



File Code: 1950

Date: January 9, 2009

Dear Interested Individuals,

The USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) is seeking comments on a proposal to drill two 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 boundary. The proposed test wells are outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin and are on the Nevada side of the ski mountain.

The Forest Service will be lead agency for this process. Due to the minor scale and minimal amount of disturbance associated with the proposed exploratory water wells, the Forest Service is considering categorically excluding them from review and approval under either an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment.

In order to categorically exclude a proposed action, it must fit one of the categories identified in Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (36 CFR 220.6) and have no extraordinary circumstances. The Proposed Action is consistent with 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3): *"Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads."*

Proposed Action Description

Currently, 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 appropriated through the Nevada State Engineer's Office. If pumping tests for these two wells have favorable results, permanent wells could be installed in the future. This proposal is intended to determine if two objectives can be met 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.

The Proposed Action is to drill two exploratory water wells south of the Galaxy lift's top terminal, (see enclosed project area map). One test well would be located on an existing ski trail near the intersection of *Lower Milky Way* Trail and *Orion's Belt* Trail. The second test well would 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 would be used to drill both wells, performing a 72-hour pump test to ascertain water availability. It is anticipated that, in total, the tests would take one week to complete.



Each exploratory well would 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 square feet in area (30' x 150'). Test well sites are located outside of existing drainage ways. No noxious weeds were detected in the project area. The disturbed areas will be 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 would 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 vehicles, especially large vehicles, will be cleaned when they come from a known weed infested area. Equipment will be considered clean when visual inspection does not reveal soil, seeds, plant material, or other such debris. When working in known weed infested areas equipment shall then be cleaned at a washing station before moving to other National Forest System lands which do not contain noxious weeds.
- 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 Pacific Southwest Region 5 policy that directs the use of native plant material for revegetation and

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

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.

- After the project is completed the LTBMU Noxious Weed Coordinator shall be notified. The project area will be monitored for 3 years subsequent to project implementation to ensure additional weed species do not become established in the areas affected by the project and to ensure that known weeds do not spread.

Timing

The proposed exploratory water wells will be drilled in July and August, 2009.

How to Comment and Timeframe

We are asking for your comments on this Proposed Action. This scoping notice is intended to provide those interested in, or affected by, this project with an opportunity to make their concerns known. If you have information the Forest Service may not be aware of, or feel you have issues regarding potential effects of the Proposed Action, please send your comments to Matt Dickinson, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, 35 College Dr., South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning the Heavenly Mountain Resort Exploratory Snowmaking Water Wells should be submitted by **February 23, 2009**. The office business hours for those providing hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may be provided during normal business hours via telephone (530) 543-2769 or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-pacificsouthwest-LTBMU@fs.fed.us (please put “Heavenly Mountain Exploratory Water Wells” in the subject line).

Sincerely,



TERRI MARCERON
Forest Supervisor