. C – Integrated<br/>Guided and Unguided<br/>Operation</b>  |
| <b>Safety</b>  | Snow safety risk to public safety somewhat greater than under other alternatives but manageable through effective implementation of snow safety plan and suggested mitigation measures. Abandoned mine risk, potential for skier/snowmobile collisions on CR 52, and fire hazard all manageable with suggested mitigation.   | All potential impacts reduced by smaller scale of operation. Lowest snow safety risk to public safety because of terrain limits, but effective external boundary management to reduce risk to skiers in unmanaged terrain around ski area essential. Otherwise similar to Proposed Action. | Snow safety risk to public safety somewhat less than Proposed Action because of inherent safety of guided operation on public land and higher likelihood of effective boundary management. Risk higher than under the No-Action Alternative. Otherwise similar to Proposed Action. | Snow safety risk to public safety less than Proposed Action, mainly because of inherent safety of guided operations, greater visitation, and thus revenue generation to fund snow safety program. The Alternative Lift Trail would facilitate emergency snowmobile access. Risk still somewhat higher than under the No-Action Alternative. Otherwise similar to Proposed Action. |
| <b>Transportation</b>  | Capacity of SH 110A and available parking spaces would accommodate traffic and vehicles related to SOLRC operations. Road closures would be managed similarly to current conditions, with cooperation between SOLRC, San Juan County, and CDOT. Avalanche hazard index would be slightly elevated. Because of expanded avalanche control activities, road closures would likely be more frequent, and impacts to | Road closures would likely be less frequent than under the Proposed Action because of reduced avalanche control activities. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action.   | Road closures could be less frequent than under the Proposed Action because potentially fewer explosives used for avalanche control. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action.  | Similar to the Proposed Action.   |

| <b>Table S-2 (cont'd). Summary of impacts of Proposed Action and alternatives.</b> |   |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Alternative/<br/>Impact<br/>Type</b>  | <b>Proposed Action</b>  | <b>Alt. A –<br/>No Action</b>  | <b>Alt. B –<br/>Guided-Only Operation</b>  | <b>Alt. C – Integrated<br/>Guided and Unguided<br/>Operation</b>   |
| <b>Transportation<br/>(cont'd)</b>   | parking areas would be potentially less. Emergency access to SH 110A would continue to be provided on the basis of urgency and safety.  |  |  |  |
| <b>Aesthetic Resources</b>   | In addition to the visual impacts on private land under the No-Action Alternative, facilities authorized on BLM lands under the Proposed Action and as mitigation would be visible to the public. With suggested mitigation in place, SOLRC infrastructure constructed on public land would be consistent with applicable BLM Visual Quality Management objectives. The main noise impact would be avalanche control explosives, and this impact is not projected to change notably from current levels. Air quality impacts would be restricted to minor, temporary, construction dust. Suggested mitigation would reduce this impact. | Most visual impacts would occur under this alternative, associated with base area construction. No visual standards are in place for private lands. Development would change the visual character of the base area site but would not be inconsistent with mining and residential development in the Cement Creek watershed. Noise associated with avalanche control would continue but at reduced levels due to restriction to private land. Air quality impacts associated with construction and heating would be minor and mitigable. | Operation of a helicopter would add substantially to noise in the Cement Creek watershed. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action. | Similar to the Proposed Action.  |
| <b>Cultural Resources</b>  | There are 11 known historic mining sites and 15 isolated finds in the SOLRC project area. Seven of the 11 historic sites are recommended as eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. There would be no direct impacts to these   | The potential for indirect impacts to public-land sites would be reduced because the SOLRC operation would be restricted to private land and there would likely be fewer guests. Otherwise, similar to the Proposed Action.  | Similar to the Proposed Action.  | The potential for indirect impacts could increase under this alternative if tree thinning facilitated access to historical sites. Otherwise, |

| <b>Table S-2 (cont'd). Summary of impacts of Proposed Action and alternatives.</b> |   |                               |   |  |
|--|---|-------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Alternative/<br/>Impact<br/>Type</b>  | <b>Proposed Action</b>  | <b>Alt. A –<br/>No Action</b> | <b>Alt. B –<br/>Guided-Only Operation</b> | <b>Alt. C – Integrated<br/>Guided and Unguided<br/>Operation</b> |
| <b>Cultural<br/>Resources<br/>(cont'd)</b>   | identified cultural resources. Indirect impacts could occur due to increased visitation and associated vandalism and souvenir collection. Mitigation measures have been suggested to protect sites. |                               |   | similar to the Proposed Action.                                  |

NEPA requires that EISs disclose any unavoidable, adverse, environmental impacts of a proposed federal action. This analysis identified several such impacts, the most notable of which include:

- Wildlife: short-term impacts to the threatened Canada lynx (i.e., finding of “may affect but not likely to adversely affect”); short-term disturbance and possible displacement of species of high public interest, including elk, grouse, and ptarmigan.
- Land Use: reduced access to the project area by winter recreationists not visiting SOLRC; occasionally reduced access to adjacent private property and private inholdings.
- Safety: more people exposed to the inherent risk of backcountry-type skiing.
- Transportation: more people exposed to the inherent avalanche risk of driving on SH 110A; periodic closure of SH 110A when SOLRC conducts control work on slopes above the highway.
- Aesthetic Resources: change to the visual character of the base area due to construction of lift, buildings, and associated infrastructure.

## **PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

The BLM's *National Environmental Policy Act Handbook* (H-1790-1) directs that the manager responsible for preparing an EIS should select the agency's preferred alternative, and that the selection should be based on the results of the environmental analysis as well as other factors that influence the decision or are required under other statutory authority (Chapter V, B.2.b).

Alternative C – Integrated Guided and Unguided Operation has been selected as the agency's preferred alternative. The rationale for this selection is as follows:

- This alternative would provide the greatest recreational opportunity. In terms of diversity, it would authorize both guided and unguided options, each of which constitutes a distinctive recreational experience. In terms of the amount of terrain made available, it is projected to maximize the useable portion of the permit area. In terms of the number of people served, providing diverse opportunities on the largest land area possible would meet the desires of the greatest number of skiers.
- This alternative would best address public safety concerns. The main, alternative driving issue addressed in this EIS is snow safety, given the inherently high avalanche hazard in the San Juan Mountains. This alternative would combine the two approaches to snow safety associated with guided and unguided operations (hazard avoidance and hazard reduction, respectively), and the combination would be more effective at reducing risks to the public than either approach alone. Further, because this alternative is projected to attract more skiers than the other alternatives, it would generate more revenues to fund what will undoubtedly be an expensive snow safety program.
- This alternative would not result in any notable environment impacts beyond those associated with the Proposed Action and Alternative B.

## **ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT**

Additional opportunities for public involvement in this process include a 90-day comment period following publication of this Draft EIS. The purpose of this comment period is to allow the public to: point out inaccuracies or discrepancies in this document; comment on the adequacy of the analysis; identify new impacts, alternatives, or mitigation; or disagree with significance determinations. A 30-day protest period and a 60-day Governor's Consistency Review period follow publication of the NOA of the Final EIS in the Federal Register. The ROD is prepared after the protest and review period is complete, once any protests are resolved, and after the State Director approves the plan amendment.

The final opportunity for public involvement in this NEPA process will be the administrative appeal process following release of the ROD. In accordance with 43 CFR Part 4, Department Hearings and Appeals Procedures, individuals, organizations, or agencies with standing in this NEPA process may file a notice of appeal during a 30-day period following release of the decision. The agency will review any such appeal in accordance with the cited regulations and respond to the appeal accordingly, either affirming the decision or remanding it to the decision maker.

