

APPENDIX B – PROPOSED FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE FOREST PLAN

The proposed amendment responds to the current Management Area 2 direction¹ in the current Forest Plan that reads:

Maintain a visual quality objective [(VQO)] of Retention along the Mount Rose, US 50, and Kingsbury highways, and Highway 206 (Foothill Road).²

The Visual Management System (VMS) states that the *Retention* VQO “provides for management activities which are not visually evident.” Under *Retention*, activities may only repeat form, line, color, and texture, which are frequently found in the characteristic landscape. Changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc. should not be evident.³

The VQO of *Retention* cannot be achieved at a developed ski area. The nature of ski facilities, particularly the materials and forms of modern lift towers and terminal structures, makes them difficult to blend with natural form, line, color, and texture. These facilities appear dominant in most cases, regardless of mitigation measures applied to reduce effects. Hence, the existence of developed trails, chairlifts, and supporting infrastructure on NFS lands at Mt. Rose contradicts the definition of the *Retention* VQO and causes the area to currently be out of compliance.⁴

This amendment would add the following sentence to the existing management direction for Recreation in the current Forest Plan:

However, the entire Mt. Rose - Ski Tahoe special use permit area, including the area known as the Chutes, will be managed to a VQO of Partial Retention.

The VMS provides the following definition of Partial Retention:

Partial Retention requires that any activity must be visually subordinate to the natural characteristics of the landscape. Activities may repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the characteristic landscape but changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc. remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape.⁵

The proposed amendment is based on the conclusion that it is not feasible to manage the developed trails and infrastructure that are inherent to support a developed ski area under

¹ Recreation - MIH Code A14

² USDA Forest Service, 1986 pg. IV-81

³ USDA Forest Service, 1974, pg. 30

⁴ USDA Forest Service, 1974, pg. 30

⁵ USDA Forest Service, 1974, pg. 32

the *Retention VQO*. A VQO of *Partial Retention* is feasible; adoption of this amendment would bring existing and proposed facilities at the East Bowl side into compliance with the Forest Plan. In addition, the amendment would allow for development of The Chutes to also comply with the Forest Plan and the VMS.

DIRECTION FOR AMENDING FOREST PLANS

Forest Service requirements for amending forest plans are included in agency regulations and policies. These require that land uses be consistent with forest plans and that proposed activities which would be in conflict with the forest plan either be denied or modified (so as to be consistent), or that the forest plan be amended. Regulations direct the Forest Service to consider whether a proposed amendment to a forest plan would be considered a significant change.⁶

The Forest Service is authorized to implement amendments to forest plans in response to changing needs and opportunities, information identified during project analysis, or the results of monitoring and evaluation. Forest Service Handbook and Manual direction⁷ provides the framework for considering a forest plan amendment, reviewing it for significance, documenting the results, and reaching a decision. An assessment of a proposed amendment's significance in the context of the larger forest plan is a crucial part of this process. It is important to note that the definition of significance for amending a forest plan is not the same as the definition of significance as defined by NEPA.⁸ Under NEPA, significance is generally determined by whether a proposal is considered to be a "major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment,"⁹ or whether the relative severity of the environmental impacts would be significant based on their context and intensity.¹⁰

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that proposed forest plan amendments be evaluated for whether they would constitute a significant change in the long-term goods, outputs, and services projected for an entire national forest. Amendments that are not significant may be adopted following disclosure and notification in an environmental document, such as an EA, an EIS, or a supplement to one of these documents. Amendments that are deemed significant must be processed under the more intensive requirements for developing and approving a forest plan, which includes preparation of an EIS.¹¹

The criteria to analyze the significance of a forest plan amendment are summarized below.¹² Each of the four criteria for determining significance of the proposed amendment is responded to directly.

⁶ 36 CFR 219.10(f)

⁷ Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1922 and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12, Chapter 5

⁸ 36 CFR 219.10(f) and FSH 1922.5

⁹ 40 CFR 1502.3

¹⁰ 40 CFR 1508.27

¹¹ FSH 1909.12, 5.34(4)

¹² USDA-FS, 1992, Forest Service Handbook 1909.12

1. Timing. When the change in the Forest Plan would take place relative to the planning period and scheduled revisions of the Plan.

The proposed changes to the current Forest Plan management direction for the Carson Front Management Area could take immediate effect following the Decision Notice for this EA. If approved, implementation of the proposed project elements could commence as early as the spring of 2003.

2. Location and size. Location and size of the area affected compared to the size for the overall planning area.

This amendment would affect NFS lands within the existing and proposed Mt. Rose SUP areas only. The area affected through adoption of this amendment would be approximately 746 acres under Alternative 2 and approximately 590 acres under Alternative 3.

3. Goals, Objectives, and Outputs. How, or to what degree, the amendment would affect the long-term relationship between levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan.

Amending the Forest Plan in this instance would help achieve one of the desired future conditions of the Forest, which states that “the Toiyabe will increase the quality and quantity of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities with particular emphasis in the Sierra Nevada...”¹³

4. Management Prescription. Whether the change would apply only to a specific situation, or to future situations across the planning area.

The proposed change to the Carson Front management direction would apply to the existing and proposed Mt. Rose SUP areas only and would not apply to any other current or future situation across the planning area covered by the current Forest Plan.

¹³ USDA-FS, 1986, pg. IV-3