

3.17 DISCLOSURES

3.17.1 Introduction

NEPA requires consideration of the relationship between short-term uses of man's environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity (40 CFR 1502.16). As declared by Congress, this includes using all practicable means and measures, including financial and technical assistance, in a manner calculated to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic and other requirements of recent and future generations of Americans (NEPA Section 101).

As per the NEPA requirements, this section discusses the following topics: short-term uses and long-term productivity; unavoidable adverse impacts; irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources; effects on social groups, consumers, civil rights, minority groups, women, and environmental justice; effects on American Indian rights; effects on farmlands, rangelands, and forestlands; effects on energy requirements and conservation potential; and the urban quality and the design of the built environment, including the reuse and conservation potential.

3.17.2 Short-Term Uses and Long-Term Productivity

The Multiple Use - Sustained Yield Act of 1960 requires the Forest Service to manage NFSL for multiple uses, including timber, recreation, fish and wildlife, range and watershed. All renewable resources are to be managed in such a way that they are available for future generations. Trail clearing prescriptions can be considered a short-term use of a renewable resource. As a renewable resource, trees can be reestablished and grown again if the productivity of the land is not impaired.

Additional short-term impacts include grading associated with trail and lift construction. Grading impacts would be partially mitigated through Mitigation Measures, Management Requirements and Other Management Provisions (refer to Tables 2.4-2, 2.4-3, and 2.4-4).

Managing the productivity of the land is a complex, long-term objective. All Action Alternatives protect the long-term productivity of the White Pass Study Area through the use of specific Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, and Mitigation Measures, Management Requirements, and Other Management Provisions. Long-term productivity could change as a result of various management activities (e.g., trail clearing and subsequent vegetation management) proposed in the alternatives. Ski area management activities would have direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the economic, social and biological environment (refer to Sections 3.10 – Social and Economic Factors, 3.5 – Vegetation and 3.6 – Wildlife).

Soil and water are two key factors in ecosystem productivity, and these resources would be protected in all alternatives to avoid damage that could take years to correct. Habitat and species productivity are best

measured by Management Indicator Species identified by the USFS. Management Indicator Species are used to represent the habitat requirements of wildlife species found within the White Pass Study Area. All alternatives would provide and protect, to a reasonable extent, the wildlife habitat necessary to contribute to the maintenance of viable, well-distributed populations of existing native and non-native species. The abundance and diversity of wildlife species depends on the quality, quantity and distribution of habitat, whether for breeding, feeding or resting. By managing habitat of indicator species, the other species associated with the same habitat would also benefit (refer to Section 3.6.2.7). The alternatives are consistent with Standards and Guidelines (refer to Section 3.1.1 – Forest Plan Amendment), and include Mitigation Measures, Management Requirements, and Other Management Provisions for maintaining long-term habitat and species productivity. The alternatives vary in degree of risk to wildlife habitat and habitat capability (refer to Section 3.6).

3.17.3 Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

Implementation of the Action Alternatives would result in some unavoidable adverse impacts. Although the design of the Proposed Action and the alternatives include Mitigation Measures, Management Requirements, and Other Management Provisions (refer to Tables 2.4-2, 2.4-3, and 2.4-4) to reduce potential adverse impacts, some adverse impacts could occur that cannot be completely mitigated. The unavoidable adverse impacts identified below are those that are expected to occur after implementation of the Mitigation Measures, Management Requirements, and Other Management Provisions, or that cannot be completely mitigated away. While these impacts are anticipated, they are of limited scope as analyzed and described in the referenced sections of this FEIS.

3.17.3.1 Geology and Soils

The Action Alternatives would result in a loss of productive soils associated with the clearing, grading, and construction associated with proposed lift towers and terminals (e.g., *Basin, Hogback Express*, or *PCT* chairs), parking lot (2.5 acres for Alternatives 6 and 9, and 7 acres for Modified Alternative 4), lodge construction, and trail grading (Holiday trail grading and egress trail grading to Hogback Basin lifts). The construction of the lift towers, trails and other facilities would result in the conversion of potentially productive soils to a developed condition rendering these areas non-productive (refer to Chapter 2 and Section 3.2 – Geology and Soils).

3.17.3.2 Watershed

The Action Alternatives would result in an increase of solar exposure reaching streams and wetlands, stemming from the loss of vegetation (refer to Section 3.3 – Watershed Resources). Additionally, all Action Alternatives would increase the number of stream crossings, and increase the amount of potentially unstable stream banks.

3.17.3.3 Vegetation

The Action Alternatives would result in a loss of mixed conifer and mountain hemlock parkland communities associated with the clearing and grading of ski trails and lift corridors. Modified Alternative 4, Alternative 6 and Alternative 9 would result in clearing in forest stands with old-growth characteristics (the Medium tree – Multi-story – Closed Canopy forest structure). Alternative 9 would result in the most clearing in forest stands with old-growth characteristics, as compared to the other alternatives (refer to Section 3.5 – Vegetation). Alternative 2, Modified Alternative 4, and Alternative 6 would result in a loss of mountain hemlock parkland communities (refer to Section 3.5.3.1).

3.17.3.4 Recreation

Alternative 2 and Modified Alternative 4 would result in a loss of backcountry skiing opportunities and an alteration of the roadless character of Hogback and Pigtail basins. Alternative 6 would result in a loss of backcountry skiing opportunities and an alteration of the roadless character of Pigtail Basin. Alternative 2, Modified Alternative 4 and Alternative 6 would result in the elimination of a portion of the White Pass Inventoried Roadless Area from placement on the inventory of potential wilderness areas for the life of the ski area (refer to Section 3.11 – Recreation). Modified Alternative 4 would result in an altered experience for PCNST users. While the PCNST reroute would maintain an uninterrupted experience for hikers, a change in the experience would occur nonetheless. Alternatives 2 and 6 would result in an altered experience for PCNST users, as a chairlift would interrupt the wilderness experience of the hiker. Alternative 9 would result in an altered experience for PCT users. As described for Modified Alternative 4, while the PCNST reroute in Alternative 9 would maintain an uninterrupted experience for hikers, a change in the experience would occur nonetheless (refer to Section 3.15 – Visual Resources).

3.17.3.5 Wildlife

The Action Alternatives would result in a decrease in Nesting, Foraging and Roosting as well as dispersal habitat for Northern Spotted Owl, which May Affect and is Likely to Adversely Affect northern spotted owl (refer to Section 3.6 – Wildlife).

3.17.3.6 Visual Resources

Increased development in Pigtail and Hogback basins under Alternative 2, Modified Alternative 4 and Alternative 6 would result in a more developed character of the Hogback Basin, with a VQO of retention (refer to Section 3.15 – Visual Resources).

3.17.4 Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources

Irreversible commitments of resources are those that are forever lost and cannot be reversed. Irrecoverable commitments of resources are considered to be those that are lost for a period of time and, in time, can be replaced.

3.17.4.1 Geology and Soil Resources

Irreversible commitments of soil and geologic resources resulting from the Action Alternatives would be limited to the loss of small areas of productive soil from excavation and construction of the lift terminals and towers, parking area and lodge (refer to Section 3.2 – Geology and Soils). No prominent geologic features would be removed or impacted by the Action Alternatives. Irretrievable commitments of soil and geologic resources resulting from the Action Alternatives include the loss of soil productivity in graded areas for the life of the White Pass operation.

3.17.4.2 Watershed Resources

Irretrievable commitments of watershed resources would result from the loss of shading vegetation on streams and wetlands for the duration of ski trail vegetation management operations (refer to Section 3.3 – Watershed Resources). Irretrievable commitments would result from stream crossings (culverts and bridges) on streams for the duration of their use (refer to Section 3.3.3.1).

3.17.4.3 Vegetation Resources

The loss of mixed conifer and mountain hemlock parkland vegetation in developed areas would be irretrievable as long as the area is maintained as a ski area (refer to Section 3.5 – Vegetation). Should the time come that the ski area would no longer be desired or viable, then use of the area would be discontinued and structures removed, resulting in the gradual return of conditions to a pre-development state.

3.17.4.4 Wildlife Resources

Irretrievable commitments of wildlife resources include the loss of mixed conifer and mountain hemlock parkland habitat in areas proposed for development under the Action Alternatives for as long as the ski area is active (refer to Section 3.6 – Wildlife). Additionally, the construction of ski trails would result in an irretrievable loss of forested habitat through the creation of new forest edge areas. These edge areas would impact small, terrestrial animals (i.e., low mobility species such as mollusks and frogs) that are adapted to microhabitats within forested areas.

3.17.4.5 Recreation

Irretrievable commitments of land use include loss of backcountry opportunities in Hogback and Pigtail Basins under Alternative 2, Modified Alternative 4, and Alternative 6. The changes to backcountry opportunities would be irretrievable for the life of the White Pass operation, but not irreversible, as the impacted areas would be returned to a non-developed character upon closure of the ski area (refer to Section 3.15 – Visual Resources). Loss of roadless character would likely be irreversible, since Pigtail and Hogback basins would no longer qualify for placement on the inventory of potential wilderness areas.

3.17.4.6 Visual Resources

Increased development in the Pigtail and Hogback basins under Alternative 2, Modified Alternative 4 and Alternative 6 would result in a more developed character of the Pigtail and Hogback basins, with a VQO of retention. Visual impacts would be irretrievable for the life of White Pass operations, but not irreversible, as the impacted areas would be returned to a non-developed character upon closure of the ski area (refer to Section 3.15 – Visual Resources).

3.17.5 Effects on Social Groups, Consumers, Civil Rights, Minority Groups, Women, and Environmental Justice

As directed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, NEPA, and Executive Order 12898, all federal actions, programs, and policies shall identify and prevent and/or mitigate, to the greatest extent practicable, disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects on minorities and low-income populations. No disproportionate impacts to social groups, consumers, civil rights, minority groups, and women are expected from the Action Alternatives (refer to Sections 3.9 and 3.10).

3.17.6 Effects on American Indian Rights

Archaeological survey work in the White Pass Study Area to date has not identified any National Register eligible heritage resources (historic properties) in or adjacent to the project area. Under all alternatives there would be no effect to historic properties because none have been identified to date within the White Pass Study Area. The only direct or indirect impact to archaeological heritage resources would be from ground-disturbing activities in areas of dense vegetation where surface visibility proved difficult during archaeological field surveys, and where as yet unidentified historic properties could exist.

Access by American Indians for traditional uses and the exercise of treaty rights would remain unchanged under all alternatives. Direct and indirect effects to resources and values of concern to the Yakama Nation would be avoided, to the highest extent practical, by project design. Additionally, the Yakama Nation have historic interests in this area and have been contacted in reference to the Proposed Action and environmental analysis (refer to Section 3.9 – Heritage Resources).

3.17.7 Effects on Farmlands, Rangelands, and Forestlands

There is no farmland or rangeland located within the White Pass Study Area. The Project Site is surrounded by forest land; the Proposed Action and Action Alternatives would alter or remove approximately 29 to 85 acres of forest for as long as the ski area is managed. The White Pass Study Area is located in the OWNF and GPNF.

All Action Alternatives would include a non-significant amendment (as defined under the National Forest Management Act) to the 1990 Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This amendment would modify the Standards and Guidelines to allow for downhill ski trails and other ski area infrastructure to cross riparian influence areas within the existing SUP area and the proposed expansion area (refer to Section 2.3.1.1).

3.17.8 Effects on Energy Requirements and Conservation Potential

The existing Benton REA power lines and transformer would be upgraded with larger capacity conductors on the existing alignment to accommodate the increased demand associated with the proposed ski lifts and mountain lodge.

While there is a transformer capacity of 2,970 kW, the existing line is not capable of delivering more than 1550 kW to the summit. Expansion under all Action Alternatives would require upgrading the power line into the area (refer to Section 3.13 – Utilities and Infrastructure).

3.17.9 Urban Quality and the Design of the Built Environment, Including the Reuse and Conservation Potential

The goal of landscape management on all NFSL is to manage for the highest possible visual quality, commensurate with other appropriate public uses, costs, and benefits. In 1996, the Forest Service developed the Scenery Management System (USDA 1995) to more effectively and efficiently integrate scenic values and landscape aesthetics in Forest Plans, and incorporate human values into ecosystem management. The Scenery Management System is to replace the Visual Management System during the planning of new projects or Forest Plan revisions as initially directed by the Chief in the Scenery Management System handbook.

Section 2.3.1.6 outlines the various clearing prescriptions used for all Action Alternatives, including full clearing with grading, full clearing without grading, tree island removal, and tree island retention. Table 2.4-1 in Section 2.4 further describes lift and trail construction techniques. The use of feathering, scalloping and tree island removal prescriptions soften the developed character of the White Pass Study Area. No roads are proposed under any of the Action Alternatives, except Alternative 6 (refer to Section 2.3).

From a landscape aesthetics viewpoint, the recreation experience, scenic setting, available facilities, and sense of place are important aspects in meeting user expectations. Under the Action Alternatives, the proposed mid-mountain/mountain-top lodge, chairlift and other facility design and material selection are designed to keep with the form, line, color and texture with the natural landscape in mind (USDA 1995) (refer to Section 3.15 – Visual Resources for further details).

As described in Mitigation Measure MM22 (refer to Table 2.4-2), the replacement of existing facilities (not part of the proposed development), would be similar in character and architecturally compatible with the established landscape. Additionally, reconstruction of facilities would comply with the approved site development plan.