



USDA Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit



Decision Memo
Heavenly Mountain Resort Exploratory Snowmaking Water Wells
Douglas County, Nevada

BACKGROUND:

In October 2008, the USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) solicited comments on a proposal to drill two on-mountain exploratory snowmaking water wells at Heavenly Mountain Resort. The Proposed Action is intended to confirm water availability for snowmaking on trails that are located within Heavenly's Forest Service-administered Special Use Permit (SUP) area. The test wells are outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin and are on the Nevada side of the ski mountain.

Due to the minor scale and minimal amount of disturbance associated with the proposed exploratory water wells, the Forest Service agreed to consider categorically excluding this project from review and approval under either an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment.

PURPOSE AND NEED:

Heavenly purchases water used for snowmaking operations on the Nevada side of the resort from the Kingsbury General Improvement District. However, Heavenly and the LTBMU currently own and control valid ground water rights that were appropriated by the State of Nevada. This proposal is intended to achieve two objectives on the Nevada-side of the resort: 1) allow Heavenly to utilize and put to beneficial use the LTBMU and Heavenly's Nevada groundwater rights for snowmaking operations and; 2) improve current and future snowmaking coverage.

PROPOSED ACTION:

The Proposed Action is to drill two exploratory water wells south of the Galaxy lift's top terminal (see attached map). One test well will be located on an existing ski trail near the intersection of *Lower Milky Way* Trail and *Orion's Belt* Trail. The second test well will be located in a previously undisturbed area adjacent to the existing Mott Canyon summer maintenance road. Each test well site is accessible by existing summer maintenance roads.

A single drill rig will be used to drill both wells, performing a 72-hour pump test to ascertain water availability. It is anticipated that, in total, the tests will take one week to complete. Each exploratory well will be drilled six inches in diameter to a depth of up to 300 feet. Approximately 2.2 cubic yards of excavated material are anticipated to be generated during drilling for each well. This material will be spread out over the project site. Temporary soil disturbance directly related to the first test well will not exceed an

approximate area of 5,000 square feet (50' x 100'). Temporary soil disturbance from the second test well will be approximately 4,500 feet in area (30' x 150'). Earth movement and vegetation disturbance will be minimized and test well sites are located outside of existing drainage ways. The disturbed areas will be delineated and revegetated, and will include site-specific BMPs that will be monitored and maintained throughout drilling by Heavenly staff consistent with Heavenly's Construction Erosion Reduction Program (CERP).¹

If the exploratory wells are successful, they will be temporarily cased and capped consistent with State of Nevada Division of Water Resources requirements. Conversion of the exploratory wells to permanent production wells will be subject to further NEPA documentation and approval. If the exploratory wells are unsuccessful, they will be abandoned, also consistent with State of Nevada Division of Water Resources requirements.

PROJECT DESIGN FEATURES:

- In the event historic properties are discovered during the implementation of this undertaking, all project related work must stop immediately, the LTBMU's Heritage Resources personnel will be notified at once and the procedures as set forth in Section 800.13 of the Council's regulations must be implemented in accordance with the guidance as stated in this sub-section.
- All earth-moving equipment, gravel, fill, or other materials are required to be weed-free. Use onsite sand, gravel, rock, or organic matter when possible. Otherwise, obtain weed-free materials from gravel pits and fill sources that have been surveyed and approved by Nevada Department of Agriculture or by a botanist or ecologist at the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.
- Use weed-free mulches, and seed sources. Salvage topsoil from project area for use in onsite revegetation. All activities that require seeding or planting must utilize locally collected native seed sources when possible. Plant and seed material should be collected from or near the project area, from within the same watershed, and at a similar elevation when possible. Persistent non-natives such as *Phleum pratense* (cultivated timothy), *Dactylis glomerata* (orchard grass), or *Lolium* spp. (ryegrass) will not be used. This requirement is consistent with the USFS Region 5 policy that directs the use of native plant material for revegetation and restoration for maintaining “the overall national goal of conserving the biodiversity, health, productivity, and sustainable use of forest, rangeland, and aquatic ecosystems”. Seed mixes must be approved by a Forest Service botanist.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION:

CEQ regulations allow Federal agencies to exclude from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) categories of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment, based on the agency's experience and knowledge. I have concluded that the proposed action fits under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3): “*Short-term (1 year or less) mineral,*

¹ Per the 2007 Heavenly Mountain Resort Master Plan EIR/EIS/EIS

energy or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-county travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads.”

This proposed action fits within this category because the two proposed test wells are temporary in nature and have no extraordinary circumstances associated with them (discussed below). If pumping tests for these two wells have favorable results, permanent wells could be installed in the future; however, this would be contingent on site-specific analysis and approval per the National Environmental Policy Act.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES:

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species –

A Biological Assessment / Biological Evaluation (BA/BE) for wildlife and aquatic species (Project Record Document B3) and a Biological Evaluation for sensitive plant species (Project Record Document B1) was prepared in support of the Heavenly Mountain Resort Exploratory Snowmaking Water Wells proposal.

Based on the description of the proposed action and the evaluation contained in the BA/BE, it was determined that the proposed Galaxy test well project will not affect any wildlife or aquatic threatened, endangered or sensitive species or their habitat.

Based on the description of the proposed action and the evaluation contained in the sensitive plant BE, it was determined that the proposed Galaxy test well project:

Will Not Affect *Arabis tiehmii* (Tiehm’s rock cress), *Botrychium ascendens* (Upswept moonwort), *Botrychium crenulatum* (Scalloped moonwort), *Botrychium lineare* (Slender moonwort), *Botrychium lunaria* (Common moonwort), *Botrychium minganense* (Mingan moonwort), *Botrychium montanum* (Western goblin), *Bruchia bolanderi* (Bolander’s candle moss), *Dendrocollybia racemosa* (Branched collybia), *Draba asterophora* var. *macrocarpa* (Cup Lake draba), *Epilobium howellii* (Subalpine fireweed), *Erigeron miser* (Starved daisy), *Helodium blandowii* (Blandow’s bog-moss), *Hulsea brevifolia* (Short-leaved Hulsea), *Lewisia longipetala* (Long-petaled lewisia), *Meesia triquetra* (Three-ranked hump-moss), *Meesia uliginosa* (Broad-nerved hump-moss), *Peltigera hydrothyria* (Veined water lichen), and *Rorippa subumbellata* (Tahoe yellow cress), because there is not suitable habitat within the project area.

May Affect Individuals, But Is Not Likely to Result in a Trend Toward Federal Listing or Loss of Viability for *Arabis rigidissima* var. *demota* (Galena Creek rock cress), *Draba asterophora* var. *asterophora* (Tahoe draba), *Eriogonum umbellatum* var. *torreyanum* (Torrey’s or Donner Pass buckwheat), *Lewisia kelloggii* ssp. *hutchisonii* (Kellogg’s lewisia), and *Lewisia kelloggii* ssp. *kelloggii* (Kellogg’s lewisia); because of the presence of suitable habitat for the above mentioned species, it is possible that isolated species may occur within the project and undiscovered individuals may be inadvertently affected. For this reason (potential impact to undiscovered individuals) a

determination of “may impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability” has been made for these species.

2. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

The test wells are not located in flood plains or in close proximity to any wetlands. There are no municipal watersheds in the Tahoe Basin.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas

No congressionally designated wilderness areas are within the project area. This decision will not affect specially designated areas.

4. Inventoried roadless areas

There are no inventoried roadless areas in, or near, the project area.

5. Research Natural Areas

There are no research natural areas in, or near, the project area.

6. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites –

The project proposal was sent to the Washoe Tribe and no comments or concerns were received. Alaskan sites do not apply to the California region.

7. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas

Pursuant to Section 800.3(a)(1) of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation’s regulations 36 CFR Part 800 – Protection of Historic Properties – the LTBMU’s Heritage Resources Manager reviewed the proposed undertaking and determined that this activity does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties (October 2008 Proposed Test Wells Project, Heavenly Ski Resort, South Lake Tahoe Vicinity, Douglas County, NV; TB-2009-002, R2009051900002; Project Record Document B4).

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS:

This decision is consistent with the LTBMU’s administration of Heavenly’s SUP area. It is consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4347) and the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, as required by the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 1600-1614). A forest plan consistency spreadsheet was completed for this project (Project Record Document C1) which shows that this project is consistent with the Forest Plan.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:

Scoping notices were mailed to 16 organizations and agencies at the state and local level, as well as the Washoe Tribe. The Tahoe Daily Tribune published an article on January 20th announcing the test well proposal. The scoping notice was also posted on the LTBMU website on January 10, 2009.

No comments were received in response to scoping on this project.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE:

Heavenly plans to drill the test wells in July or August, 2009.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES:

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f) as it is a decision "for actions that have been categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS."

CONTACT PERSON:

Matt Dickinson, Interdisciplinary Team Leader

Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit

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South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

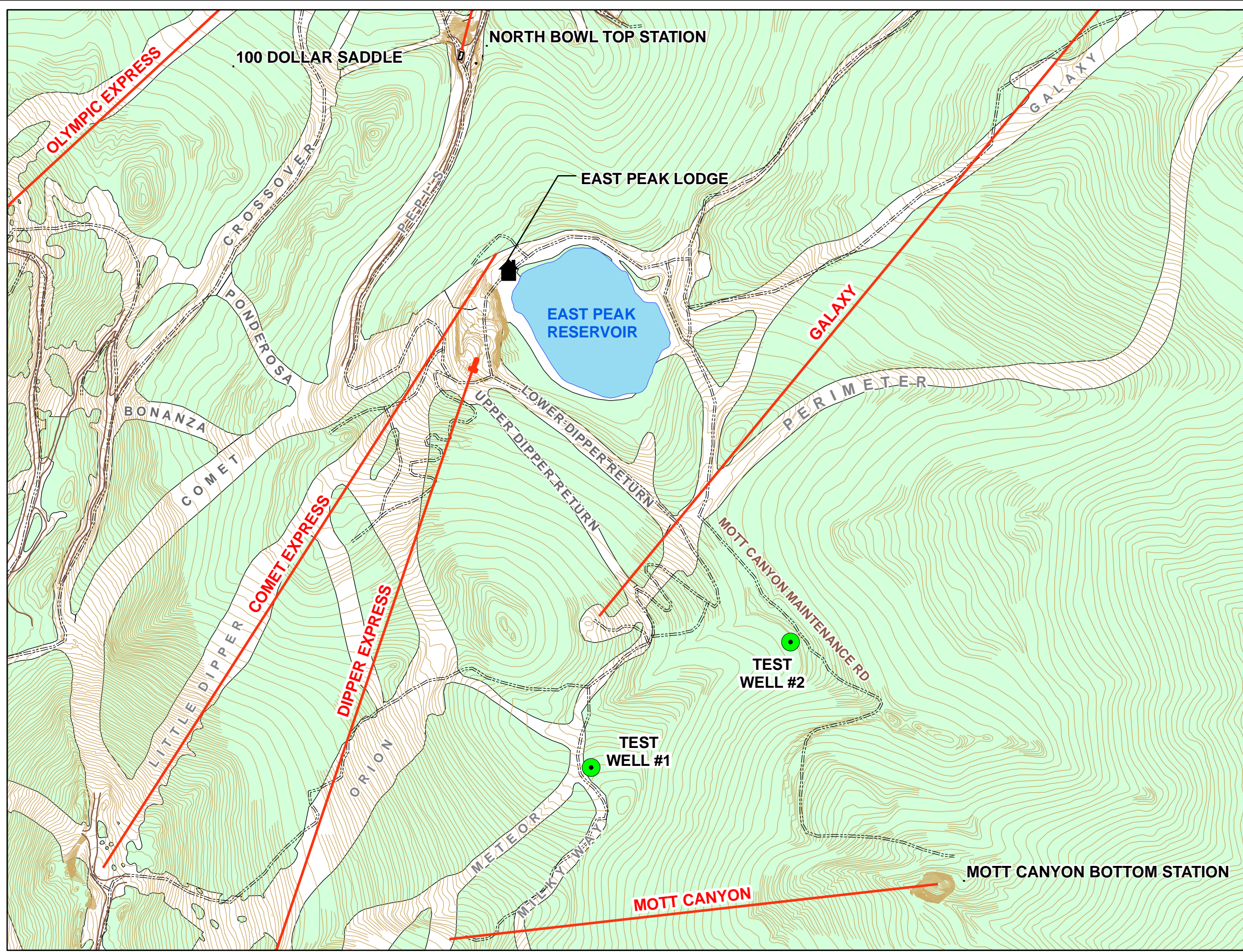
SIGNATURE AND DATE:

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified in §220.6(d) and (e). My decision concludes that no extraordinary circumstances exist related to the proposed action that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the human environment, and that the decision is not subject to appeal.

My conclusion is based on information presented in this document, my familiarity with the project areas and the entirety of the project file.





TERRI MARCERON
Forest Supervisor, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit

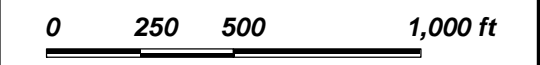
4.7.09
Date



Proposed Galaxy Lift Snowmaking Test Wells

LEGEND

-  Existing Lifts
-  Test Well Location
-  Existing Mountain Road



Scale: 1" = 500'
 Contour Interval: 25 Ft
 Date: 9.18.2008
 Created By: JT
 Produced By:

