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## Fire on the mountain: Growth and conflict in Colorado ski country

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FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN: GROWTH AND CONFLICT IN COLORADO SKI  
COUNTRY

by

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Bachelor of Arts  
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1995

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dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Doctor of Philosophy Degree in History**  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Fire on the Mountain: Growth and Conflict in Colorado Ski Country**

By

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Professor of History

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This dissertation examines the environmental, economic, and cultural conflicts over the private development of ski resorts in Colorado's National Forests between 1910 and 2000. Downhill skiing emerged as an increasingly popular winter activity during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in western state such as Colorado. A part of the a larger outdoor recreational boom throughout the United States' during the interwar years, downhill skiing challenged the Forest Service's ability to meeting the public's growing appetite for year-round recreational opportunities. These challenges increased following World War II as the nation's growing population and affluence drew millions to their public lands to sightsee, camp, hunt, and ski. The Forest Service turned to private ventures to develop ski resorts to meet this growing public demand. But the development of ski resorts on public lands by private interest proved to be problematic when faced with competing views of public lands and public land management. The same natural allure that drew millions to the country's national parks, national forests, and other public lands also gave rise to a modern environmental movement, which called for the preservation of wilderness, limits on urban and suburban growth, and pollution reduction. These two emergent views of nature came into increasing conflict with one another over

the management of public lands, particularly concerning the development of ski resorts. With more ski resorts, and more skier visits, than any other state, Colorado sat at the center of these conflicts. By the late 1960s, a growing number of critics began denouncing the environmental impacts of ski resorts on national forests. Over the next four decades, political battles raged throughout Colorado over the environmental, social, and economic impacts of ski resorts. Controversies such as Colorado voters' rejection of the 1976 Denver Winter Olympics, the fight to develop Beaver Creek Ski Resort, and the burning of twelve buildings on top of Vail Ski Resort by members of the extremist environmental group Earth Liberation Front pitted the American public's growing recreational demands against emergent concerns over the environmental and social consequences of the commercial development of ski resorts on public land for private corporate gain. These fights not only tell the story of skiing in Colorado, but Americans' changing understandings of nature and the larger environmental costs of outdoor recreation and tourism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dissertations mark the culmination of years of study, research, writing, and hard work, and thanks is always needed at their conclusion. But this dissertation marks more than the end of the typical doctoral experience, one that began with the passing of Hal Rothman and ended with last minute heroics of several professors. In between, there were moments of great sadness and greater joy, and I want to express my deep-hearted gratitude to all who were there for me along the way. I wish to begin by thanking my chair, Andy Kirk, who provided much needed encouragement at moments of loss and priceless dissections of my arguments and prose throughout my writing process. David Wrobel's seminars and sage advice helped lay the foundation for the dissertation and my future career. David Tanenhaus and David Hassenzahl's agreement to join my committee not only saved the day, but also helped articulate my argument and clarify my writing. I began this dissertation with three other committee members, who for various reasons were unable to help me complete my project. Elizabeth Fraterrigo and Tim Farnham both served as committee members through my comprehensive exams before taking jobs elsewhere. Both helped me tremendously in getting my arms around the dissertation and articulating the most striking characteristics of ski resorts in Colorado. And finally the late Hal Rothman—Hal hired me as his graduate assistant the first day I set foot on UNLV's campus, a position that I held for the next four years working on projects as diverse as the history of the National Park Service's fire policy and the downfall of the mob in Las Vegas. During that time, I learned a tremendous amount about history and writing, but more importantly, I learned about being generous with your time, true to your friends, and solid in your convictions. Hal was able to get me through my

comprehensive exams before his death. During our last conversation, he listened intently to what my research had thus far produced and offered advice on what to do next. He was a true mentor till the end. Hal, I did it.

I would also like to thank other members of the generous UNLV faculty and staff. Elizabeth White Nelson and Andy Fry broadened my understanding of American history in their seminars. David Holland, Kevin Dawson, and Marcie Gallo gave generously of their time through conversations that improved my teaching, especially during my first couple of semesters on the other side of the lectern. Without Lynette Webber and Kathy Akins I would never have been able to navigate through the mountains of paperwork needed to complete a PhD, or at times to get back into my office after locking the door behind me yet again. I am beyond grateful to my cohort, Michael Duchemin, Jonathon Foster, Peter Gough, Aaron MacArthur, and Jeffrey Richardson, with whom I shared the seminar room and sighed whenever we heard Dr. Wrobel announce that he had a “good feeling” about ending on time that evening. Those who followed my group, including Charlie Dietrich, Michelle Turk, Garron Maloney, Julie Stetler, John Liss, and Megan Weatherly have all become dear friends and helped immensely in my survival of graduate school and Las Vegas. I want to make special note of two friends, Chris Johnson and Christian Harrison, whose long conversations on environmental history, writing, and even married life helped more than either of you may know.

Beyond the sandstone walls of UNLV, I found other lifelong friends in Las Vegas who I wish to thank. To the mountain bike squad comprising of Jason Smith, Marshall Evans, Chad Hayes, and Tim Ward, our weekly rides were often a needed break from studying and writing. In particular, Marshall, whose conversations about recreation,

skiing, and life in general were as valuable to me in writing this dissertation as any seminar. I am especially thankful to Bob, Anna, and Hanna, and Tucker Bond, for letting me crash in their basement while I spent a summer digging through the Denver Public Library's archives. Paul Brooks and Kitty Lohse's sage advice on academia and invitations to many adventures were always welcomed. Leonardo Fey always provided a place to stay and a wondrous meal when I visited Denver. In addition, Josh and Andi Walton always welcomed me and Leisl to Flagstaff with open arms whenever we needed a break from the Las Vegas heat and were companions in many excellent adventures.

No dissertation is written without the help of archivists and I have been blessed throughout the entire process to work with some of the best. I did the majority of my research in the Denver Public Library's Western History and Genealogy Archive. Enough cannot be said of the DPL's staff, all of whom often went well beyond the call of duty to find materials and even offer suggestions that later proved instrumental. In particular, I want to thank Ann Brown, without whom chapters one and two would have never been written, and Claudia Jensen, who not only helped in running down obscure facts, but also provided priceless advice and insights into the collection. Special thanks goes to Coi Drummond-Gehrig, whose last minute research and scanning provided many of the photographs in the dissertation. Finally, Cheryl Oakes at the Forest History Society Archives answered my many questions, both over the phone and via email, and provided vital documents on the Forest Service's management of Colorado ski resorts.

The summer before I moved to Las Vegas to begin my studies at UNLV, I interned for the Colorado Ski and Snowboard Museum and Hall of Fame in Vail, Colorado. Having spent the previous four years helping manage a mail order catalog and attempting



to become a freelance journalist, the switch to working in a museum in one of the most famous ski towns in the world was a welcomed change of pace. While there, I worked under the guidance of the museum's curator, Justin Henderson, who showed me the inner workings of the museum world and helped me broaden my knowledge of skiing and snowboarding's history. During the first half of the summer, Ann Eggers graciously allowed me to stay at her family's condo for free, which is no small thing in Vail. The museum's historian Patricia Pfeiffer proved to be an invaluable resource in helping answer questions on the specifics of Colorado ski history.

There are others who have also provided great insights and answered questions during my research and writing of the dissertation. Daniel Glick and Hal Clifford both graciously answered my questions about their work on the 1998 Vail Arsons. Seth Masia, Ben Doone, John Fry, and Edward Brannon all helped tremendously in answering questions over the phone and via email. One of the real joys in historical research is the discovery of people who were integral to the story you wish to tell, but for various reasons have flown under your radar. Such was the case with Erik Martin who worked as the Winter Sports Resorts Program Manager within the White River National Forest from 1970 until 2000. During that time, he was involved in the planning and development of most of Colorado's modern ski resorts. I discovered Erik through a series of phone calls trying to track down the files of his predecessor within the White River National Forest. He responded quickly to my inquiry and for nine hours, we sat down and spoke at length about his experience in the Forest Service and the agency's role in the development of numerous ski resorts throughout Colorado.

I would like to make special mention of Lincoln Bramwell and Sara Dant for their advice and moral support in the final stages of finishing this dissertation. David Louter and Dave Sproul also offered timely advice and support. Bill Philpott and Duke Ritchie each helped tremendously in the early stages of writing. Andy Harrison provided the wonderful map of Colorado ski resorts in the introduction. And to the many others who graciously gave of their time to sit and talk about their experiences—Gerry Grosword, Gary McGraw, Dan and Sandy Stricklin, Jack Bucheister, Elise Clayton, Dwight and Gene Miller, and Hal O’Leary, to mention but a few—I am ever grateful.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the frigid morning hours of October 18, 1998, William Rogers raced along the snow-covered slopes of Vail Ski Resort setting fires. In a matter of minutes, flames engulfed six buildings, including the ski resort's aging ski patrol headquarters and the lavish Two Elks Lodge. Having set the blazes, the thirty-three-year-old environmental activist known as Avalon to his friends quickly made his way to the bottom of the ski resort where twenty-one-year-old co-conspirator Chelsea Gerlach waited behind the wheel of her truck. "I waited 10 minutes, then 20. After a half-hour, as I was wondering if I should leave, Avalon appeared. He just walked up to the truck and got inside. He said two things: He said he was injured. And that the action was successful," Gerlach later told journalist McKenzie Funk in an interview from prison.<sup>1</sup> The two immediately drove eastward to Denver, stopping off at a local metro area library to check the Internet for information on how to treat Rogers's sore Achilles tendon and e-mail a communiqué to the Vail newspaper and regional National Public Radio affiliate taking credit for the arsons. Citing the Forest Service's approval of Vail Ski Resort's Category III expansion into the upper basin of the Two Elks River drainage—a development biologists and environmental activists had long maintained would disturb the habitat of the endangered lynx as well as an important calving area for elk in the region—the brief e-mail proclaimed that "[p]utting profits ahead of Colorado's wildlife will not be tolerated," and warned, "We will be back if this greedy corporation continues to trespass into wild and unroaded areas."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chelsea Gerlach, "Firestarter," *Outside*, September 2007, 105. On the Vail Arsons, see Daniel Glick, *Powder Burn: Arson, Money, and Mystery on Vail Mountain* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> ELF Communiqué, October 19, 1998, in Leslie James Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front, 1997–2002*, 2nd ed. (Portland: Arissa Media Group, 2007), 13.

The most notorious act of “eco-terrorism” in American history, the Vail Arsons brought instant national attention to the highly contentious debate over Vail Ski Resort's expansion into the 1,000 acre Two Elks Roadless Area. Considered by many biologists to be a prime habitat of the threatened Canadian lynx, despite the lack of any verifiable sighting of the elusive cat in the area since the 1970s, the roadless area offered ideal ski terrain. Its mellow north facing slopes held ample amounts of snow, and the area’s vast open glades were perfect for intermediate skiers, the ski industry's bread and butter clientele. But while the Two Elks area held great potential for skiing, a broad coalition of environmental organizations, backcountry skiers, hunters, and even the Colorado Division of Wildlife opposed the ski resort’s expansion, fearing the impacts the development of ski trails, lifts, roads, and structures would have on wildlife, particularly the lynx.<sup>3</sup>

Roughly twice the size of a house cat, the Canadian lynx had become the latest *cause de célébrité* in the debate over the development of ski resorts in national forests, the lynx sat at the center of the fight over the Cat III expansion. Listed as endangered by the Colorado Department of Wildlife, the last confirmed sighting of a tuft eared cat in the state had been in 1973, leading many to wonder if the cat still existed in the region. But beyond the lynx, the Two Elks roadless area was home to one of the state's largest elk herd calving grounds, and a key watershed for the Eagle River, which provided water for the small community of Minturn, just down valley from Vail Ski Resort.<sup>4</sup> Beside its

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<sup>3</sup> The Colorado Department of Wildlife had listed the lynx as endangered in the state, while federal authorities considered the cat threatened as defined by the Endangered Species Act. The reason for this difference lay in the fact that nationally the lynx was only threatened, meaning that it faced the likelihood of becoming endangered, nationally, but in peril of extinction in Colorado.

<sup>4</sup> Al Knight, “Missing Lynx: Vail Plan Eases Way for Species,” *The Denver Post*, December 14, 1997; Dustin Solberg, “Locals Protest Vail Expansion,” *High Country News*, March 30, 1998; Tony Perez-Giese, “The Missing Lynx,” *Denver Westword News*, November 6, 1999.

impacts on wildlife, expansion opponents pointed to Vail Resort's planned development of the 5,000-acre Gillman property adjacent to the Two Elks Area as evidence that the expansion was more about real estate than it was about skiing. Vail Resorts denied such claims, stating that the expansion was just the completion of the final phase of the resort's 1986 Master Plan created in conjunction with the Forest Service.<sup>5</sup>

Two days after the fires, Vail's local newspaper and the regional National Public Radio affiliate both received Rogers and Gerlach's statement claiming responsibility for the arson. News of the email spread quickly, and news stories began to emerge focusing on a fringe environmental group known as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and its extremist agenda. Colorado Governor Roy Romer declared the fires "an act of terrorism."<sup>6</sup> Others agreed, including the FBI who labeled the ELF the largest domestic terrorist organization in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Mainstream environmental groups quickly sought to distance themselves from the blazes and condemned the arsons, but the damage had already been done. Seemingly overnight, Vail Resorts, the owners of Vail Ski Resort, went from a greedy corporation exploiting public lands in order to increase profits, to a victim of terrorism. Vail Resort officials quickly exploited the swelling of public sympathy. "Don't let the bastards get you down," Vail Resorts president Andy Daily implored a crowd of Vail employees and locals residents at a public meeting following

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<sup>5</sup> James Brooke, "Environmentalists Battle Growth of Ski Resorts, *The New York Times*, January 19, 1999, A 10.

<sup>6</sup> The labeling of environmentalists as terrorists by the FBI remains controversial. Many advocates of groups like the ELF maintain that defining their actions as terrorism stretches the bounds of credibility, and point to the fact that not a single life has been lost in any action by members of the ELF or its sister group the Animal Liberation Front. FBI officials maintain that actions such as the Vail Arsons are clearly meant to intimidate through the use of violence. For more discussion on eco-terrorism see: Craig Rosebraugh, *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet: Speaking for the Earth Liberation Front* (New York: Lantern Books, 2004), 236-41; Douglas Long, *Ecoterrorism* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 3-56; Rick Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2006), 259-85.

<sup>7</sup> James Brooke, "Suspicious Fires Shed a Light on Dark Grumblings in Vail," *The New York Times* October 21, 1998. A 18.



the arsons.<sup>8</sup> Environmental groups opposed to the expansion saw their support evaporate. “The fire really hurt. They turned Vail into a victim, and environmental groups lost a lot of progress on the issue of ski area expansions,” recalled Rocky Smith, former director of the Colorado Environmental Coalition, on the aftermath of the arsons and their impacts on public opinion.<sup>9</sup>

After setting the fires, Rogers and Gerlach, along with six other members of their ELF cell known as “The Family,” remained fugitives until 2004, when, after a six-year-long investigation, the FBI arrested both along with three others in connection to the Vail Arsons. Rogers committed suicide in his prison cell shortly after his arrest and Gerlach received a nine-year prison sentence in a federal penitentiary after agreeing to cooperate with authorities.<sup>10</sup> The arsons cost Vail more than \$12 million in damages and \$13 million in lost revenues over the next season. Despite these losses, the fires proved to be an unintentional boon to the iconic ski resort. In 2000, Vail opened its Category III expansion. Renamed Blue Sky Basin, the new addition included two bowls named after the resort’s founders Pete Siebert and Earl Eaton, three high-speed ski lifts, and an extravagant new Two Elks Lodge 5,000 square feet larger than the original.<sup>1</sup>

In the end, the Vail arsons, and the fight over the Category III expansion that precipitated them, were merely the continuation of decades of contentious debate over the environmental and social consequences of the development of ever-larger ski resorts, the growing outdoor recreational industry, and tourism’s role in the management of the American West’s vast public lands. In addition, the development of ski resorts illustrates

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<sup>8</sup> Allen Best, “Vail Fires Outrage Community,” *High Country News*, November 7, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Rocky Smith, Former Staff Ecologists for the Colorado Environmental Coalition. Interview by author, April 14, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> “Four Are Indicted on Arson Charges in 1998 Fires at a Resort in Vail,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2006, A-10.

broader regional struggles over tourism, urbanization, and the environment in the twentieth century American West. Each of these factors have held significant influences on U.S. Forest Service management policy, redefining the agency's mission and placing it at the center of a larger cultural battle between the American public's growing outdoor recreational demands and mounting concerns over the environmental impacts of such demands on the natural world.<sup>11</sup>

Once viewed as a secondary use of national forests, outdoor recreation emerged as an increasingly popular use of national forests and other public lands by the 1920s, creating what Forest Service Chief Henry Graves termed "a crisis of national recreation."<sup>12</sup> Home to the vast majority of the nation's public lands, the region, in effect, became the nation's playground. This trend continued in the decades immediately following World War II, as activities such as hiking, fishing, camping, and skiing, exploded in popularity as millions of Americans ventured out into their national forests and national parks to hike, camp, fish, and ski. Public lands became more valuable to the West's expanding urban and

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<sup>11</sup> Much has been written on the twentieth century American West. Those I draw from include: Richard White, *"Its Your Misfortune and None of My Own,": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993); Walter Nugent, *Into the West: The Story of Its People* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); William Travis, *New Geographies of the American West: Land Use and the Change Patterns of Place* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2008); Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Change in Western North America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 186-290. Published in 1957, Earl Pomeroy's *In Search of the Golden West* was the first historic investigation of tourism in the American West. The topic remained largely ignored until the 1990s with works like Hal Rothman's *Devil's Bargains*. In the decade since the publication of *Devil's Bargains* scholarship on tourism has grown much deeper. For more on the history of tourism in the American West see: Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997); David Wrobel and Patrick Long, eds., *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), and Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet?: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008). For excellent examples of Tourism's impact on local communities see: Bonnie Christensen, *Red Lodge and the Mythic West: Coal Miners to Cowboys* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); and Connie Y. Chiang, *Shaping the Shoreline: Fisheries and Tourism on the Monterey Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Henry Graves, "A Crisis in National Recreation," *American Forestry* (July 1920), 391-97.

suburban population as recreational amenities than as grazing range, timber stands, and hard rock mines. In this new, post-industrial West, politicians, environmentalists, and recreationalists wrestled over the social and environmental consequences of the region's urban and suburban growth and the transition from economies based on extractive industries such as mining, timber and grazing to those based on tourism.<sup>13</sup>

The increasing role of recreational tourism in the economy of West's hinterlands, especially in communities adjacent to the region's vast public lands, led to increased tensions between recreationalists, environmentalists, and the U.S. Forest Service over the environmental and social consequences of outdoor recreation— including increased wildlife habitat fragmentation, rapid growth, and loss of rural identity.<sup>14</sup> As activities such as skiing and hiking grew in popularity through the 1950s and 1960s, a nascent environmental movement began calling for the preservation of wild areas.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In his seminal work, *Coming of the Post-Industrial Society*, sociologist Daniel Bell argued that the shift from a goods-producing economy to a service-based economy, along with the pre-eminence of the professional and technical class, the centrality of theoretical knowledge as the source of innovation and policy formulation for the society, the control of technology assessment, and the creation of new intellectual technology embodied the emergence of a postindustrial economy. In this postindustrial world, the measurement of economic well being was determined by quality of life as measured by services and amenities rather than quantity of goods. Scholars such as historian Hal Rothman, economist Thomas Michael Power, and geographer William Wyckoff have further explored the larger ramifications of this postindustrial transformation in the American West. Rothman argued that by repackaging cultural images, postindustrial industries such as tourism redefine the value of place, nature, and identity. Nature becomes not just a source of raw goods, but of experiences and “physic trophies” used to define leisure, place, and perhaps most importantly, identity. See: Daniel Bell, *Coming of the Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 14; Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 17; Thomas Michael Power, *Lost Landscapes and Failed Economies: The Search for a Value of Place* (Washington D.C: Island Press, 1996); William Wyckoff, “Postindustrial Butte,” *Geographical Review*, vol. 85 (October, 1995), 478-496.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Michael Power contends that a shift from extractive industries to service base economies will in the long-run lead to the preservation of natural landscapes, protecting both jobs and the environment. But while service industries like tourism and real estate value natural resources in a fundamentally different manner than timber, grazing, and mining, they bring with them a whole set of environmental issues; some old, some new. See: Power, *Lost Landscapes*, 3-5.

<sup>15</sup> On the rise of the modern environmental movement see: Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13-39; Hal Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 131-159; Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 239-61.

Recreationalists often joined in the call to end clear cutting and strip mining as such activities took away from their aesthetic enjoyment of public lands. But while environmental groups often sided with recreationalists on issues such as timber and mining, they often questioned the intensive development of public lands for recreation, particularly the development of ski resorts. These consequences were profoundly apparent in the Forest Service's attempt to balance the public's growing demand for ski resorts with environmental concerns over the impacts of ski resorts.<sup>16</sup>

Ski resorts had been the lightning rod of numerous controversies as early as the 1930s, as seen with the struggle over the proposed development of a ski area in the San Geronimo Mountains outside of Los Angeles between skiers and conservation groups. Such battles only increased following World War II as downhill skiing grew in popularity; between 1954 and 1970, lift ticket sales rose by 124 percent in Colorado alone. As skiing grew in popularity, ski resorts increased in both number and size.<sup>17</sup> Controversies such as the rejection of the 1976 Denver Winter Olympics by Colorado voters in 1972 and the fight four years later over Disney's proposed development of a ski resort in the Mineral King Valley just north of Sequoia National Park indicated growing

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Wilkinson, *Crossing the Next Meridian: Land Water, and the Future of the West* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1992), 17-27; William Robbins, "Creating a 'New' West: Big Money Returns to the Hinterland," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 46 (Summer 1996), 66-72; Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996), 29-49; Ann F. Hyde, "Round Pegs in Square Holes: The Rocky Mountains and Extractive Industry," in David Wrobel and Michael Steiner, eds., *Many Wests: Place, Culture, & Regional Identity* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 93-113; Liza Nicholas, et al. eds. *Imagining the Big Open: Nature, Identity, and Play in the New West* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Charles Goeldner, et al., *The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998-1999 Season* (Boulder: University of Colorado Graduate School of Business Administration, Business Research Division, 1999), 5; Charles Goeldner, "Skiing Trends in North America," *Mountain Resort Development: Proceedings of the Vail Conference, April 18-21, 1991* (Burnaby, British Columbia: Simon Fraser University Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, 1991), 7-20.

environmental opposition to the development of ski resorts throughout the country, particularly in the Colorado Rockies.<sup>18</sup>

Skiing emerged in Colorado as a means of traveling through the snow covered mountains during the mid-nineteenth century. Men such as “Father” John Dryer and Albert Thompson became regionally famous for their exploits delivering mail over Colorado’s treacherous winter mountains on twelve-foot long wooden skis. Residents in rural mountain towns such as Steamboat Springs, Crested Butte, and Grand Lake used skiing as a means to get around during the long winter months. Despite this regional appeal, skiing remained a little known sport until the 1910s when a wave of Scandinavian immigrants including Carl Howelson, who in 1915 helped form the Steamboat Springs Winter Sport Club, brought the sport of Nordic skiing with them to Colorado. Ski clubs flourished throughout the state during the decade, with hundreds competing in weekly ski jumping contests. But by the late 1920s, Nordic skiing slowly faded in popularity with the introduction of downhill, or alpine, skiing. Originating in the Austrian Alps, downhill skiing proved more accessible to a growing numbers of recreationalists throughout the country. Unlike Nordic skiing, downhill skiing was much easier to learn and allowed

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<sup>18</sup> On the fight over San Geronio see: Ingrid P. Wicken, *Pray for Snow: The History of Skiing in Southern California* (Norco, CA: Vasa Press, 2001), 86-103. On the controversy surrounding Mineral King see: Lary Dilsaver and William Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resource History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (Three Rivers, CA: Sequoia Natural History Association, Inc., 1990), 278-82 and 298-301; Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails, Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980, 67-70. On the history of skiing in North America see: John B. Allen, *From Ski to Skiing One Hundred Years of an American Sport, 1840-1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Anne Hyde, “Square Pegs in Round Holes: The Rocky Mountains and Extractive Industry,” in David Wrobel and Michael Steiner, eds., *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 93-113; Hal Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997); William Philpot, “Consuming Colorado: Landscapes, Leisure, and the Tourist Way of Life,” (PhD diss. University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2002); Abbott Fay, *A History of Skiing in Colorado* (Montrose, CO: Western Reflections, Inc., 2003); Annie Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing* (Hanover: University of Vermont Press, 2006); Edward Duke Ritchie, “Living it Up in Aspen: Post-War America, Ski Town Culture, and the New Western Dream, 1945-1975” (PhD. Diss. Boulder: University of Colorado, 2006).

novices to enjoy the thrill of racing down snow-covered slopes with minimal skill. Downhill skiing quickly spread throughout North America as American tourists and European instructors brought the sport to the United States and Canada. By the mid-1930s, dozens of small ski hills opened throughout Colorado, most in national forests. Skiing, like all outdoor recreational activities, enjoyed the benefits of New Deal spending and increased Forest Service efforts at recreational planning. Berthoud Pass, arguably the most popular ski area of the period, opened in 1937 with a rope tow built with private and federal funds.<sup>19</sup>

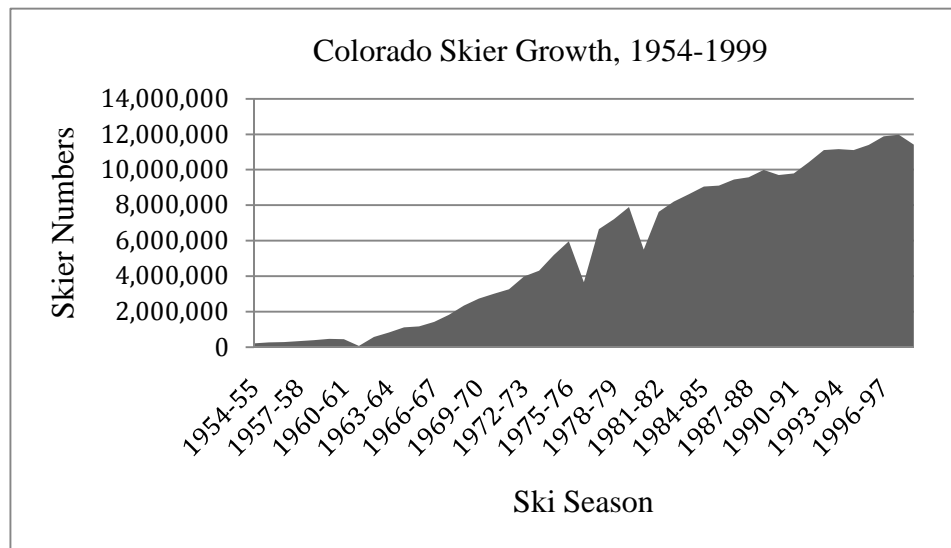
The United States entry into World War II slowed the development of the sport nationally as the war effort limited Americans' leisure time and ability to travel. But the war proved to be a boon to Colorado's ski industry. The creation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, and its subsequent move to Camp Hale outside the railroad town of Pando, introduced hundreds of the country's best mountaineers and skiers to the state. Many returned following the war and helped build Colorado's most popular ski resorts, including Arapahoe Basin, Aspen, and Vail.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> E. John Allen, *From Ski Sport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of and American Sport, 1840-1940* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Hal Rothman, "Powder Aplenty for Native and Guest Alike." *Montana* (Winter 1998), 3-17; Abbott Fay, *A History of Skiing in Colorado* (Montrose, CO: Western Reflections, Inc., 2003); Annie Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing* (Hanover: University of Vermont Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to overstate the impacts of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division on the ski industry in America. In Colorado alone, three of the state's most popular ski resorts were opened by veterans of the famed division: Aspen, Arapahoe Basin, and Vail. Because of the division's impact much has been written on its history. See: H. Benjamin Duke, Jr. "Skiing Soldiers to Skiing Entrepreneurs: Development of the Colorado Ski Industry," manuscript. Earl E. Clark Papers, Series 1. National Association of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. Box 1, FF45 Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Department. Denver, Colorado; Hal Burton, *The Ski Troops* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971); Peter Shelton, *Climb to Conquer: The Untold Story of World War II's 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Ski Troops* (New York: Scribner, 2003); McKay Jenkins, *the Last Ridge: The Epic Story of America's First Mountain Soldiers and the Assault on Hitler's Europe* (New York: Random House, 2004); Norma Tadlock Johnson, *Soldiers of the Mountains: The Story of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division of World War II* (New York: PublishAmerica, 2005); Charles J. Sanders, *The Boys of Winter: Life And Death in the U.S. Ski Troops During the Second World War* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005).

Driven by the nation's growing affluence and urbanization, particularly in the American West, millions of Americans began venturing ever further onto their public lands to hike, picnic, and even ski following World War II. Between 1954 and 1975 skier numbers boomed. In Colorado alone, lift ticket sales jumped from 204,640 in 1955 to more than 5 million by 1970, a trend that would continue to a greater or lesser extent throughout the rest of the century. This popularity led to the development of hundreds of ski areas throughout the state. By the 1970s, the sport of skiing had evolved from a minor recreational activity into a major industry in the region. As ski areas became ski resorts, complete with lodging, restaurants, and real estate, they helped drive the urbanization of the state's once isolated communities. Such growth was particularly dramatic along the newly constructed Interstate 70 as it passed through the Colorado mountains.<sup>21</sup>



Colorado Skier Growth, 1954-1999

<sup>21</sup> Charles Goeldner, et al., *The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998-1999 Season* (Boulder: University of Colorado Graduate School of Business Administration, Business Research Division, 1999), 5; Charles Goeldner, "Skiing Trends in North America," *Mountain Resort Development: Proceedings of the Vail Conference, April 18-21, 1991* (Burnaby, British Columbia: Simon Fraser University Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, 1991), 7-20.



Today, downhill skiing not only acts as the basis of the economies of the mountain communities nestled along Interstate 70, but is also plays a central role in Colorado's tourism industry. According to the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), American ski resorts host, on average, 52 million skier days annually. Ski resorts within the Rocky Mountain region (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico), rank number one in skier numbers, attracting 18 million skier days per season. Of those, Colorado is by far the most popular, with an average of 11 million annual skier days. California ranks a distant second with 6 million, followed by Utah with 3 million, then Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Washington, each hosting roughly 2 million annually.<sup>22</sup> Such numbers translate into jobs and economic opportunities for each state. Colorado Ski Country USA, the Colorado ski industry's trade association, determined that in 2004 alone, the state's ski industry generated nearly 31,000 jobs and comprised a third of Colorado's \$7 billion tourist economy. "That says communities and ancillary businesses directly benefit from resort efforts to attract more folks and increase visitation," said Rob Pearlman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Colorado Ski County USA.<sup>23</sup>

Ski industry critics counter that focusing on such economic windfalls ignores the tremendous environmental and social costs of ski resorts. For decades, environmentalists have raised concerns over ski resorts' impacts on wildlife habitat, water quality, and wilderness. While the development of thousands of acres of national forests as ski resorts appears less invasive than strip mining or clear cutting, ski resorts embody the most intensive commercial development of public lands for recreational use throughout the American West. Vail Ski Resort, the largest resort in the United States, sprawls over

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<sup>22</sup> National Ski Area Association, and RRC Associates, "Kottke National End of the Season Survey 1999/2000 Final Report," (August 2000), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Chris Walsh, "State Ski Industry A Peak Producer," *Rocky Mountain News* (April 1, 2004).



5,000 acres, is serviced by thirty-one ski lifts, four on mountain lodges, 193 trails, and hosts more than one million skier and snowboarder ski visits a year. Such intensive use has a dramatic impact on wildlife migration, vegetation, and water quality. But criticisms of ski resorts' impacts on wildlife and water are often secondary to concerns over real estate development. In his 2002 book, *Downhill Slide: Why the Corporate Ski Industry is Bad for Skiing, Ski Towns, and the Environment*, journalist and vocal critic of the ski industry Hal Clifford wrote, "skiing is no longer an end into itself for those looking to profit from it; instead [it] has transformed into a come-hither amenity to sell real estate."<sup>24</sup> Clifford's attack reflected larger concerns over the urbanization of the West, concerns that stemmed from the region's post-war economic boom, and became the basis for mounting environmental criticism throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Driven by mass consumption and federal investment, the United States emerged from World War II as the preeminent global military and economic power. This consumers' republic placed a high priority on quality of life issues such as open space and recreational access.<sup>25</sup> Increased automobile ownership during the inter-war years led to greater mobility, drawing thousands to the West's public lands. The nation's pent-up demand for consumer goods and travel redefined the country's landscapes, politics and culture. Immediately following the end of the war, millions of Americans hit the road to visit their national parks and forests. What they found shocked them; wide swaths of clear-cut forest, decrepit and outdated campgrounds, and a lack of staff to manage them. Such conditions combined with a growing desire to preserve the nation's canyons, rivers,

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<sup>24</sup> Hal Clifford, *Downhill slide: Why the Corporate Ski Industry is Bad for Skiing, Ski Towns, and the Environment* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2002), 8.

<sup>25</sup> On the role of consumerism in late twentieth century America see: Liz Cohen, *Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

and forests helped forge a nascent environmental movement that would come to greatly shape not only American's views of nature, but also national and regional politics.<sup>26</sup>

Over the next several decades, concerns over wilderness, pollution, and open space played an increasing role in American politics, especially in the American West. With its burgeoning metropolitan areas and vast public lands, battles over the region's environment stood out in stark relief. Conservation groups such as the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club became increasingly politically active in calling for the preservation of wilderness. The passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964 reflected an emergent social and political movement that sought to bring greater attention to the nation's environmental issues. By the late 1960s, the modern environmental movement matured to include a wider range of issues. Events such as the Cuyahoga River fire and the Santa Barbara oil spill, as well as the ongoing problem of air pollution, helped transform environmentalism into "a mass movement organized around cleaner air and water for all, not just in wilderness areas."<sup>27</sup> The environment became front-page news in many of the nation's major newspaper and magazines. Books on environmental issues, most notably Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring* and Paul and Anne Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, became national best sellers, fueling middle class American's growing concerns over the environment. The passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in 1970 and both the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act reflected Americans' growing awareness of environmental issues and a belief in legislative solutions.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hal Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 87.

<sup>27</sup> Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 240.

<sup>28</sup> Much has been written on the emergence of the environmental movement in the decades immediately following World War II. Most scholars point to American's growing concern over pollution and growth, along with the nation's affluence, as causes for the movement's origins. For more see: Hays, *Beauty*,

Post-war prosperity also led to widespread growth throughout the country. By the middle of the 1950s, the majority of American cities experienced rampant growth of suburbs around their peripheries. But what was initially seen as the fulfillment of the American dream of homeownership quickly became viewed as an environmental disaster. Critics decried the pace of suburban growth and the destruction of landscapes for the construction of “ticky-tacky” houses.<sup>29</sup> Nowhere was this more apparent than in the West. Drawn by the old promise of economic prosperity and a higher quality of life, millions migrated westward in the decades following the war. The region’s metropolitan population more than doubled between 1940 and 1960. The pace of growth unsettled many westerners, who watched as rural landscapes quickly transformed into sprawling housing developments. Such worries led to a political and cultural backlash throughout much of the West. Californian metropolitan areas continued to lead the region in growth, as millions moved to the Los Angeles Basin and San Diego area. In Oregon, Governor Thomas McCall condemned the development of what he termed “sagebrush suburbs,” and called for limits on growth throughout the state. Similar anti-growth sentiments lay behind the rejection of the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games by Colorado voters in 1972 and the later fights over the construction of Interstate 470, Two Forks Dam, and Beaver Creek Ski resort. Despite such anti-growth sentiments, the West’s population continued to expand. Over the next two decades, many of the region’s states ranked

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*Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13-39; John Opie, *Nature's Nation: An Environmental History of the United States* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 404-33; Rothman, *Saving the Planet*, 131-159; Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, 250-57.

<sup>29</sup> Written in 1962, Malvina Reynolds’ song “Little Boxes” was inspired by the sprawling suburban developments south of her home city of San Francisco. In the song Reynolds sung of the conformity of American life as demonstrated by such developments. The song gained broader popularity two years later when folk singer Pete Seeger released a version of “Little Boxes” on his *Cash Box* album. See: Malvina Reynolds, “Little Boxes,” Omni, 1960.

among the fastest growing in the nation. Within these states, areas adjacent to public lands became prized for their scenic beauty and recreational access.<sup>30</sup>

The growing popularity of outdoor recreation in the early decades of the twentieth century challenged the Forest Service's ability to balance the public's demands for increased access while at the same time focus on managing timber and grazing. Increased car ownership combined with a growing national affluence drew millions into the hinterlands of western cities such as Denver, Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Between 1916 and 1922, national forest visitation increased from an estimated 2.4 million to 6.2 million, producing Forest Service Chief Graves's national recreation crisis.<sup>31</sup> Within the first decade of the century, an economic and cultural shift began to emerge throughout the region as service-based industries such as tourism played a greater role in the region's economy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> On the environmental concerns over the suburbanization of the United States see: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Adam Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). In 2005, cultural geographers William Travis, David Theobald, Geneva Mixon, and Thomas Dickinson released their examination of Western population growth and land use, *Western Futures: A Look into the Patterns of Land Use and Future Development in the American West*. Based upon population and urban growth between 1960 and 2000, the group projected that the West's population would continue to grow at a much faster pace than the rest of nation. More telling than the report's future projections, were its maps of urban growth throughout the region beginning with the 1960 census. Each map clearly demonstrated the rampant growth of the region's metropolitan and rural areas throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. William Travis, David Theobald, Geneva Mixon, and Thomas Dickinson, *Western Futures: A Look into the Patterns of Land Use and Future Development in the American West* (Boulder: Center of the American West, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Graves, "A Crisis in National Recreation," 391.

<sup>32</sup> Much has been written on the history of outdoor recreation in the twentieth century American West. Those works that I believe best lay out the early history outdoor recreation in the region include: Richard West Sellers, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Neil Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). On the role of recreation in U.S. Forest Service management policy see: Marion Clawson and Jack Knetsch, *Economics of Outdoor Recreation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1966); Glen Robinson, *The Forest Service: A Study in Public Land Management* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1975); Charles Wilkinson and H. Michael Anderson, *Land and Resource Planning in the National Forests* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1987), 334-70; Paul Hirt, *Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests since World War Two* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Harold Steen, *The*

This boom in recreational use of national forest challenged the Forest Service's ability to meet a changing public perception of national forests. Created in 1905, the Forest Service had focused solely on grazing and timber, believing that management for aesthetic purposes was less economically and politically pragmatic than harvesting of timber and grazing. Gifford Pinchot, the driving force behind the creation of the agency and its first Chief, argued that recreation and preservation of scenic beauty was detrimental to the wise management of forests and grazing lands. Such beliefs held sway within the agency until the late 1910s, when men such as Aldo Leopold and Arthur Carhart began promoting managerial approaches that included recreation and ecological concerns. As outdoor recreation grew in popularity in the post-war period, it became necessary for the Forest Service to take a broader managerial policy. The Multiple Use and Sustainable Yield Act of 1960 looked to not only recognize recreation as a use of national forests, but to utilize national forests in combination that would best "meet the needs of the American people."<sup>33</sup> Just what those needs were was open to interpretation. Arguably, timber and grazing remained the primary focus of the Forest Service throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, but as recreational use increased, many Americans came to believe that their enjoyment of the great outdoors far outweighed logging.<sup>34</sup>

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*U.S. Forest Service: A History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Samuel P. Hays, *The American People and the National Forests: The First Century of the U.S. Forest Service* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Multiple Use—Sustained Yield Act, P.L. 86-517. June 12, 1960.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Hays and Char Miller have written excellent studies of the conflict of preservation versus use in the shaping of the Forest Service. Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999); Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2001). Paul Hirt, Nancy Livingston, Harold Steen, and Samuel Hays have all written on the struggles within the Forest Service during the latter half of the twentieth century. Hirt, *Conspiracy of Optimism*; Nancy Livingston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West*

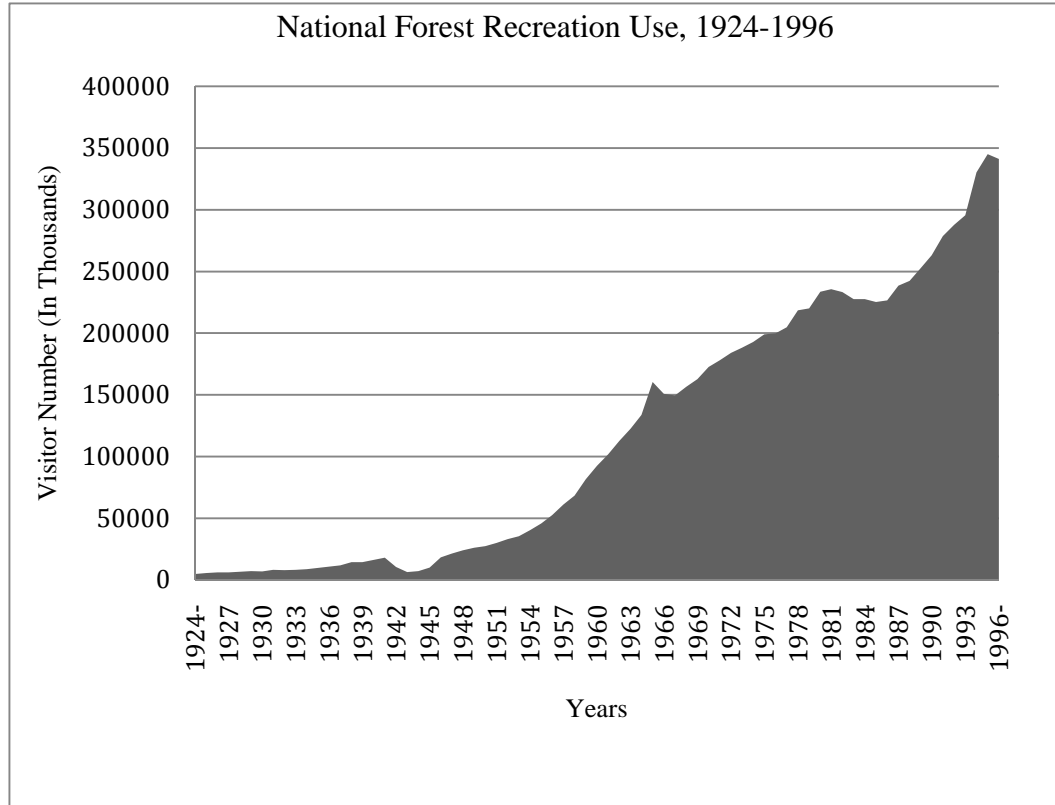
Between 1945 and 1953, Visits to national forests jumped from 10 million to nearly 35 million. By the end of the century the United States' national forests hosted, on average, 200 million visitors a year. In comparison, national parks attracted 250 million visitors a year and Bureau of Land Management hosted another 60 million.<sup>35</sup> Such numbers underpin the nation's enormous outdoor recreation industry. According to a report published by the Outdoor Industry Foundation, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the national economy. In addition, outdoor recreation supports more than 6.5 million jobs, produces \$289 billion in retail sales, \$249 billion in travel related expenditures, and generates \$49 billion in annual tax revenues.<sup>36</sup> The combination of public demand and tremendous economic windfalls make outdoor recreation one of the most pressing issues in public land management, forcing federal land management agencies like the Forest Service to struggle in balancing the growing demand for recreation with ecosystem protection and economic pressures for further development. The most intensive development of public lands for recreational use, ski resorts have long embodied this struggle for balance.

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(Seattle: University Of Washington Press, 1996); Steen, *The Forest Service*; Samuel Hays, *Wars in the Woods: The Rise of Ecological Forestry in America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, *Forest Service Report in Agriculture Department Report, 1923*, 325; National Forest Visitor Use Monitoring Program National Project Results, January 2000 through September 2003, [http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/national\\_report\\_final\\_draft.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/national_report_final_draft.pdf). Accessed March 13, 2009; [http://www.blm.gov/public\\_land\\_statistics/recreation.htm](http://www.blm.gov/public_land_statistics/recreation.htm). Accessed March 13, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Outdoor Industry Foundation, "Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: A 730 Billion Contribution to the U.S. Economy," (2007). <http://www.outdoorindustry.org/images/researchfiles/RecEconomypublic.pdf?26>



National Forest Recreation Use, 1924-1996

In the decades following World II, burgeoning environmental and anti-growth groups criticized the impacts of ski resorts on the environment such as eroding wildlife habitat and driving the rampant suburbanization of rural areas. Ski resort developers countered the ski industry’s meteoric growth was simply a reflection of public demand for increased recreational access to public lands. Caught in the middle, the Forest Service historically struggled to meet public demands for recreational access. But unlike hiking, fishing, and other dispersed recreational activities, downhill skiing presented the Forest Service the increasingly difficult problem of commercial development of public lands for private

gain where pressures to maximize profits collided with demands for further environmental preservation.<sup>37</sup>

In the following study I spend little time discussing the development of ski resorts such as Aspen and Steamboat, and outright ignore ski resorts such as Crested Butte, Durango, and Telluride. There are two reasons for these omissions. One, many scholars have already examined the history of both Aspen and Steamboat, and I do not believe that I could offer much more to their discussions on the early development of either ski resort. Two, I wished to underline the important correlation between urban growth and the development of ski resorts in the American West. While ski resorts that developed further away from metropolitan areas often share similar dynamics—such as controversies over real estate, wildlife habitat, and loss of identity—to those located closer, the environmental and political impacts of ski resorts and recreational use are more clearly seen in resorts that lie nearer large population centers. The combination of access and affluence creates a potent mixture of increasing demand and rural development. Similar dynamics can be seen throughout the West. From Mount Rainier National Park to Park City, the occurrence of public lands adjacent to urban populations has led to widespread development and use of these public lands as recreational amenities. For these reasons I have focused on the ski resorts along the Interstate 70 corridor as it passes through Colorado.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> On the evolution U.S. Forest Service recreation policy see: Glen Robinson, *The Forest Service: A Study in Public Land Management* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1975), 126-128; David A. Clary, *Timber and the Forest Service* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press), 1986; Dennis Le Master, *Decade of Change: The Remaking of Forest Service Statutory Authority During the 1970s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984) 142-74; Hirt, *Conspiracy of Optimism*, 52-84 and 125-57; Joseph Arave, “The Forest Service Takes to the Slopes: The Birth of Utah’s Ski Industry and the Role of the Forest Service,” in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, vol. 70 (November, 2002), 341-55; Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A History*, 278-307.

<sup>38</sup> Other scholars have made similar connections on the recreational links between metropolitan populations and their rural hinterlands. For more see: John Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the*



In chapters one and two, I examine the evolution of skiing in Colorado and the reimagining of Denver's mountain hinterlands as recreational playgrounds both prior to and following World War II. Chapters three and four take a closer look at the controversies surrounding ski resorts during the 1970s, beginning with the fight over the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games and the deregulation of the ski industry in 1978. Finally, chapter five examines the events and causes of the 1998 Vail Arsons. I argue that the changing economic and regulatory realities facing the ski industry during the 1980s led to a period of ski resort consolidation, creating what has been best described as an arms race among ski resorts over who could provide the most terrain, fastest chairlift, and most extravagant amenities in order to increase profits. No single resort embodied this more than Vail Ski Resort. The arsons brought a close to over a half-century of struggles over the development of ski resorts in Colorado.

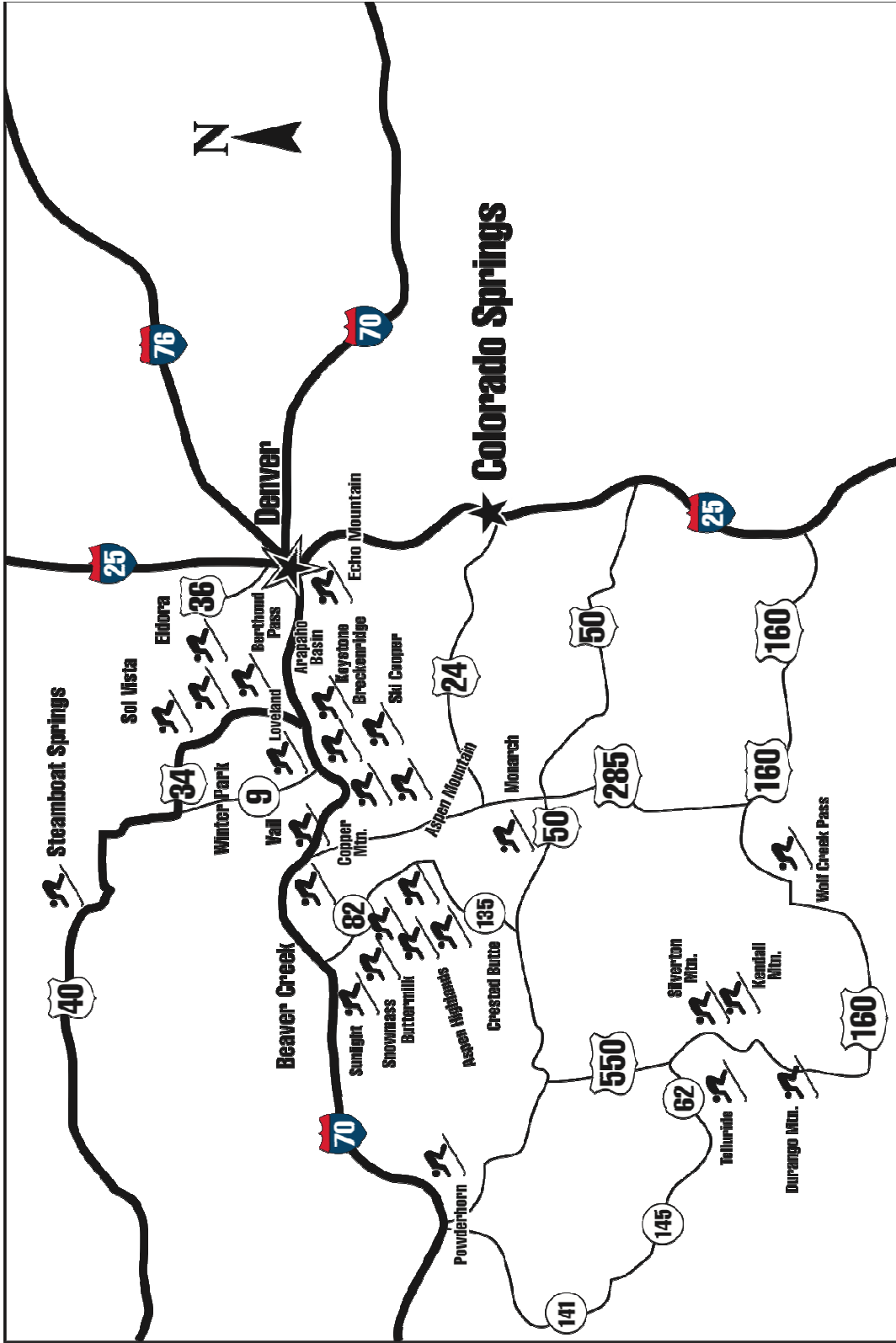
In 1998, Michael Berry, President of the National Ski Areas Association, commented, "The public expects that their recreational needs will be met, whether it is skiing, backpacking, or even bird watching, and they have every right to expect it."<sup>39</sup> Made just weeks after the Vail Arsons, Berry's comments underlined the cultural and economic importance of outdoor recreation in the West. Americans have come to believe that access to public lands for recreation is a right and are outraged at any obstruction in the way of their enjoying the great outdoors, be it hiking, four wheeling, or skiing. Whole

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*Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Cindy Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Theodore Catton, *National Park, City Playground: Mount Rainer in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Lincoln Bramwell "Wilderburbs: Nature, Culture, and the Rise of Rural Development in the Rocky Mountain West, 1960-2000," (PhD diss. University of New Mexico, 2007). On the history of Aspen see: Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*, 205-367 ; Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style*, 117-81; William Philpott, "Consuming Colorado: Landscapes, Leisure, and the Tourist Way of Life," (PhD diss. University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2002), 32-96; Edward Duke Ritchie, "Living it Up in Aspen: Post-War America, Ski Town Culture, and the New Western Dream, 1945-1975" (PhD. Diss. Boulder: University of Colorado, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> "Concerned Citizens Comment," *High Country News*, December 7, 1998.

communities rely on the tourist dollars brought in by recreation, which shaped local economies and defined the relationship between the West's metropolitan and rural regions. As millions venture into their public lands to hike, hunt, picnic, and ski, many Americans voice grave concerns over the condition of those lands. The growth of ski resorts in Colorado reflects this dichotomy. On one hand, public demand for skiing has continually grown over the past eighty years, while at the same time increasing numbers of Colorado residents had become critical over the impacts of ski resorts on the environment. The debate between the two has not only shaped Colorado's economy and politics, but demonstrates the complexities that emerged in the American West throughout the twentieth century.



Map by Andrew Harrison

# Colorado Ski Resorts

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE BIRTH OF COLORADO SKI COUNTRY

Crossing the Continental Divide at 11,307 feet above sea level, heavy snows often closed Berthoud Pass during Colorado's long winters making travel over the divide impossible. The opening of the Moffat Tunnel in 1928 had opened Colorado's Western Slope to increase winter travel, replacing the numerous mountain passes, which like Berthoud Pass, were often impassable during the winter. Winter travel soon changed when, in 1931, the Colorado Department of Highways began maintaining U.S. Highway 40 over the Berthoud Pass year round, allowing automobile access to the top of the mountain pass some sixty miles from Denver and its growing suburbs during the long winter months for the first time.<sup>1</sup> Denver drivers quickly took advantage of the ability to drive to the top of the pass to ski and play on the pass's snow covered summit. But the lack of facilities, including an adequate winter shelter, led to a clamoring for greater development of the pass, and Forest Service officials responded to the increasing use of the area by planning "a winter play-ground" on the pass summit. "The Forest Service has been at work for more than two years on plans for development of a winter play-ground in that area." noted one *Denver Post* article in 1932, "All that is holding up the proposed project is a lack of funds to work with."<sup>2</sup> Funding issues were soon solved by securing of Works Progress Administration (WPA) monies with which the Forest Service along

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Black, *Island in the Rockies: The Pioneer Era of Grand County* (Granby, CO: County Printer, Inc., 1969), 386. Black cited cost as the reason for the Department of Highway's decision to plow Berthoud Pass, arguing that forced plowing during the spring to open the pass cost far more than maintaining the road throughout the winter months. Despite year-round maintenance of Berthoud Pass, he argued that automobile access to the Western Slope remained painfully slow in coming. The lack of adequate roads long plagued the region, leaving it relatively isolated until the 1970s with the construction of Interstate 70. See chapter three for further discussion on the interstate and its impacts on Western Colorado.

<sup>2</sup> "Ski Mecca for Nation is Started: First Shelters on Berthoud Pass Begun by US Forest Service," Colorado Alberg Club: newspaper clippings 1932. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

with the City of Denver combined in purchasing an aging World War I barracks as a “lodge” for the burgeoning ski area.

Even with such rudimentary facilities, Berthoud Pass quickly grew in popularity. In 1937, the May Company, a Denver department store, helped finance the installation of the state’s first rope tow on Berthoud. Composed of a long rope looped over two pulleys typically run by a car or tractor motor—rope tows provided the first uphill transportation for skiers—making skiing much more accessible and popular. No longer having to trudge their way to the top of a ski run, skiers simply skied down, grabbed hold of the rope, an exercise that often proved much more difficult than it sounded, and were pulled to the top. The rope tow drew hundreds of skiers from the Front Range every weekend. “Denver people are suddenly awaking to the fact that within almost an hour’s easy drive from the city there lays one of the biggest assets in Colorado—an ideal winter sports center,” and “many ardent enthusiasts continue to ski on the receding snow fields until mid-summer,” observed a *Rocky Mountain News* reporter in 1937.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the decade, Berthoud was among the most popular ski destinations in the state, attracting 23,500 skiers by the winter of 1939-1940.<sup>4</sup>

Berthoud Pass’s growth reflected skiing’s growing popularity throughout the United States during the 1930s. In New England, thousands made their way to ski areas via train in Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York every weekend. The same was true in California, where the opening of Wawona Tunnel in Yosemite National Park led to the development of Badger Pass Ski Area in 1933. Further south in California, Lake Arrowhead ski area opened in 1932 in the San Geronio Mountains due in large part to

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<sup>3</sup> Ward White, “Denverites Awaken to Berthoud Resources,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 19, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Denver Ski Patrol Ninth Annual Accident Report, 1946-1947 Charles Minot Dole Papers, Box 2, FF25. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

the sport's rising popularity among Los Angelesans. Members of Utah's Alpine Ski Club convinced state officials to plow the road through Big Cottonwood Canyon in 1937, opening access to the state's Wasatch Front. Built using WPA funds, Mount Hood's Timberline Lodge opened in 1938 in the Cascades. The Union Pacific Railroad developed Sun Valley, the first true destination ski resort, in 1936.<sup>5</sup>

Skiing's rise in popularity during the 1930s reflected Americans' larger embrace of outdoor recreation during the first half of the twentieth century. Fueled by increased leisure time and growing automobile ownership, outdoor recreation blossomed throughout the nation as millions Americans ventured into their city parks, public beaches, national parks, and national forests to sight see, hike, fish, swim, picnic, and ski. In 1920, Forest Service Chief Forester Henry Graves identified the "widespread and spontaneous movement for outdoor recreation" as a pressing national issue.<sup>6</sup> Between 1916 and 1922, national forest visitation alone increased from an estimated 2.4 million to 6.2 million.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the creation of the National Park Service in 1916 reflected American's growing appreciation nature for not only its natural resources but for its scenic wonders and recreational opportunities. Arguably, the first National Parks, Yellowstone and Yosemite, were created as much for recreational opportunities for the affluent as for the preservation of their scenic wonders. As Marguerite Shaffer argues,

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<sup>5</sup> For more on skiing's early history in the United States see: John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing in America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 13-23; E. John B. Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing From Antiquity to World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 222-32. On skiing in Southern California see: Ingrid P. Wicken, *Pray For Snow: The History of Skiing in Southern California* (Norco, CA: Vasa Press, 2001). On Badger Pass see: Lincoln Bramwell et. al., "The Yosemite Way: An Administrative History of Yosemite National Park" (Unpublished manuscript, 2009), 207-11. On Timberline Lodge see: Theodore Catton, National Park, *City Playground: Mount Rainier in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 124-130.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Graves, "A Crisis in National Recreation," *American Forestry* (July 1920), 391.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 392; National Forest Recreation Use, 1924-1996. U.S. Forest Service History <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/policy/Recreation/RecreationVisitors.aspx> Assessed November 2, 2009.

promotional campaigns sold National Parks as sacred spaces in which American visited in order to discover the “real” America. As increasing numbers of Americans visited their ever-expanding national parks, environmental concerns began to arise.<sup>8</sup>

As Americans came to reimagine nature through their recreational activities, so too did the relationship between cities and their surrounding regions change through the transformation of rural hinterlands into urban playgrounds. Recreational desires combined with the era’s growing consumerist culture and the automobile not only lead to the creation of national parks such as Mountain Rainier, Rocky Mountain, and Yosemite, but more widely the use and development of national forests. But while National Parks like Rocky Mountain and Yosemite attracted thousands of visitors every year, the majority of American’s sought recreational opportunities closer to home within their national forests. Visiting a national park often took weeks of planning and travel, while national forests were often within a half-day’s drive for many living in cities throughout the American West.<sup>9</sup>

This was particularly true of Denver, where four national forests and Rocky Mountain National Park all lay within an hour’s drive from the city. In 1909, Denver

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Sellars chronicles the rise, and subsequent fall, of ecological science in the National Park Service during the 1920s and 1930s. He and other historians argue that landscape architects, park superintendents, and Park Directors Stephen Mather and Horace Albright emphasized recreation over natural resources during the period. Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 4-7; Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 16-22; Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 100-105.

<sup>9</sup> Historians have long debated the growing rivalry between the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service over the issue of recreation. Hal Rothman argued that the root of the two agencies competition with one another lay in the fact that each viewed land management in fundamentally different manners. The older of the two agencies, the Forest Service focused on the scientific management of timber and grazing resources, while the Park Service focused on building a larger constituency through the twentieth century ideal of recreation. Ironically, the national forests became much more popular as recreational playgrounds than did national parks in large part to the proximity to the West’s growing cities. See: Hal Rothman, “A Regular Ding-Dong Fight: The Dynamics of Park Service- Forest Service Controversy During the 1920s and 1930s,” in Char Miller ed., *American Forests: Nature Culture, and Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 118-119.

boosters began promoting the idea of building a system of mountain parks to draw greater numbers of visitors to the city. Over the next three decades, Denver built one of the most expansive park systems in the nation. As Denver built its mountain parks, thousands began venturing into the city's neighboring national forests, and Rocky Mountain National Park. The completion of U.S. Highways 40 and 6 during the 1920s connected the state's mountains with Denver opened the mountains to both tourists and Front Range residents alike creating a boom in access in popularity. This growing popularity placed Denver at the center of an ever-expanding recreational empire, one that the city sought to exploit economically by using it to attract visitors. Denver's surrounding mountains and parks became what U.S. Forest Service landscape architect Arthur Carhart would later term a recreational factory, producing greater wealth for both the city and the state in the form of tourist dollars.<sup>10</sup> But it was not only tourists who took advantage of these growing recreational opportunities. Denver residents, along with those from the city's fast growing suburbs, came to view the city's nearby mountains as playgrounds in which to hike, sightsee, picnic, and even ski. The popularity of such recreational activities redefined the relationship between Denver and its mountain hinterlands both culturally and economically during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Arthur Carhart, "Denver's Greatest Manufacturing Plant," *Municipal Facts Monthly* (September–October 1921), 3.

<sup>11</sup> In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams argues that the imagined contrasts between the city and the county by English writers reinforced cultural construction of the country as a natural Eden and the city as places of loss and capitalistic exploitation. William Cronon discusses this cultural dichotomy between the city and what he termed as nature, as opposed to Williams' country, arguing that cities are intrinsically a part of nature rather than something apart from nature. His *Nature's Metropolis* traces the environmental, cultural, and economic links between Chicago and its surrounding rural region. William Robbins and Gray Brechin add an additional aspect to the city rural relationship, each pointing out the capitalistic power cities exerted over their hinterlands. Outdoor recreation grew along similar lines, with cities exploiting the natural beauty and landscapes of their hinterlands in promoting tourism. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 289; and William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago*



Skiing was a part of American's growing love affair with outdoor recreation during the opening decades of the twentieth century. First introduced by European immigrants to the American West in the nineteenth century as a means to travel during the region's long winters, by the turn of the century, skiing had grown into an increasingly popular winter sport throughout the region's intermountain areas. Ski jumping emerged as a popular winter sport throughout many of Colorado's rural mountain communities during the 1910s, with ski clubs springing up throughout the state and the rest of the Mountain West. In addition, mountain communities such as Hot Sulphur Springs and Steamboat Springs began holding winter carnivals with ski jumping competitions. In the 1920s, the introduction of newer techniques and improved equipment made downhill skiing much more accessible and popular to a wider range of participants than its Nordic (or cross-country) predecessor. By the late 1920s, hundreds of small rope-tow-serviced ski hills operated throughout Colorado, including Denver's Genesee Park.

Denver's growing population, and the increasing popularity of skiing and greater access to mountain areas helped led to the opening of Berthoud Pass and Winter Park Ski Area during the late 1930s. The state highway department's decision to begin year-round maintenance of Berthoud Pass beginning in 1931 lured growing numbers of skiers to the pass's summit throughout the 1930s, quickly making Berthoud Pass among the most popular ski destinations within the state. At the same time, the completion of the Moffat Tunnel in 1928 opened the western side of Berthoud Pass to skiers, leading to the development of Winter Park Ski Area in 1939. A part of Denver's vast mountain parks

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*and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), 6-7. William Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

system, Winter Park was the creation of the city's park manager George Cranmer and other city boosters, including members of the Alberg Ski Club, who had purchased property near the Moffat Tunnel's West Portal in the mid-1930s and who stood to gain from the development of a city-owned ski area nearby. Winter Park quickly became one of the most popular ski areas in the state, attracting thousands of Denver residents to its slopes every weekend. By 1941, ski areas such as Berthoud Pass and Winter Park sat at the beginning of Colorado's ski country development.<sup>12</sup>

### A Gateway into the Mountains

On a cold February day in 1909, newly elected Denver mayor Robert W. Speer stood before a small crowd at the Denver YMCA to give a speech on his vision of the city's future. He spoke of a city of parks, open vistas of the snow-capped Rocky Mountains, and tree-lined boulevards radiating outward from the city's center. Looking toward this future, Speer announced his desire for the creation of a mountain park that would lie within twenty-five miles of the city where "[T]he masses could spend happy days and feel that some of the grandeurs of the Rocky Mountains belong to them."<sup>13</sup> The idea of constructing a mountain park quickly took hold, and by the following summer three separate committees formed to pursue of the idea of creating not just one park, but also an entire system of mountain parks. Composed mostly of local business interests and politicians, the three groups combined in 1912 to create the Mountain Parks Committee of the Commercial Bodies. In its first report on the need for a park system in Denver's

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<sup>12</sup> Abbott Fay, *A History of Skiing in Colorado* (Montrose, CO: Western Reflections, Inc., 2003); and Hal Rothman, "Powder Aplenty for Native and Guest Alike," *Montana* (Winter 1998): 3–17.

<sup>13</sup> *Eagle Valley Enterprise*, "Making Denver City Beautiful," February 25, 1909. On Robert Speer and his role in the creation of Denver's mountain parks, see Lyle Doresett, *The Queen City: A History of Denver* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company, 1977), 121–86; William Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 234–53.

nearby mountains, the committee proclaimed that the mountain parks were “Denver’s chance to open a gateway into the mountains, and take the lead in making Colorado more attractive to tourists than Switzerland.”<sup>14</sup>

The following year Denver passed a mill levy increase and quickly set about purchasing land in the nearby foothills to build the city’s mountain parks. With the passage of the special mill levy in 1912, the Mountain Parks Committee hired renowned landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr. to assess Denver’s nearby foothills as potential parks. In his initial report submitted that July, Olmsted noted “The relative value to the city of such tracts is in part determined by the natural charm and fitness of each, and in part by the relative ease with which they may be reached.”<sup>15</sup> The true value of the city’s hinterlands, he argued, came from their natural beauty and relative proximity to the city’s population. Such an idea was revolutionary. As the commercial and transportation hub of the Rocky Mountain region, Denver had long prospered by exerting control over the surrounding region’s vast wealth. But the recreational linking of the city with its mountain hinterlands offered a new model of economic control and urban development. City business leaders and politicians believed that the creation of a mountain parks system would attract tourists to the city, and thus bolster revenues. The new parks did much more than that. They also helped expand Denver residents’ regional identity by drawing the hinterlands into their sphere of experience and influence.<sup>16</sup> Over

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<sup>14</sup> Warwick M. Downing, “How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks: A Condensed History of the Building of America’s Most Unique Park System,” *Municipal Facts* (March–April 1931): 14.

<sup>15</sup> Park Commission, Denver Colorado Mountain Parks, Report on Land Recommended for Acquisition to Accompany Plan Number 58, Olmsted Brothers, Brookline, MA, January 20, 1914. Denver Department of Parks and Recreation Papers. Box 1, FF2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>16</sup> Other cities attempted similar projects during the period with greater and lesser success. As Greg Hise and William Deverall point out about Los Angeles’s failed Olmstead-Bartholomew Plan in 1930, as well as similar projects in Boston, New York, Louisville, Washington D.C., and Kansas City demonstrated a

the next two decades, Denver officials began developing the city's mountain park system by acquired 1,200 acres surrounding Genesee Mountain. Other parks soon followed, with several wealthy Denver residents donating small parcels of land, including Bergen Park in 1915, and Starbuck Park in 1916. By the end of the 1920s, Denver's mountain parks were drawing nearly half a million visitors annually. But rather than the thousands of tourists the city's businesses hoped to attract, the majority of the parks' visitors were local residents.<sup>17</sup>

The man at the center of Denver's mountain parks system was its mayor. Robert Speer first moved to Pueblo in 1878, seeking respite from tuberculosis. After recovering from his illness, the young Speer then moved to Denver where he found work first as a carpet salesman and later in real estate. His election as city clerk in 1884 began a political career that would span over the three decades, and help define Denver's place in the Mountain West. By 1904, Speer served as Denver's postmaster, member of the Denver Fire and Police Board, police commissioner, fire commissioner, and finally as president of the Denver Board of Public Works. Through it all, he formed relationships with the city's more dubious characters, including notorious madams, gamblers, and saloonkeepers, as well as most of the city's police, fire, and public works employees.

Many of the city's workers owed their jobs to Speer, who as police and fire

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growing desire by city governments to impose greater order over urban landscapes by developing parks for boom populations during the progressive era, though few of those plans scope of Denver's Mountain Park System. On the planned park movement during the early twentieth century see: Greg Hise and William Deverall, *Eden By Design: The 1930 Olmstead-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 7-22.

<sup>17</sup> The November issue of Municipal Facts noted, "Although there was an enormous increase in the number of machines and people entering the Denver Mountain Parks, there was a decrease in the number of out-of-state cars." City officials estimated that only 24 percent of all automobiles passing through mountain parks were registered out-of-state. Such figures led many to believe that while the mountain parks were a success that a national park was needed to draw more out-of-state tourists to the region. "Travel in Mountain Parks Increased Heavily," Municipal Facts (November 1918): 2-3.

commissioner had turned a blind eye to violations by local brothels and saloons, earning the loyalty of each group. Speer also had a strong following among Denver's elite, whom he catered to by promoting the construction of parks and by keeping their neighborhoods free of the less desirable segments of Denver's society.<sup>18</sup> With such broad support, he won Denver's mayorship in 1904, serving two terms before losing his bid for a third in 1912. He later won a third term, dying in office in 1918.<sup>19</sup>

Denver grew tremendously during Speer's first years in office, its population more than doubling between 1900 and 1910. City officials struggled to keep up with growing demands for sewers, water, and other amenities. Faced with escalating problems caused by the city's growth, Speer adopted a political philosophy he articulated as "progressive along conservative lines." Speer asserted that he had no problem with monopolies as long as they paid their fair share to the city. He secured a deal from the Tramway Company that allowed the transportation corporation to build and run a streetcar system for the annual payment of \$60,000, which went towards the beautification of the city's parks and streets. Such profitable deals were common during Speer's term as mayor and with the city used its gains to build projects such as the Denver's Civic Center, City Auditorium, plant of hundreds of trees along city streets, and, of course, construct the mountain parks.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>19</sup> On the life of Robert Speer, see Charles A Johnson, *Denver's Mayor Speer: The Forgotten Story of Robert W. Speer, the Political Boss with a Rather Unsavory Machine Who Transformed Denver into One of the World's Most Beautiful Cities* (Denver: Green Mountain Press, 1969); Phil Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver: 1904–1920, The Mile High City in the Progressive Era* (Denver: Denver New Social Publications, 2004). On Speer's role in the creation of Denver's Mountain Parks, see Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Queen City: A History of Denver* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1977), 121–58; and William Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 169.

<sup>20</sup> Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 122.

Despite his role in their creation, the idea of Denver's mountain parks system was not Speer's. Rather, it was city business owners who struck upon the idea of developing scenic drives through the nearby foothills as a way to draw tourists to the city. Upon his reelection in 1908 Speer quickly grabbed a hold of the idea, knowing that by promoting the development of parks he could secure the votes of Denver's business elites. After 1910 Speer continued to push the idea of mountain parks after touring Europe, where he became fascinated with the physical and political structure of German cities. In a speech following his return home, he declared to the audience that if Denver were a German city it would acquire "a large mountain park, and a ribbon strip would be annexed to Denver, connecting the city to the park, upon which a shaded drive and electric road would be constructed."<sup>21</sup> Over the next year, Speer worked tirelessly to gain approval of a property tax increase in order to begin the purchase and development of a mountain park system. The first property acquired for the system was a 1,200-acre parcel surrounding Genesee Mountain, but a road to the top of Lookout Mountain was built first. The road was later extended to the top of Genesee Mountain, allowing motorists to travel between the two parks. Other parks soon followed, with several wealthy Denver citizens donating small parcels of land, including Bergen Park in 1915, Starbuck Park in 1916, and Daniels Park in 1937.<sup>22</sup>

To help design the city's parks and roadways Speer hired the Olmsted Brothers Landscape Firm in 1913. Inheriting the firm from their father Frederick Law Olmsted, John Charles and his half-brother Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. rose in prominence as national leaders in landscape design during the opening decades of the twentieth century.

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 184.

<sup>22</sup> See Denver Parks and Recreation Department Records, Boxes 27–30. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

The more famous of the two brothers, Olmstead Jr., graduated from Harvard in 1894 before joining his father's firm. He later returned to Harvard as a professor of landscape architecture and became a founding member, and later president, of the American Society of Landscape Architects. In 1910, Olmsted was approached by J. Horace McFarland, a leader of the city beautiful movement and president of the American Civic Association, for advice on creating an agency to better manage the national parks. Over the next six years the two corresponded about their concerns over the commercial development of the national parks and the need for a strong centralized agency to manage them. Their efforts, along with those of several others, helped lead to the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. Olmsted's contribution to the new agency came in the form of a few words within the National Park Service Organic Act that shapes the agency's mandate and the debate between conservation and use for generations to come. Olmstead envisioned the purpose of the National Park Service "To conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."<sup>23</sup> To Olmsted, the national parks, and more broadly all parks, needed to frame nature for the consumption of visitors through the development of a system of roads, trails, and other facilities in order to best preserve natural and scenic areas. It was this thinking that Olmsted brought to Denver.<sup>24</sup>

In Denver, Olmsted found a raw canvas on which to paint his vision of a modern city. In his initial report on the potential of Denver's nearby mountains to serve as parks

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<sup>23</sup> National Park Service Organic Act, 1916 (U.S.C., title 16, sec. 1).

<sup>24</sup> On the Olmsted brothers, particularly Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., see Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 68–69 and 184; Charles Birnham, Robin Karson, National Park Service Historic Landscape Initiative, Inc. History, *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), 13 and 272.

Olmsted concluded that “the district most suitable for a mountain park system west of Denver lies south of Clear Creek, east of the Pike National Forest, and north of the southern limits of the Bear Creek and Turkey Creek watersheds. The relative value to the city of such tracts is in part determined by the natural charm and fitness of each, and in part by the relative ease with which they may be reached.”<sup>25</sup> To provide the access Olmsted deemed necessary, Denver began a road-building campaign, constructing hundreds of miles of new road over the next several years.<sup>26</sup>

By 1912, the automobile was radically redefining Americans’ understanding of nature. As historian David Louter notes, the automobile helped reinvent the nineteenth-century idea of nature as a product of America’s cultural achievements and a vestige of the nation’s disappearing wilderness for a modern, mobile audience.<sup>27</sup> The automobile reflected the Progressive Era’s belief that nature and technology could be blended together to create a new aesthetic understanding of the natural world. Landscape architects such as Olmstead Jr. and Thomas Vint designed roads in Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Park that framed each park’s scenic wonders through the windshield of the automobile. Thus, the automobile became a tool in which American’s came to interact with the natural world, redefining it and themselves. And nature increasingly became a commodity that could be consumed through the use of the automobile. By visiting national parks, national forests, and even Denver’s mountain parks, Americans expressed their identity through their visitation. The automobile both

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<sup>25</sup> Park Commission, Denver Colorado Mountain Parks, Report on Land Recommended for Acquirement to Accompany Plan Number 58, Olmsted Brothers, Brookline, MA, January 20, 1914.

<sup>26</sup> Denver Department of Parks and Recreation Papers. Box 1, FF2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>27</sup> David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University Press of Washington, 2006), 4.



created and expressed American's growing consumerist and leisure identity acting as both a tool and an expression of self-identity.<sup>28</sup>

### Recreation in the National Forests

Along with the popularity of Denver's Mountain Parks, Colorado's national forest experienced millions of visitors beginning in the late 1910s. Prior to World War I, the Forest Service had viewed recreation as a secondary use of national forests, subordinate to grazing and timber. The reasons for the Forest Service's disregard of recreation were twofold. First, prior to World War I, few Americans owned automobiles, which meant few had the ability travel at will to nearby national forests. Instead, the railroad played a central role in the period's development of recreation, linking the nation's urban centers with national parks such as Yellowstone, as well as resorts and spas.<sup>29</sup> It was not until

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<sup>28</sup> Much has been written on the role of the automobile in American history, particularly on the automobile's transformative role in defining nature. See: Earl Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America* (New York: Knopf, 1957; reprint, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Book Edition, 1990), 146-51; Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 11-54; Shaffer, *See America First*, 131-68; Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 30-41; Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, 3-10. On the Progressive Era, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform from Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 1967); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 2003). Sociologist Colin Campbell provides an explanation on the cultural connection between production and consumption in the creation of identity. Campbell argues that consumers both consume and produce the meaning of a good, which both informs and creates identity. Jackson Lears make a similar argument, stating that identity came to be defined through consumption beginning in the late nineteenth century. I wish to build on this argument inasmuch as to link the consumption of nature through recreation in the creation of identity during the twentieth century, and how this consumption redefined both identity and nature. Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987), 6-9; Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 379-414.

<sup>29</sup> The study of tourism in the early twentieth century is an ever-expanding field. Most scholars note how the consumptive nature of tourism reflected the period's growing consumerist culture. Earl Pomeroy's *In Search of the Golden West* argued that tourism, and tourists, helped define the West in the opening decades of the century. In comparison, Marguerite Shaffer argued that tourism reinforced American's national identity through the experience of visiting distinctive American landscapes. Some of the seminal works on tourism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century include: Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West*; John Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); Shaffer, *See America First*; Cindy Aron, *Working at Play: A*

the introduction of widespread automobile ownership, that recreation truly became an issue for the Forest Service. Second was the strongly held belief by the Forest Service's progressive founders that the sole purpose of the agency was the efficient management of the nation's forests and grasslands for timber and grazing. A culture emerged within the agency that promoted timber above all else, closely followed by grazing and mining.<sup>30</sup>

Following the end of World War I, outdoor recreation dramatically increased on national forests nationwide from an estimated 2.4 million in 1916 to 6.2 million in 1922, most of which occurred in national forests within close proximity of the region's thriving cities.<sup>31</sup> With no recreational mandate, the Forest Service struggled to construct a policy on how best to manage the millions of recreationalists ventured ever farther into national forests. Henry Graves, the Forest Service's second chief forester, acknowledged as early as 1919 the importance of recreation in the management of national forests, but the agency struggled to view recreation as a commodity alongside timber and grazing. For many within the agency the distinction between economic activity and pleasure was fundamental; planning for recreational activities took away from the Forest Service's primary objective of providing sustainable forestry and grazing on the nation's public lands. But the Forest Service could not ignore the reality of millions visiting national

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*History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Hayes, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 71-73; William Rowley, *U.S. Forest Service Grazing and Rangelands: A History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985); David Clary, *Timber and the Forest Service* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986); Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Char Miller, ed. *American Forests: Nature Culture, and Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> E. A. Sherman, "Use of the National Forests of the West for Public Recreation," *Proceedings of the Society of the American Foresters* vol. XI (July 1916): 293-96.

forests every year, and by 1921, William Greely, Graves's successor as the head of the Forest Service, declared recreation a major use of national forests.<sup>32</sup>

The hiring of Arthur Carhart in 1919, along with the growing bureaucratic struggle with the nascent National Park Service, greatly influenced the Forest Service's early recreational policies and helped the agency reimagine recreation's role in national forests.<sup>33</sup> While he strongly believed that outdoor recreation played a crucial role in individual and social stability, Carhart realized the consumerist relationship between most Americans and nature. Writing in 1920, he noted "Individuals naturally desire to help themselves to the best they can obtain regardless of others. This very greed undirected defeats its own purpose in a location of this kind by destroying the very qualities which the individual locates his house on the shore of a lake."<sup>34</sup> As the nation became increasingly urban, many American's dreamed of vacations in the forests and on the shores of remote lakes.<sup>35</sup> This relationship influenced much of Carhart's and others

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<sup>32</sup> Graves, "A Crisis of National Recreation," 391–400; John Wilkinson and H. Michael Anderson, *Land Resource Planning in the National Forests* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1987), 312–17; Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*, 113–22.

<sup>33</sup> Historians disagree on the scale of Carhart's influence on the Forest Service and the modern environmental movement. Baldwin argued that Carhart, not Leopold, was the "father" of the wilderness concept. Others including Nash and Steen repeated this argument in their works. Kirk correctly points out that such designation is problematic, and a bit boring. Despite who was the originator of the wilderness idea, there is no doubt that Carhart had a tremendous impact on the role of recreation in national forests. He remained a prolific writer on the subject decades after his leaving the Forest Service, particularly in Outdoor Magazines such as *Outdoor Life* and *Sports Afield*. Today, his portrait hangs aside former Forest Service Chiefs and other important figures in the agency's main hallway in its Washington D.C. offices. On Arthur Carhart's career and influence, see Donald Baldwin, *The Quiet Revolution: The Grass Roots of Today's Wilderness Preservation Movement* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1972); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 2d ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 185-86; Harold Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 154–58; Andrew Kirk, *Collecting Nature: The American Environmental Movement and the Conservation Library* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 19-47; Tom Wolf, *Arthur Carhart: Wilderness Prophet* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Carhart, "Memorandum: Uses, White River," February 1, 1920. Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 22, FF9. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>35</sup> Kirk, *Collecting Nature*, 30-31. On the Forest Service's response to the growing popularity of outdoor recreation during the 1920s, see Charles Wilkinson and H. Michael Anderson, *Land and Resource Planning in the National Forests* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1987), 312–21; Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*, 113–22.

within the Forest Service views on the proper role of recreation in the national forests. A pragmatist, Carhart understood the need for development in order to provide adequate recreational access to the masses, but endeavored to do so in a manner that preserved the very things recreationalists sought when venturing into their national forest and parks. In a memorandum to Aldo Leopold following their meeting in Denver in 1919, Carhart wrote, “There is no question in my mind but what there is a definite point in different types of country where man made structures should be stopped. How best to arrive at a definition of this point, or how best to come to a decision on these areas to be preserved is a question with me.”<sup>36</sup> It was a question that would continue to trouble the Forest Service over the next eighty years.

After graduating from Iowa State College in 1916 with a degree in landscape architecture, Carhart took a job with a Chicago landscape architectural firm. But he soon grew frustrated with the mundane work and enlisted in the army. He served most of his enlistment as a hygiene officer analyzing and testing drinking water and food supplies at Camp Mead, Maryland. Upon his release from the army, and with the encouragement of his former college advisor, Carhart sought a job with the burgeoning National Park Service. After making his way to Washington, D.C., to speak with National Park Service director Stephen Mather, only to find the director had left town. In a twist of fate that would shape not only Carhart’s future but that of the Forest Service, Mather’s assistant suggested that young architect inquire with the Forest Service regarding employment.

Following the assistant’s advice, Carhart made his way to the Forest Service’s offices. His timing could not have been more perfect. Assistant Forester E. A. Sherman

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<sup>36</sup> Memorandum for Mr. Leopold, District 3, December 10, 1919. Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 8, FF9. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

had recently begun thinking about how best to confront the growing recreational demands within the national forests, particularly the problem of increased automobile use, concluding that the agency needed to hire a landscape architect to help direct its recreational efforts in its western forests. Carhart appeared the perfect fit and Sherman hired him on the spot.<sup>37</sup> Assigned to the Forest Service's Region 5 Headquarters in Denver, Carhart observed that "[i]t will be reasonable to say that Denver, in spite of the fact that she has at the present time the excellent foothill parks, is in actual need of a place where her citizens, both laboring class and of the more well to do can go for an extended outing at a reasonable price."<sup>38</sup> He quickly linked the urban population's recreational needs with Forest Service management policy by advocating the development of national forests as recreational parks.

Denver boosters had long pointed to Mount Evans's wild scenic beauty, as well as its relative proximity to the city, as an ideal setting for a park. Located thirty miles west of Denver, Mount Evans rises to over fourteen thousand feet above sea level and is surrounded by a thick forest of spruce and lodge pole pine, the mountain began attracting tourists as early as the 1870s. But with few roads and no facilities, Mount Evans remained largely isolated well into the 1930s despite its relative proximity to the city. By comparison, thousands visited nearby Rocky Mountain National Park every summer. Roughly seventy-five miles to the northwest of Denver, tourists would drive or ride a bus from Denver, make their way over the park's Trailridge Road, and drive back in one day. "At that time we had a very active Tourist Bureau in Denver dedicated to holding

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<sup>37</sup> Wolf, *Arthur Carhart*, 39-42; Kirk, *Collecting Nature*, 25-27; Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*, 154-58; Donald Baldwin, *The Quiet Revolution: The Grass Roots of Today's Wilderness Preservation Movement* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1972).

<sup>38</sup> Preliminary Report Recreation Plan Mount Evans Area, Arthur Carhart, Recreational Engineer, 1919. Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 22, FF55. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

tourists in the city as long as possible by any reasonable means that would trap them here,” wrote Carhart on the possibility of developing a second national park within driving distance of Denver. “This proposition was being hard driven to get another tourist attraction in the city of Denver and provide for a circle trip out of town with a return at night.”<sup>39</sup> To members of Denver’s chamber of commerce, Mount Evans appeared a logical choice for another national park.

Carhart agreed. Noting the proximity of the fourteen-thousand-foot peak to the city, he wrote in his preliminary report “With roads and a reasonable method of motor bus transportation established, this territory will become the larger summer recreation area of Denver. It will be a continuation in effect of her present excellent Mountain Park System.” Along with roads, he suggested the construction of three residential centers, the most important established along Owlshhead Creek just below Beaver Meadow Camp, which would house not fewer than eight hundred people at any one time.<sup>40</sup> The Chamber of Commerce loved Carhart’s ideas, but was hesitant to develop government-built villages that would compete with the city’s economic interests. The Forest Service never acted on the plan and Mount Evans remained under the agency’s jurisdiction. Despite the failure of the plan, Carhart took away some very valuable lessons from his Mount Evans survey, namely, the recreational ties between national forests and cities. One lesson he would later extend in reinvesting the Forest Service’s role in providing recreational access to the nation’s burgeoning urban population.

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<sup>39</sup> Memorandum for Record, March 22, 1967, Arthur Carhart. Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 22, FF55. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>40</sup> Preliminary Report Recreation Plan Mount Evans Area, Arthur Carhart, Recreational Engineer, 1919. Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 22, FF55. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

Following the completion of the Mount Evans report, Assistant Regional Forester Carl Stahl assigned Carhart to write a recreation development plan for Trapper's Lake in the White River National Forest. Located 40 miles east of the rural town of Meeker, in western Colorado, Trappers Lake was a small natural lake surrounded by the Flat Top Mountains. The lake's beauty, as well as its remoteness and good fishing, had drawn many to request permits from the Forest Service to build cabins along the lake's shore. Under the Term Permit Act of 1915, the Forest Service had the authority to lease national forest land to private interests for the construction of summer homes, hotels, stores, and other outdoor recreational facilities. Capital raised by these permits was often the sole source of funding for recreational planning, privileging those who could afford to lease land from the government and those who simply wished to spend the day fishing, hiking, picnicking, or sightseeing.<sup>41</sup>

On examining the Trapper's Lake area, Carhart advised that rather than placing cabins and roadways on the lake's edge, they should instead be placed farther back to preserve the natural landscape surrounding the lakeshore and allow all visitors to enjoy the lake's beauty and fishing. The plan infuriated the few who wished to have their cabins on the lake's shore, but the Forest Service sided with Carhart's plan and restricted development along the shoreline. Today, Trapper's Lake is a part of the Flat Top Wilderness due in large part to Carhart's plan excluding development around the lake. In a memorandum on the Trapper's Lake decision, Carhart asserted that "[t]here are

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<sup>41</sup> Tom Quinn, *Public Lands and Private Recreation Enterprise: Policy Issues from a Historical Perspective*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service: Pacific Northwest Research Station, September 2002), 12; Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 60 – 62. Sutter argues that the permit system opened the way for a rapid increase in the development of summer homes, municipal and private camps, resorts, hotels in the national forests, and that the system undermined itself by allowing the monopolization and overdevelopment of some of the best recreational areas in the national forests. Such arguments reflect those of Carhart.



gluttons for scenic beauty innumerable. Left to themselves, hundreds of people will settle on summer home sites on the edge of the lake.”<sup>42</sup> He concluded that such development would lead to the eventual destruction of the very thing people in these areas looked to possess. “This very greed undirected defeats its own purpose in a location of this kind by destroying the very qualities for which the individual locates his home on the shore of the lake.”<sup>43</sup> The only way to preserve such scenic areas was to preserve them for all rather than allow a few to develop them. However, Carhart later acknowledged his views often clashed with those of the Forest Service’s over recreation’s place in national forests as well as the primary role of logging and grazing on national forest lands.<sup>44</sup>

Carhart’s plan for Trapper’s Lake in the White River National Forest marked one of the first calls for the preservation of landscapes within the national forests based solely on their scenic beauty.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that he did not call for the complete

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<sup>42</sup> Memorandum: Uses, White River, February 1, 1920. Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 8, FF9. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> In 1961, Carhart published a small pamphlet titled “Planning for America’s Wildlands: A Handbook for Land-Use Planners, Managers and Executives, Committee and Commission Members, Conservation Leaders, and all who face Problems of Wildland Management.” In it, he argued the public lands should be managed using a dominate use rather than the recently accepted multiple use concept. Dominant use would solve many of the Forest Service’s struggles in meeting growing public demands for recreational access, wilderness protection, and increased timber production Carhart reasoned. While arguably, such a system became the de facto policy of the Forest Service, the agency never outwardly embraced the concept. Arthur Carhart, “Planning for America’s Wildlands: A Handbook for Land-Use Planners, Managers and Executives, Committee and Commission Members Conservation Leaders, and All who Face Problems of Wildland Management,” (Washington D.C.: National Audubon Society, National Parks Association, The Wilderness Society, Wildlife Management Institute, 1961). Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 22, FF 125. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>45</sup> Much is written on the ideal of wilderness, and the early calls to set aside lands in order to preserve their scenic beauty. Roderick Nash wrote extensively on how American romanticism shaped the concept of wilderness, arguing that wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization. Nash’s argument on the inherent virtues of wilderness remained the dominant troupe for environmental historians for decades following his publishing *Wilderness and the American Mind* in 1967. Nash’s work stood on the intellectual shoulders of works such as Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Lands*. Environmental history’s “cultural turn” during the early 1990s revisited the concept of wilderness. Often marked by the publication of William Cronon’s essay “The Trouble with Wilderness,” environmental historians have broadened their cultural definition of wilderness and nature through consumerism, race, class, and gender. Such works argue that



removal of people from nature, as later wilderness advocates would begin in the late 1950s, but preservation of landscapes so that all could enjoy their beauty and recreational access. Such ideas were slowly emerging during the first half of the century. Others, such as Aldo Leopold, who in 1916 along with Tusayan National Forest Director Don Johnson co-wrote a report on the commercial development on the Grand Canyon's south rim suggesting greater regulation of development and visitor access to protect the area's ecology and scenic beauty, increasingly called for a new ethic in the management of nature. Leopold remained critical of recreation's impact on the environment, writing in 1938, "Barring love and war few enterprises are undertaken with such abandon, or by such diverse individuals, or with so paradoxical a mixture of appetite and altruism as that group of advocates known as outdoor recreation."<sup>46</sup> The growing popularity of outdoor recreation would continue to challenge the Forest Service's ability to balance the clamoring demands by an increasing number of recreationalists and those who sought to exploit national forests for commercial gains with traditional timber and grazing interests. The nation's growing environmental ethos following World War II only added to the agency's woes. These concerns helped change the agencies focus in coming decades.

In late November 1919, Carl Stahl invited Carhart to meet with Leopold to discuss his views on recreation and planning. Carhart readily agreed, and on December 6th the three men sat down in Denver's Brown Palace for a brief meeting. While no notes were taken of the discussion, Carhart later wrote a memo for Leopold covering the main

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American's define wilderness through the desire to preserve wilderness for their consumptive pleasure. For more see: Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, xv; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 69-90.

<sup>46</sup> Aldo Leopold, "Conservation Ethic," in *A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 165.

points of the meeting. “The Forest Service, it seems to me, is obligated to make the greatest return from the total forests to the people of the Nation that is possible. This, the service had endeavored to do in the case of timber utilization, grazing, watershed protection and other activities,” wrote Carhart.<sup>47</sup> “There is, however, a great wealth of recreational facilities and scenic values within the Forests, which have not been so utilized, and at the present time the Service is face to face with a question of big policies, big plans, and big utilization for the values and areas.”<sup>48</sup> Within the memo lay the seeds of what would become the Multiple Use Act of 1960 and the Wilderness Act of 1964. Carhart’s call for greater recreational development around Denver demonstrated the growing reality of increased usage of the city’s hinterlands by tourists and residents alike for recreation.<sup>49</sup>

To this end in 1921, Carhart published an article in the City of Denver’s *Municipal Facts Monthly*, in which he proposed the creation of a vast “Recreational Fan” that swept outward from Denver with the city’s mountain parks at its center and Mount Evans just beyond. Like the Mountain Parks Committee a dozen years before, Carhart portrayed Denver as the gateway to a vast recreational empire that assured “Denver the envied position of being the ‘Playground City of America.’”<sup>50</sup> By the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, the Forest Service faced increasing recreational use of national forest

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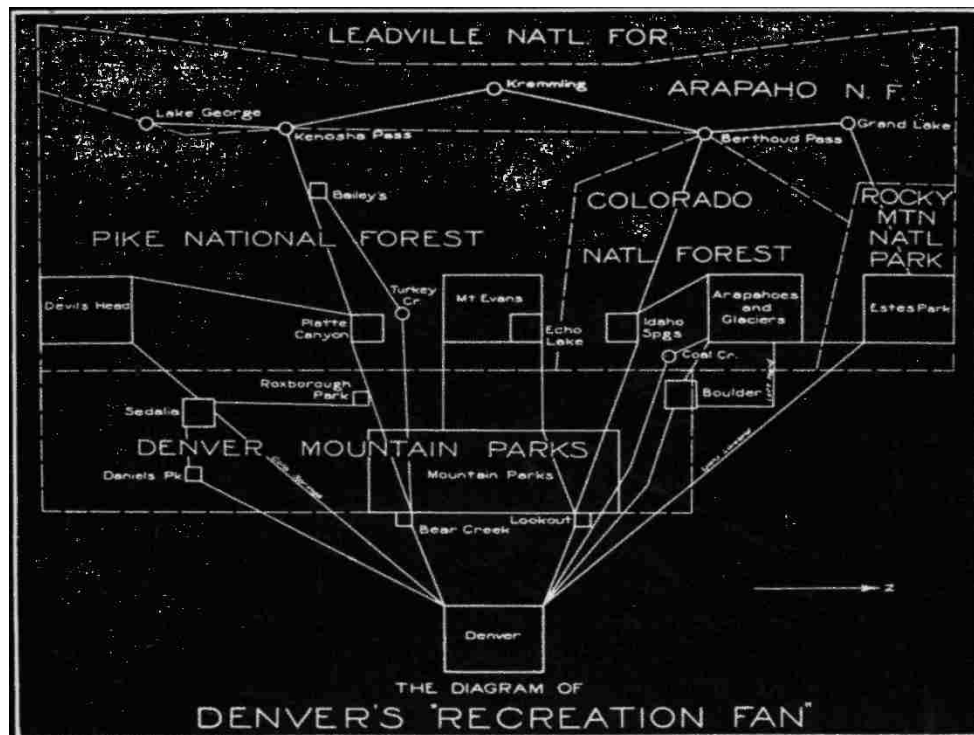
<sup>47</sup> Memorandum for Mr. Leopold, District 3, December 10, 1919. Arthur H. Carhart Papers. Box 8, FF9. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Historians traced the intellectual origins of the wilderness in part idea to Carhart’s and Leopold’s writings during the 1910s and 1920s. Baldwin argued that Carhart, and not Leopold, first proposed the idea of wilderness in his 1919 plan for Trappers Lake. Other scholars followed Baldwin’s lead, but it is difficult to definitively state who first proposed the idea. Rather, it is much more likely that both reflected a paradigm shift in land management occurring at the time. For more, see Baldwin, *The Quiet Revolution*, 29-36; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 185-6; Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 54-60; John Siedensticker, “Aldo Leopold’s Wilderness, Sand County and My Garden,” *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience*, Richard L. Knight and Susanne Riedel eds. (New Haven: Oxford University Press, 2002), 45-59; Wolf, *Arthur Carhart*, 59-61.

<sup>50</sup> Carhart, “Denver’s Greatest Manufacturing Plant,” 3-7.

lands. The growth of the Denver metropolitan area, as well as the popularity of outdoor recreation, in effect created the land use that Carhart had envisioned in 1919. His arguments for the necessity of recreational opportunities for residents of growing metropolitan areas in nearby national forests prophesied the growing boom in recreation by the late 1920s and early 1930s. This boom forced the Forest Service to begin managing national forests for recreation on a much larger scale.<sup>51</sup>



Photograph 1. Denver's Recreational Fan from *Denver's Municipal Facts* (September-October, 1921)

Carhart produced several other plans for national forests in Colorado including one in which he argued for the development of recreational facilities near Pueblo, Colorado.

<sup>51</sup> On recreation in the management of national forests during the 1930s see: Paul Hirt, *Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests Since World War Two* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 34-39; Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*, 113-22.

In his three years working in the Colorado office he had convinced district forester Stahl, Stahl's assistant, and the supervisor of the San Isabel National Forest of the importance of planning in managing recreation on national forests.<sup>52</sup> In 1921, Stahl assigned Carhart the task of drafting a recreational plan for the Superior National Forest in northern Minnesota. Rejecting the development of roads in what would later become known as the Boundary Waters, Carhart bucked the regional forest supervisor's desire to build a complex road system in the riparian area by proposing the restriction of road and cabin development to the forest's periphery.<sup>53</sup> Assistant Forester E. A. Sherman, the very man who had hired him three years earlier, rejected Carhart's plan, and after months of public meetings, approved the construction of two roads through the forest principally for fire control. Increasingly frustrated with the agency's failure to accept his larger ideas on recreation and planning, Carhart resigned from Forest Service in 1922. He moved on to become a mildly successful author of fiction and nonfiction, founder of the Conservation Library in Denver, Colorado, and a leading voice for conservation and wilderness.<sup>54</sup>

Carhart's legacy within the Forest Service became one of not only wilderness preservation but also of increased development and management of recreational facilities as demanded by a public increasingly interested in outdoor activities. Along with the development of the Denver Mountain Park System, Carhart's vision demonstrated the growing desire for recreational access by the nation's growing urban population to their

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<sup>52</sup> Arthur Carhart, "Recreational Plan, San Isabel National Forest, 1920" Arthur Carhart Papers. Box 8 FF58. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Carhart, "Recreational Plans Superior National Forest, 1921," Arthur Carhart Papers. Box 7 FF29. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>54</sup> Both Wolf and Kirk chronicle Carhart's writing and conservation career following his leaving the Forest Service. Kirk argues that Carhart's transformation from hunter to librarian reflect larger transformations of the American environmental movement, and complex relationship between man and nature. Wolf stresses Carhart's moderate approach to environmental issues of his day. Both argue that Carhart's contributions place him among the leading environmentalists of the mid-twentieth century.

nearby national forests. The sport of downhill reflected this desire than the growth of skiing. While, not as popular as picnicking, hunting, and sightseeing, skiing's rise in popularity during the 1920s and 1930s was built upon the Denver mountain parks, and reflected Carhart's vision for the role of the Forest Service in developing recreational access on national forest lands. By the 1910s, skiing was a widely popular wintertime recreational activity, which came to define Denver's mountain hinterlands.

### Skiing Comes to America

Skiing, in one form or another, is as old as the human settlement of Europe. Archeologists have discovered ancient skis dating back to 2,500 years before the birth of Christ throughout the Arctic region of Scandinavia and northern Russia. Ancient skis have been excavated out of peat bogs in northern Sweden. British ski historian Sir Arnold Lunn noted in 1927 that the earliest documented record of skiing was by the Greek historian Procopius in the fourth century AD.<sup>55</sup> While skiing in one form or another has existed for centuries, it remained rather primitive until the mid-nineteenth century when Norwegian skier Sondre Norheim invented a new type of binding composed of a traditional toe strap and a band of twisted roots that went behind the heel. The new binding allowed skiers greater control and the ability to turn their skis while descending moderate slopes. The binding led to a revolution in skis, which became shorter and lighter, and in technique. The ability to turn the ski with greater ease introduced two styles of turning—the telemark turn, and the Christie turn, named after Norway's capital city Christiania, now known as Oslo. The telemark turn involved the skier driving his or her downhill ski forward in the direction of the turn, while the

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<sup>55</sup> Arnold Lunn, *The History Ski-ing* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 3-6.

Christie required the skier to keep his or her feet roughly parallel to each other. Both styles have remained the basis of ski technique. In 1868, the forty-two-year-old Norheim won Norway's first national ski competition, awing the audience with both his equipment and technique. Norway continued its dominance over the sport throughout the rest of the century, with countless Norwegian adventurers accomplishing feats such as Fridtjof Nansen's trek across Greenland on skis in 1888.<sup>56</sup>

Inspired by Nansen's crossing of Greenland, twenty-nine-year-old Austrian school teacher Mathias Zdarsky bought his first pair of skis in 1890. Drawn to the Alps at an early age, Zdarsky possessed both a keen intellect and exceptional athletic ability. He quickly grew dissatisfied with his new Norwegian-made skis, finding them too long to maneuver on the steep slopes of the Austrian Alps, and began experimenting with shorter, more maneuverable skis and more secure bindings. Over the next five years Zdarsky built dozens of new skis, experimenting with length and technique. In 1896, he submitted patents on the Lilienfeld ski and binding and published his book on ski technique titled *Lilienfeld Skilaufttechnik* [Lilienfeld Ski Technique]. In it, Zdarsky focused on descending in any terrain using controlled turns based on the stem turn and the use of a single pole, which could be dragged in the snow for braking, balance, and leverage. Zdarsky's Lilienfeld Ski Technique remained the standard until the late 1910s when fellow Austrian Hannes Schneider introduced what became known as the Alberg technique.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> On the early history of skiing in Europe, see Arnold Lunn, *The History Ski-ing*; Roland Huntford, *Two Planks and a Passion: The Dramatic History of Skiing* (London: Continuum Books, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Thanks to Seth Masia for explaining the difference between the Lilienfeld and Alberg techniques. For more, see E. John B. Allen, "Mathias Zdarsky: The Father of Alpine Skiing," *Skiing Heritage*, <http://skiinghistory.org/zdarsky.html>; and Ski History Time Line, <http://skiinghistory.org/historicdates.html>.

Born in Stuben, Austria in 1890, Hannes Scheider became a ski instructor at the Hotel Post in St. Anton, Austria in 1907. There he began developing a new way in which to teach the hotel's patrons how to ski. Under Schneider's watchful eye, students progressed through a series of skills, building stem turns, in which the skier placed their skis into a wedge pressuring the inside edges, to keeping their feet parallel through the end of the turn. After the introduction of steel edges, Schneider eliminated the stem altogether in favor of a pure parallel turn. Schneider taught thousands of Austrian Army recruits to ski using his new Alberg technique during World War I, adapting it further for wealthy hotel guests following the war. The Alberg technique popularized downhill skiing throughout Europe. Appealing to a great numbers of tourists, especially British tourists, because of its speed and relative ease to learn, downhill skiing quickly the Alberg Technique became the standard technique throughout most of European and North America, catapulting the sport's popularity by making skiing accessible to millions.<sup>58</sup>

Political unrest in Europe during the 1930s led to the widespread immigration of Austrian and German ski instructors to the United States. Among them was a young Austrian named Otto Lang. Lang had taught at St. Anton under Schneider before immigrating to the United States in 1935, where he found work as an instructor at the small ski lodge in New Hampshire named Peckett's at Sugar Hill. Owned by the Hill family, heirs to the fortune of Great Northern Railroad founder James Jerome Hill, Sugar Hill was a small ski resort serviced by a single rope tow and offered terrain that

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<sup>58</sup> Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*, 168-201; Annie Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 50-59; Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing*, 13-23.

“resembled a hilly golf course, lacking any challenge for downhill skiers.”<sup>59</sup> While Lang enjoyed working in New Hampshire, the region’s unpredictable snow and an intriguing offer from filmmaker and heir to the Hill fortune Jerome Hill, whom Lang had met in Austria, drew the Austrian skier to the American Pacific Northwest. An avid skier himself, Hill suggested that he and Lang produce an instructional ski film to introduce larger numbers of American to the sport. The two men traveled to Mount Rainier, where they spent several days filming Lang skiing. The film titled *Ski Flight* premiered two years later at Radio City Music Hall and introduced millions to the beauty and excitement of skiing. Over the next decade, Lang opened ski schools on Oregon’s Mount Rainier, Mount Baker, and Mount Hood before ending up as the ski school director for Sun Valley in Idaho’s Sawtooth Mountains.<sup>60</sup> European instructors such as Lang helped establish ski schools in virtually every ski area in North America during the 1930s. From the Cascades to the Rockies and throughout New England, hundreds of ski areas opened across the country during the decade and millions of Americans considered themselves skiers.<sup>61</sup>

The early story of skiing in the American West differed from that of New England and the ski resorts of Europe. The discovery of gold in California in 1849 brought great numbers of Norwegian immigrants to the Sierra Nevada, where they used their

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<sup>59</sup> Otto Lang, *A Bird of Passage: The Story of My Life* (Milltown, MT: Sky House Publishers, 1994), 110.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 105–23.

<sup>61</sup> In 1966, the editors of SKI Magazine noted that the 1930s was the one of the most fruitful decades in the up-to-then short history skiing in the United States. “Skiing transformed from being a tool of the winter mountaineer to a sport in its own right, due partly to the proselytizing activities of ski clubs, the impact of the Schneider-Frank films, and the growing interest in competition,” they noted in illustrated *America’s Ski Book*. Historians have since seconded this assessment. Hal Rothman, Abbott Fay, Annie Gilbert-Coleman, and E. John Allen all point to the remarkable technological advancements and American’s growing desire for recreation as caused for skiing’s popularity during the decade. John Henry Auran and the editors of SKI Magazine, *America’s Ski Book: A Comprehensive, Illustrated Guide to Skiing* (New York: Charles Scribner Son’s, 1966), 33.



“Norwegian snowshoes” to travel during the snowy Sierra winters. Idle miners soon took to racing down steep icy slopes as long as a half a mile on their twelve-foot-long skis. Made faster by the application of specially created “dope” to the bottoms of their skis, racers became renowned for their daring and speed. While dope racing remained a regional phenomenon, disappearing by the late nineteenth century, skiing remained a popular means of transportation as well as recreation throughout the West. Mail carriers such as Snowshoe Thompson and Father John Dyer became famous for their heroic exploits on skis delivering mail in the California Sierras and Colorado Rockies. Isolated mountain communities found skiing a good method of travel during the long winter months, as well as a source of recreation. Beginning in the 1910s, many rural Colorado mountain communities began holding winter carnivals, the highlight of which was often a ski jumping competition. The first of such winter carnivals was held in Hot Sulphur Springs in 1911. Organized by Norwegian immigrant Carl Howelson, who had become famous as the Flying Norseman performing for the Barnum and Bailey Circus, the Hot Sulphur Springs carnival drew hundreds of spectators and competitors to the small town on the headwaters of the Colorado River for several winters. So popular was the carnival mountain towns from Grand Lake to Crested Butte soon began hosting ski jumping competitions.<sup>62</sup>

Ski jumping was not the only attraction drawing people into Colorado’s mountains. In 1912, a small group of seven outdoor enthusiasts formed the Colorado Mountain Club (CMC). Focused on in hiking more than skiing, the club soon became a meeting place for those interested in exploring the mountains surrounding Denver and the Front Range.

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<sup>62</sup> On the early history of skiing in Colorado, see: James Whiteside, *Colorado: A Sports History* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1999), 91-99; Abbott, *A History of Skiing in Colorado*, 21-31; Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style*, 13-40.

More than just an outings group, the however CMC promoted a greater understanding of the state's alpine regions through education, the publication of its monthly newsletter *Trail and Timberline*, the creation of a youth group, and the organization of trips. In 1916, the club began sponsoring winter trips to Fern Lake Lodge in Rocky Mountain National Park. By 1922, members began skiing in the area and by the end of the decade skiing had become the club's primary winter activity. CMC members later became instrumental in the creation of Winter Park in 1940 and hosted several ski races in the region during the 1930s.<sup>63</sup>

Even with the formation of the CMC, ski jumping competitions remained a popular form of skiing throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s. In 1920, the Denver Ski Club leased ten acres outside Denver on Genesee Mountain and built a ski jump. The following winter Genesee hosted the national ski jumping finals. Local business boosters envisioned the Genesee ski hill as a magnet for winter tourism and looked to promote a series of winter carnivals throughout the state, building upon those already in existence. While Genesee Park failed to draw national attention to Denver as a winter destination, it did attract thousands of Denver residents. Inconsistent snow, the Great Depression, and the opening of Berthoud Pass in 1931 brought an end to skiing in Genesee Park but proved the growing popularity of winter recreation in Denver's nearby mountains.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Hugh Kingery, *The Colorado Mountain Club: The First Seventy-Five Years of a Highly Individual Corporation, 1912–1987* (Evergreen, CO: Cordillera Press, Inc., 1987).

<sup>64</sup> "Colorado Has Right Combination of Sun and Snow, Ski Tournaments Already Pave Way for Others," Colorado Alberg Club. Papers. Colorado Skiing: newspaper clippings, 1921. Box 12, FF28. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.; Genesee Park Mountain Skii [*sic*] Club—construction of ski course, tournament: correspondence. Denver Parks and Recreation Department Records. Box 28, FF26. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



Photograph 2. Two Women Skiers at Genesee Park, circa 1920s.  
Denver Public Library Western History Photograph Collection

Genesee Park's local popularity was part of a much larger economic and cultural shift in the development of the mountains surrounding Denver at the turn of the century. Denver's economy had long been based upon gold extracted from the mines and placers high in the Rocky Mountain, as well as the exploding agricultural development of the central plains. The Queen City of the Plains, as its residents came to call it, sat at the center of an agricultural and extractive empire that ranged from the boom and bust mining towns in the mountains all the way to Kansas City. By the late nineteenth century, Denver had grown into one of the largest cities in the Intermountain West, attracting not only newcomers but visitors who wished to tour the towering peaks to the west of the city. While only a small part of the region's economy, tourism began playing

a larger role in shaping Denver and its surrounding region. In 1912, the city began constructing its mountain park system. An outgrowth the Progressive Era City Beautiful Movement, the parks expanded Denver's hegemony over its surrounding region. By the early twentieth century, both residents and tourists alike began visiting the nearby foothills and mountain regions. The creation of Denver's mountain parks in 1912, Rocky Mountain National Park in 1913, and the Forest Service's hiring of its first recreational engineer Arthur Carhart in 1919 all demonstrated the growing role of recreation during the first two decades of the twentieth century and reflected American's growing understanding of Colorado's mountains through recreation. This slow shift in definition became the basis of Denver and the state's recreational empire that stretched ever westward over the Continental Divide.

#### Denver's Ski Area and the Birth of the Colorado Ski Country

Opened in 1928, the Moffat Tunnel replaced the snow-choked Rollins Pass as the Denver and Salt Lake Railway's route through the Colorado Rockies, making year-round travel through the Rockies possible for the first time. The tunnel was the final piece of banker and railroad entrepreneur David Moffat's quest to build a rail line through the Colorado Rockies between Denver and Salt Lake. Moffat began construction of his railroad in 1903 with the Denver Northwestern and Pacific Railway (DN&P), which climbed the foothills west of Denver to the base of Rollins Pass. The DN&P reached the west side of the Continental Divide in 1905 when rails were built through the Fraser Valley. By 1909, it connected Denver with Steamboat Springs. The endeavor cost Moffat his rather sizable fortune and after his death in 1911, the railroad was placed

into receivership and reorganized as the Denver and Salt Lake Railroad. Heavy winter snows often blocked Rollins Pass for much of the year, making the construction of a tunnel under the Continental Divide the only option for reliable rail service from Denver into western Colorado. Construction on the 6.2-mile Moffat Tunnel began in 1926 after years of delays due to Denver's inability to help finance the construction. The tunnel was finally finished in February 1928, opening the western slope to Front Range travelers.<sup>65</sup>

The opening of the Moffat Tunnel spurred greater interest in skiing at the tunnel's western portal. Located at the northern entrance of Berthoud Pass, skiers enjoyed the western portal's snow-covered slopes by disembarking the Denver Salt Lake westbound train at the portal in morning, spending the day skiing, and returning to Denver that evening on the eastbound train. In the spring of 1929, on a ride back from the West Portal, a group discussed the idea of forming a club to promote skiing in the area. The following fall the group met again in Denver and formed the Colorado Alberg Ski Club. Interest in the group was slow, with only a handful of members joining its first year. Among those who did join the fledging ski club early was Colorado native and accomplished mountaineer Graeme McGowan. In 1921, while still in high school, McGowan and a fellow classmate made the first descent of Pikes Peak on skis. After high school, skiing remained a part of McGowan's life. Along with fellow Alberg Club

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<sup>65</sup>By the late nineteenth century railroads played a central role in the development of national parks such as Yellowstone and Glacier National Park. In 1936, Union Pacific chief executive W. Averell Harriman opened Sun Valley Ski Resort to promote the railroad and bolster tourism to the region. The Moffat Railroad worked in much the same manner, though its owner did not envision tourism as the tunnel's primary. On the role of the railroads in shaping the American West, see Claire Strom, *Profiting from the Plains: The Great Northern Railway and Corporate Development of the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Carlos Schwantes and James Ronda, *The West the Railroads Made* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008). On the Moffat Tunnel and the opening of Colorado's West Slope, see Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 193–95; Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado), 137.

members Garret Van Wagenen and Josiah Holland, McGowan formed Portal Resorts, Inc. in 1932, purchasing the Mary Jane mining claim near the West Portal from a local logger for \$1,500 in the hope of developing a resort. The club then leased the property from the three men, along with the few buildings McGowan had moved to the site, and with the help of the Forest Service began cutting a ski trail and building a rope tow. Like the later construction of the rope tow atop Berthoud Pass, this cooperation between the club and the Forest Service foreshadowed the government's role in helping develop ski areas throughout the West. While the Alberg Club's operation remained small, ski areas would quickly grow in size with the sport's popularity.<sup>66</sup>

The combination of private capital and federal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) helped bolster the development of recreational facilities on public lands throughout the country. The federal government saw such developments as a way to put young men to work, and to improve public lands. In national parks such as Yosemite, the CCC not only built new trails and roads, but also helped create Badger Pass Ski Area in 1932. Similarly, the Forest Service used WPA funds and labor to help build Timberline Lodge on Mount Rainier, Washington. But the development of the West Portal, while on a much smaller scale, reflected a similar shift in philosophy by the federal government, a philosophy that would continue well into the 1970s. The development of lodges by private interests like McGowan's Portal Resorts, Inc. adjacent to national forests represented a change in the Forest Service's behavior toward ski areas. Unlike Berthoud Pass, where the Forest Service had played a primary role in developing, Portal Resorts, with funding from a regional department store the area,

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<sup>66</sup> Colorado Alberg Club BOD Minutes, newspaper clippings December 9, 1929–November 8, 1946. Alberg Club Papers. Box 1, FF9. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

provided much of the means to build ski trails and a rope tow at West Portal. By the late 1940s, such private initiative increasingly became the norm throughout the West with the several small rope tow–serviced ski areas throughout the region setting a precedent for the boom in ski resort development following World War II.<sup>67</sup>

Within three years of its formation, Portal Resorts, Inc. fell into debt due to the Alberg Club’s failure to pay its rent. McGowan decided to disband the company, even after he had spent six weeks and a considerable amount of his own money building the clubhouse. After threatening to sue the club, McGowan won a small settlement for his work and the club took over the operation and ownership of the property. Despite his failure to build a successful resort, McGowan remained optimistic about the potential of the area for future development. In a letter to Colorado Alberg Club Secretary H. G. Hodges, McGowan wrote, “The Mary Jane Placer claim is a valuable piece of ground. This will be very fully appreciated in years to come. An offer of \$10,000.00 was recently refused for the Evan property here. The owner holds it at \$25,000.00. I do not doubt but for that its value will sometime be generally recognized at that or considerably more.”<sup>68</sup> Such a prediction held true. By the end of the decade, the Colorado Mountain Club had built their own small lodge near the West Portal and hundreds of skiers were visiting the

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<sup>67</sup> Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style*, 92–93; Joseph Arave, “The Forest Service Takes to the Slopes: The Birth of Utah’s Ski Industry and the Role of the Forest Service,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* (Fall 2002): 34–55; Quinn, *Public Lands and Private Recreation Enterprise*, 15–16. Neil Maher argues that the CCC and New Deal programs expanded Progressive Era conservation that focused on the efficient use of natural resources to concerns for recreational access, wilderness preservation and ecological balance by forcing conservationists to rethink what conservation meant beyond extraction. The case Berthoud Pass demonstrates the Forest Service’s, as well as the American people’s, changing conception of nature and the proper management of public lands. Each of which, as Maher argues, greatly influence environmental thought and politics following World War II. Neil Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New Haven: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10-11.

<sup>68</sup> Graeme McGowan to H. G. Hodges, secretary of Colorado Alberg Club, March 24, 1936. Alberg Club Papers. Box 1, FF6. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



area every weekend.<sup>69</sup> Yet, the real development of the region surrounding the Moffat Tunnel's West Portal began in earnest in 1938, when Denver City Parks Director George Cranmer grew interested in the area as the location for the city's new winter sports mountain park.

The popularity of Berthoud Pass and the Alberg Club's development of its own ski trails and clubhouse drew the attention of Denver's Director of City Parks, George Cranmer. A strong believer in the City Beautiful Movement of the 1910s, Cranmer continued building upon the vision set out by Robert Speer two decades before. At age twenty-nine, George Cranmer was already a successful stockbroker. Born and raised in Denver, Cranmer attended Princeton, graduating in 1907. On returning to Colorado he met and then married Jean Chappell, heiress to a fortune made in Colorado real estate and utilities. A fight with his business partner in 1928 led to Cranmer's fortuitous departure from the stock trade a year before the New York Stock Market's 1929 crash. Wealthy and well connected, in 1935 he successfully ran Benjamin Stapleton's mayoral campaign. Stapleton rewarded Cranmer by appointing him Denver's Director of City Parks.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Colorado Alberg Club: Portal Resorts, Inc.: Lease agreement (original), articles of incorporation, notice of dissolution, annual report (copies). Alberg Club Papers. Box 1, FF1. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>70</sup> Denver Parks and Recreation Department Records. Mountain Parks—Winter Park. Box 29, FF10. Denver Parks and Recreation Department Records. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado. Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style*, 92–93; Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*; Tom Weir, et al., *Winter Park: Colorado's Favorite for Fifty Years, 1940–1990* (Denver: Winter Park Recreation Association, 1989), 24–25.





Photograph 3. George Cranmer. Colorado Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame

Denver's parks thrived under Cranmer. Using WPA labor, he directed the construction of Red Rocks Amphitheater, increased the size of Denver Municipal Airport, later renamed Stapleton Airport in 1944, and improved dozens of city parks.<sup>71</sup> With an uncannily accurate vision of the future Cranmer, believed the Denver area would continue to grow and the people moving to the state would continue to be drawn to the mountains for winter recreation, especially skiing. In addition, the Stapleton administration placed a high priority on attracting tourists to the region, expanding the municipal airport in 1937 to begin accepting transcontinental flights. An active outdoorsman, Cranmer became interested in Berthoud Pass's growing popularity. By the late 1930s, the park director came to the conclusion that the city should take advantage of its nearby mountains and build its own ski area. With the city sharing the economic

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<sup>71</sup> Hugh Russell Fraser, "George Cranmer Serves His Native Denver Well," *Cervi's Rocky Mountain Journal* (March 19, 1958), 4.

woes of the rest of the country during the 1930s, financing such a project, let alone finding a location close enough to the city with enough access and snow, appeared to be a pretty tall order to fill. Undeterred, Cranmer began searching for his winter park.<sup>72</sup>

Like the members of the Alberg Club, by the mid-1930s a growing number of Denver skiers were making their way to the western portal of the Moffat Tunnel to enjoy the snow-covered slopes adjacent to the railroad. Skiers would ride the train through the tunnel, jump off for a day of skiing, and then return by train that evening. Hearing of this, Cranmer visited the site with friends and skiing experts Bob Balch and Otto Schniebs. Despite its being sixty miles from Denver and on the other side of the Continental Divide, Cranmer decided that the area was perfect for Denver's next mountain park. He quickly set about applying for a permit from the Forest Service and raising funds for the new ski area. In April 1938, the Forest Service issued the city a permit for 6,400 acres to construct and maintain a "winter sports area, including ski courses and trails, ski tows, and appurtenant structures."<sup>73</sup>

Skiers welcomed the news of Denver's decision to build a ski area at West Portal. "This brings great joy to the hearts of all the many interested in the development of winter sports in the region. Also, it will help to take care of the ever-increasing crowds at Berthoud Pass which are becoming difficult to handle; and it will open up a large region of splendid skiing terrain," reported the December issue of the Colorado Mountain Club's newsletter, *Trail and Timberline*.<sup>74</sup> But not all agreed that the city should invest

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<sup>72</sup> On George Cranmer and his role in the creation of Winter Park Ski Area see: Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 208-9; Coleman, *Ski Style*, 92-3

<sup>73</sup> Allen Peck Regional Forester to George Cranmer, August 10, 1939. Denver Department of Parks and Recreation Papers. Box 29, FF10. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>74</sup> The Colorado Mountain Club, *Trail and Timberline*, December 1938. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF 41. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

in a ski area. *Denver Post* sports writer Jack Carberry attacked the proposed Winter Park as a “playground for the rich.”<sup>75</sup> Others questioned whether the city should build a ski area more than sixty miles away on the other side of the Continental Divide. Undeterred, Cranmer continued building the city’s ski area.

Funding the ski area remained an issue throughout the 1940s. With help from Senators Alva Adams and Ed Johnson, and Representative Lawrence Lewis, Denver secured WPA funds for the construction of two rope tows. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes approved a \$9,000 WPA grant, which, along with the \$14,000 raised by the Denver Chamber of Commerce, helped finance the development of the area.<sup>76</sup> Despite federal and municipal financing the construction of the two rope tows remained a central concern. Cranmer cajoled, begged, and pushed city officials, business owners, and railroad officials for funds, often raging at the railroads’ sloth in signing releases of interest for the city to open the ski area. He solicited contributions, or Winter Sport Subscriptions, from local businesses and ski enthusiasts varying from \$10 to \$1,500. Through his tireless letter writing and phone calls, Cranmer kept Winter Park afloat, often promising that one day the ski area would not only pay for itself but also show a profit.<sup>77</sup> Cranmer constantly scrambled to raise sufficient funds to pay for the tows, as well as negotiate with the builder to construct them in a timely fashion. Prior to receiving the WPA funds, Cranmer held in trust the funds raised for the construction of

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<sup>75</sup> Jack Carberry, quoted in *Cervi’s Rocky Mountain Journal*, March 19, 1958. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF 41. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>76</sup> Memorandum, George Cranmer, January 5, 1939. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF13. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>77</sup> Marshall Sprague, “Denver’s \$600,000 Investment,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1959; W. M. Jeffers to George Cranmer, August 10, 1938. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF13. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado; Ralph Budd to George Cranmer, February 14, 1938. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF13. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

the first two ski tows in his own name until 1942, when they were transferred to the city treasury.<sup>78</sup> Even with such financial issues, Denver continued to build its ski area with volunteers' help to clear trails, build the two rope tows, and move three aging barracks to the site to be used as warming huts and even overnight lodges. Winter Park Ski Area opened to the public in December 1939.

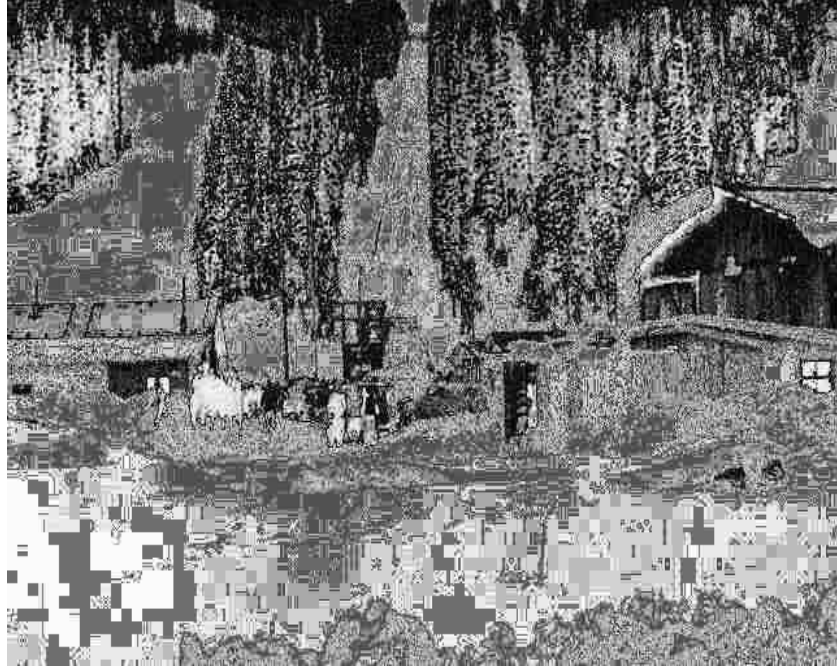
Halted only by World War II, Winter Park's growth promised to soon outpace the city's ability to manage the ski area. After only three years, its two rope tows soon fell into disrepair, leading Forest Service officials to threaten to revoke the city's permit if nothing was done to improve the two tows. Before his retirement in 1947, Cranmer ordered several improvements to the area despite the fact that neither the ski area nor the city had the funds to pay for many of the improvements. While profits jumped from \$7,385.75 during the 1940–1941 winter season to \$18,571 during the 1945–1946 season, the ski area was running in the red.<sup>79</sup> Because they were considered vital to the long-term vitality of the ski area, Denver Parks constructed a new 3,100-foot T-bar ski lift, moved the two rope tows, and constructed a restaurant and an expanded parking lot at Winter Park, leaving the Ski Tow Fund with a deficit of \$59,000.<sup>80</sup> By 1949 it was becoming apparent to all that the city could no longer manage its ski area.

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<sup>78</sup>Glenn G. Saunders to F. E. Wilson, February 24, 1942. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF13. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>79</sup>Winter Park 1947–1948 Season, Memorandum. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF22. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.



Photograph 4. Winter Park Ski Area, circa early 1950s. Denver Public Library Western History Photograph Collection

Alarmed by Winter Park's worsening condition, Denver banker and member of the Alberg Club Alan Phipps approached Denver Mayor Quig Newton with a proposal to set up a nonprofit board to run the ski area similar to that already running the city's natural history museum and botanical gardens. Pointing out the fact that the ski area's rope tows were becoming too dangerous to use and the Forest Service's threat to close the area if nothing was done, Phipps convinced Newton to accept the plan. In 1950, Phipps and other interested parties formed the Winter Park Recreation Associates (WPRA). Needing someone to run the mountain, the newly formed board hired Steve Bradley Winter Park's executive director. A graduate of Dartmouth and a member of its famed ski team, Bradley had served in the signal corps during World War II. Moving to Colorado after the war, he enrolled at the University of Colorado, earning a masters degree in fine arts. While working on his degree, Bradley was approached by Phipps, who asked the former

Dartmouth skier to apply for the executive director opening at Winter Park. Bradley did and in 1950 was hired as the WPRA's first executive director. Its leadership in place, the WPRA took the reins of the ski area. The arrangement created a nonprofit corporation run by a small board that would be an independent agent of the city. Due to the WPRA's nonprofit status any profits earned by the ski area were put into maintaining and developing the area.<sup>81</sup>

Until that point the city had invested a total of \$270,000 in Winter Park, but 1950 marked the end of public money for the ski area.<sup>82</sup> Faced with the necessity of turning a profit to remain open, the WPRA began investing in the ski area's facilities. The first order of business was the replacement of the ski area's two rope tows. "I concluded that the rope tow was perhaps the most dangerous piece of equipment there was, and we set out to retire them just as quickly as possible," recalled Bradley.<sup>83</sup> The danger of ropes tows lies in the fact that they are constantly running, and unless a skier quickly grabbed on and stays balanced they can quickly, and often violently, be jerked to the ground. Despite the use of safety gates, long hair or loose clothing could be caught in the pulley system, seriously injuring or even killing those unlucky enough to get caught. T-bars, on the other hand, allowed skiers to grab hold of a long T-shaped bar suspended from a cable and rest on the crossbar while riding uphill. Such an improvement kept skiers away from the cable and allowed lift operators to help more effectively. Ski lifts, a later introduction, improved upon the T-bar concept by attaching chairs to the cables and elevating them farther off the ground. With money the Cranmer and Phipps raised, Bradley tore down the two rope tows and replaced them with more modern T-bar tows.

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<sup>81</sup> Winter Park Recreation Association., *Winter Park*, 28-29.

<sup>82</sup> Curtis Casewit, "A City Owned Ski Area," *Journal of the American City*, April 1970, 120-22.

<sup>83</sup> Steve Bradley interview, Winter Park Marketing Files, Winter Park Ski Resort, Colorado.

Over the next decade the Balcony House, a new lodge named for its huge balcony overlooking the front slopes of the mountain, was constructed to replace the old barracks as well as a larger parking lot.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

By the end of the 1930s, the Forest Service had generally embraced recreation as one of its management priorities. The infusion of federal dollars during the New Deal through programs such as the WPA, along with cheap labor provided by the CCC, bolstered the development of recreational facilities throughout most national forests, especially those near urban populations. In Colorado, this translated as a greater emphasis on the construction of hundreds of campgrounds, trails, ranger stations, and rope tows. Such development, combined with growing automobile ownership, lured increasing numbers of visitors to the state's mountains to enjoy the outdoors. Skiing reflected outdoor recreation's mounting popularity during the period, growing from an obscure sport at the beginning of the century into an increasingly popular activity by the end of the 1930s. The United States' entry into World War II in 1941 temporarily slowed skiing's growth in Colorado, but the sport exploded in popularity in the decades following the war's end and opened Denver's mountains beyond Speer's and Carhart's imagination.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Winter Park Recreation Association, *Winter Park*, 28-29; Bradley interview; Winter Park: Ticket Prices, Ski Tow Improvements, Agreements, Contracts, Correspondence, Product, and Equipment brochures. Denver Parks and Recreation Department Records, Box 30, FF12. Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Department. Denver, Colorado.

<sup>85</sup> Ralph Hartley and James Schneck, *Administering the National Forests of Colorado: An Assessment of the Architectural and Cultural Significance of Historical Administrative Properties* (Lincoln, NE: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996), [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/forest/colorado-nf/architecture.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/forest/colorado-nf/architecture.htm). Accessed February 13, 2009.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BOOM

In the spring of 1947, Denver's city park manager George Cranmer wrote regional forester John W. Spencer demanding that the Forest Service act immediately to help fund the construction of more trails at the city's ski area Winter Park. Opened in December 1940, the burgeoning ski area was experiencing a surge in skier numbers, causing the trails to become overcrowded. Cranmer criticized the Forest Service's failure to meet the growing public demand for skiing, and insisted the agency help finance and construct more trails at Winter Park. While sympathetic to Cranmer's plight, Spencer responded in a strongly worded letter, "It is the policy of the Forest Service to give private capital an opportunity to develop ski areas on national forest land under special permits. This results in the creation of new business opportunities. Much-needed developments are provided, while at the same time the best interests of the skiers are protected by the administrative control exercised by the Forest Service."<sup>1</sup> Spencer also said the Forest Service was well aware of mounting public demand for skiing, and had, since 1945, issued permits for Berthoud Pass and Arapahoe Basin, purchased Cooper Hill ski lift from the War Department, arranged for the replacement of the Berthoud and Loveland Pass ski shelters, previously cooperated with the City of Denver to expand Winter Park, entered negotiations for the construction of a ski area at Climax outside the town of Leadville, and begun avalanche control on Berthoud Pass, all in an effort to meet the demand for skiing.<sup>2</sup> The problem the Forest Service had in assisting Winter Park's growth in 1947 was a simple lack of funds and manpower with which to continue its New Deal

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Spencer, Regional Forester, to George Cranmer, May 27, 1947. George E. Cranmer Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



expansions of the 1930s and early 1940s. The combination of increasing public demand and limited Forest Service budgets meant, as Spencer indicated in his letter to Cranmer, that private ventures would now have to develop ski areas on public lands.<sup>3</sup>

Spencer's reply demonstrated the Forest Service's struggle to meet recreational expectations in the years following World War II and the agency's transference of ski area development responsibility to the private sector. Throughout Colorado and the West, national forests attracted hundred of thousands of visitors in the years immediately following the war's end. Recreational visits to national forests rose by nearly 200 percent from the 1945 through 1950. This trend continued over the next two decades. By 1960, the Forest Service estimated that the total number of recreational visits to national forests totaled 92.6 million visitor days. Four years later, that number grew to 133.8 million.<sup>4</sup> The Forest Service was not the only agency experiencing such tremendous growth in visitation. The lifting of wartime travel restrictions, along with growing national affluence beginning in the 1950s and an overall increase in the nations population, drew

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<sup>3</sup>Recreation became an increasingly pressing issue in the years following World War II. The Forest Service's camp grounds, trails, and roads quickly proved inadequate in dealing with the millions of visitors venturing into their national forests. In 1956, the agency released a report projecting that by 1962 the national forest would host 66 million visitors. Such numbers helped launch Operation Outdoors. A five year program that injected millions of funds into the to agency in order to repair and rehabilitate facilities left unattended during the 1940s, Operation Outdoors proved to be only a band aid measure. John Sticker, "Recreation on the National Forest," *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science* (September, 1957), 129-31. The 1960s proved to be a turning point for the Forest Service in more ways than just recreational funding. In 1960, Congress passed the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act in order balance increasing recreational use with timber. The passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, and the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969 added another layer of legislation to Forest Service management of national forests. The Forest Service struggled in meeting the increasing demands both by recreationalists and the timber industry throughout the decade. Dennis C. Le Master, *Decade of Change: The Remaking of the Forest Service Statutory Authority During the 1970s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 1-15; Harold Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 297-307; Paul Hirt, *A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests Since World War Two* (Lincoln: University Press of Nebraska, 1994), 193-215.

<sup>4</sup> National Forest Recreational Use, 1924-1996, Forest History Society, <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/policy/Recreation/RecreationVisitors.aspx>., accessed May 3, 2008. According to the Forest Service, a recreational visitor day is a reporting unit consisting of twelve visitor hours. Beginning in 1965 the definition and units of recreation use were changed to reflect better estimates and the passage of the Wilderness Act and the Land and Conservation Fund Act.

Americans into their public lands by the millions. National Park visitation exploded following the war. In Yosemite National Park alone, visitor numbers rose 315 percent between 1945 and 1946, and hit the 1 million mark in 1954.<sup>5</sup> The often-overlooked Bureau of Land Management, landlord of the largest public land domain within the United States, experienced similar increases in recreational use, though not nearly to the same degree. In all, recreation became one of the primary uses of public lands, especially in the American West. This growth in turn caused tremendous problems for all land management agencies as they attempted to provide adequate access to accommodate exploding numbers of users.<sup>6</sup>

Downhill skiing reflected this remarkable growth in outdoor recreation. A relatively minor sport prior to the war, skiing's popularity boomed in the postwar years. Skiing quickly became the single largest winter use of national forests in many western states. State and local boosters promoted skiing in order to bolster wintertime travel to states such as Colorado, Utah, and California, and hundreds of new ski areas opened across the region. In Colorado alone, skier numbers jumped 59 percent during the 1946–1947 winter season. By 1949, the state's twenty-three ski areas drew 171,000 skiers, a 78 percent increase from the season before. Over the next two decades, skier numbers continued to climb dramatically. Skier days jumped from 1.3 million nationwide in 1955 to 4.2 million

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Kittredge, "Yosemite during the War Years," *Yosemite Nature Notes* (May 1946): 76. Yosemite National Park Library, California.

<sup>6</sup> Historians note the meteoric growth of outdoor recreation following World War II. See Marion Clawson, *The Bureau of Land Management* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 109–20; Charles Wilkinson and H. Michael Anderson, *Land Resource Planning in the National Forests* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1987), 321–24; Hal Rothman, "A Regular Ding-Dong Fight': Agency Culture and Evolution in the Park Service-Forest Service Dispute, 1916–1937," *Western Historical Quarterly* (May 1989): 187–214; Hirt, *Conspiracy of Optimism*, 82–87; Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 149–203; Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*, 278–307.

in 1964. Economists projected that by 1980 the eleven western states would reach nearly 24 million skier days.<sup>7</sup>

Such an increase in visitation and recreational activity overwhelmed the Forest Service, convincing the agency to allow the development of new, larger ski resorts throughout the West. In Colorado, a dozen new ski resorts opened in the two decades following the war. However, the development of ski areas on public land came with a price. From the opening of Arapahoe Basin Ski Area in 1947 to Breckenridge Ski Resort in 1961, and Vail Ski Resort in 1962 developers worked in conjunction with the Forest Service to construct ski areas on public lands. The desire to maximize profits often placed the very same developers at odds with Forest Service officials who desired to direct the control the development of public lands for recreational access. This tension shaped the early development of ski resorts throughout the West and framed the larger debate over the region's future.

The development of ski areas, and later ski resorts, in the Colorado Rockies marked the emergence of the Modern West: a West less reliant on what economist Thomas Michael Power termed "folk economics," and more reliant on postindustrial industries such as tourism and technology.<sup>8</sup> This economic shift brought with it great cultural changes. Ranches became ski resorts, as the story of Vail demonstrates, and once-rural towns became gateways to the region's vast public lands. With the greatest proportion of its population living in urban areas, the West became more so in the years after World

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<sup>7</sup> "Increase in Skier Days in 1947," Department of Agriculture release, February 9, 1947. Arapahoe Basin U.S. Forest Service, 1946–1949. Lawrence Jump Papers. Box 1, FF8. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado; Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Department. Denver, Colorado; U. S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service News Bulletin, Sunday, May 18, 1947. Lawrence Jump Papers, Box 1, FF8. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Thomas Power, *Lost Landscapes and Failed Economies: The Search for a Value of Place* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996), 19–21.

War II as millions migrated to the region's cities and burgeoning suburbs. In Colorado, the suburbs surrounding Denver quickly expanded along the Front Range. In keeping with its status as a modern western state, tourism became Colorado's second largest industry, behind only manufacturing.<sup>9</sup> As a major feature of the tourism industry in the state, ski areas began to reshape people's concept of the Colorado's mountainous interior. In terms of the scale of construction and use of resources, the development of ski areas paled in comparison to the extension of Interstate 70 through the Colorado Rockies and into Utah. The interstate facilitated unparalleled development of Colorado's mountains. Begun in 1971, the four-lane highway became the mountain's main artery that opened the state's interior to further development, allowing greater numbers of tourists to visit and greater amounts of resources to arrive. The extension of Interstate 70 also caused the beginnings of a cultural backlash against the development of the state's mountain communities and the impacts that development had on the environment, specifically a contentious debate over the proposed routing of the interstate through the Eagle's Nest primitive area. In all, the development of ski areas carried with it tremendous effects on the future of Colorado's mountains and the debate over their shape.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> On Colorado's changing economics during the late twentieth century, see: Wilson D. Kendall, *A Brief Economic History of Colorado* (Denver: Center for Business and Economic Forecasting, Inc., 2002).

<sup>10</sup> On postwar suburban growth, see Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 155–81; Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998); Andres Duany et. Al., *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2001); Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). On the importance of World War II in the American West, see Gerald Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

## Arapahoe Basin

At the end of World War II, only two highways linked Colorado's high country to the outside world. U.S. Highway 40 meandered into the mountains from Denver and crossed the Continental Divide over Berthoud Pass before making its way westward through Middle Park, Steamboat Springs, and onto Salt Lake City. Similarly, Highway 6 wound through the Rockies from Denver over Loveland and Vail Passes and into southern Utah. Of the two, Highway 40 proved to be the most popular for both summer and winter travel. The Colorado Department of Highways began plowing Berthoud Pass during the winter of 1931, opening it to skiers who often traveled to the summit of the pass during weekends to enjoy the bountiful snowfall. Such access played a central role in the opening of Berthoud Pass Ski Area in 1937 and later Winter Park Ski Area in 1940 at the western portal of the Moffat Tunnel. The two ski areas quickly became the most popular areas in the state, attracting well over 30,000 visitors each by 1945.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the more southerly U.S. Highway 6 saw much less traffic. Like Berthoud Pass, both Loveland and Vail passes remained treacherous during the winter, even with increased state maintenance. But Loveland Pass posed particular problems as it crossed the Continental Divide at nearly 12,000 feet above sea level, making winter driving on all but the calmest days difficult at best. Vail Pass was not even constructed until 1940, when it replaced the much more perilous Shrine Pass.

Two other reasons accounted for Highway 40's greater popularity with both summer and winter tourists. The first was the relative distance of Loveland and Vail Pass from Denver and the Front Range. Intimidated by the longer drive, most motorists chose to

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service News Bulletin, Friday, May, 20, 1949. George E. Cranmer Papers. Box 1, FF22. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

cross the Divide at the much closer Berthoud Pass. Second, the both the Forest Service and City of Denver actively promoted the Berthoud Pass route. As early as 1920, Denver city officials promoted a circular tour of the northern Rockies along the Front Range, through Rocky Mountain National Park, with a return to Denver via Berthoud Pass on Highway 40. The Forest Service had taken an active role in the early development of Berthoud Pass Ski Area, building both a ski shelter and helping finance the first rope tow on the pass's summit. Winter Park Ski Area, owned by the City of Denver, enjoyed the benefits of city boosters promoting the new ski area to tourists.<sup>12</sup>

Yet despite its distance from Denver and a lack of municipal and federal promotion, Loveland Pass offered great potential for the development of a ski area. In a 1931 survey of possible sites for future ski areas, the Forest Service identified both the eastern side of Loveland Pass and a small watershed on the western side of the pass known as Arapahoe Basin as ideal locations for future skiing related developments. To this end in 1936 Denver businessman J. C. Blickensderfer installed a rope tow on the eastern side of the pass. Over the next five years Blickensderfer installed three more tows and named his small ski area Loveland Basin. The potential of Arapahoe Basin captured the imagination of Regional Forest Service Ranger W. "Slim" Davis. Pointing to the basin's combination of high elevation, north-facing exposure, and access directly off Highway 6, Davis laid out plans in 1941 for a ski area in Arapahoe Basin. However, the United States' entry into World War II put the development of Arapahoe Basin on hold for the next five years.

During the winter of 1945, the Winter Sports Committee of Denver hired 10th Mountain Division veterans Lawrence "Larry" Jump and Frederick "Sandy" Schaffler to

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<sup>12</sup> A further discussion on the promotion of Highway 40 by Denver City officials is included in chapter one. Arthur Carhart, Memorandum for Record, March 22, 1967. Arthur Carhart Papers, Box 22, FF 55. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

locate a potential ski area site near the Front Range. After scouting the mountains, the two stumbled across Arapahoe Basin. Like Davis before them, Jump and Schaufler quickly identified the area's potential for skiing and recruited former Olympic medalist Dick Durrance, ski manufacturer Thor Groszold, and former Penn State forestry professor Max Dercum to form Arapahoe Basin Inc.<sup>13</sup>

Forest Service officials welcomed the construction of a new ski area in the region. "I feel personally that a development of the type you propose is badly needed, and you are invited to give us further details," wrote Regional Forester John Spencer, the same official who would pen a scathing letter to Denver City Park's Director George Cranmer a year later in response to Cranmer's complaint that the Forest Service was not doing enough to promote skiing in the state, to Arapahoe Basin director Max Dercum in 1946.<sup>14</sup> Given the rising popularity of skiing during the previous winter, the Forest Service had come to the conclusion that more ski areas would soon be needed to satisfy increasing demand. "Since there are no indications that this meteoric increase in winter recreational use is beginning to level off," noted Ranger W. S. Davis, "the national forests in the Rocky Mountain region are making preparations to accommodate an even greater number of people next season."<sup>15</sup> That next winter, Arapahoe Basin opened its first ski lift.

The new ski area struggled in its first years of operation. A lack of parking and adequate facilities kept many skiers away from Arapahoe Basin. Parking became a constant source of frustration for the area's owners. The Colorado Department of Highways refused to plow the snow back enough for skiers to park safely alongside the

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<sup>13</sup> "Survey of Winter Sports is Compiled in Mountain Area," *Glenwood Post*, May 5, 1938.

<sup>14</sup> John Spencer to Max Dercum, May 9, 1946. Lawrence Jump Papers. Arapahoe Basin U.S. Forest Service 1946-1949. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service News Bulletin, Sunday, May 18, 1947.

highway, leaving many no choice but to park alongside the highway and receive a ticket from the state highway patrol or risk getting stuck in the ditch. Jump harangued the highway department, the state patrol, and the Forest Service over Arapahoe Basin's parking problems, arguing that the ski area's profits were hurt by the failure of each agency to provide adequate parking. All agreed that it was a problem, but it was not until 1950 that the Department of Highways agreed to keep the entrance of the ski area clear of snow. Even with the agreement in place, parking at Arapahoe Basin remained perilous throughout the decade.<sup>16</sup>

Financial problems also plagued the new ski area. Besides the parking problems, Arapahoe Basin's runs were too steep for novice skiers, giving the ski area the reputation of being too difficult for most tourists to ski. In 1949, co-founder Sandy Schauffler sold his share of the business to Larry Jump, and it appeared that Arapahoe Basin might fail. Schauffler's departure was followed by more bad news when in 1951 rumors began circulating throughout the state that the Forest Service had approved the construction of a new ski lift on the eastern side of Loveland Pass.

On hearing the rumor, Jump immediately sent a letter to Regional Forester Edward Cliff in protest. In the letter, Jump argued that an agreement between the ski area and Forest Service had confirmed that no additional lifts would be approved until public need demanded. Despite careful management and attention to costs and expenses, Arapahoe Basin had operated at a loss every season to date. "In 1946 when Arapahoe Basin, Inc. was organized to construct two chair lifts on Loveland Pass, the Forest Service officials

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<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Jump to Forest Supervisor William Fay, Arapahoe National Forest, January 26, 1950. Lawrence Jump Papers. Box 3, FF1. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado; Lawrence Jump to Forester Supervisor William Fay, April 2, 1951. Lawrence Jump Papers. Box 3, FF1. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



stated that no additional lifts would be approved until a far greater need for up-hill facilities was manifested. On this basis we undertook to raise the necessary capital to make all the required improvements at a time there were no public funds (unlike competing areas) to help with such facilities as parking areas, toilets, shelters, etc.,” Jump wrote. He continued by pointing out that despite the ski area having operated in the red since its opening, “only now can [we] see a possible small profit under existing conditions.” According to Jump, the central reason for Arapahoe Basin’s financial struggles lay in its having to compete with an increasing number of ski areas in the region. He concluded the letter by stating, “A chairlift at Loveland Basin would be ruinous to our business we are convinced, and would create serious stockholder reaction which conceivably could lead to bankruptcy.”<sup>17</sup>

Cliff denied Forest Service’s approval of a new ski area on Loveland Pass, but stated, “Any new developments at an established area could not be disapproved on the basis of objections by a competing area.”<sup>18</sup> The issue of competitiveness would become increasingly difficult for the Forest Service to manage over the next decade. The agency arguably allowed the private development of ski resorts in national forests to provide recreational access to the public. But private interests were not the same as the public’s interests. What if, as in the case of Arapahoe Basin, a ski area was struggling to compete? Was it within the Forest Service’s power to limit competition? This option could protect the public’s interests by limiting the development of public lands and thereby preserving their beauty, but also might hurt consumers who desired lower ticket prices brought about

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Jump to Edward Cliff, June 6, 1951. Larry Jump Papers. Box 3, FF 9. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Cliff to Lawrence Jump, July 6, 1951. Larry Jump Papers. Box 3, FF 9. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

by increased competition. In addition, ski areas often had different interests than the Forest Service in not only maximizing their profits but in ensuring that they held a healthy market share. Jump's opposition to another ski area on Loveland Pass came from his interest in keeping Arapahoe Basin afloat financially. Such interests were widely accepted in the years following World War II. But by the late 1950s, increasing numbers of Americans began to question the development of public lands, and call instead for the preservation of wild places.<sup>19</sup>

The problem of corporate profits versus the variety of public demands remained unresolved, due in large part to skiing's continued growth over the next decade. But the questions raised by Jump in the Forest Service's role ensuring a protected market foreshadowed a much larger controversy over the development of the Vail and Breckenridge ski resorts in the coming decade. The issue of private investment in ski resorts and the corresponding need to maximize profits would become the single defining issue of the development and expansion of ski areas in national forests as the Forest Service issued permits for new ski areas. In the 1960s, this juggling act would only become more complicated with the growing call for the preservation of pristine landscapes.

In 1953, Arapahoe Basin opened its first chairlift. Two years later, Loveland Basin opened its own chairlift. The two neighboring areas remained highly competitive until the 1970s, when, unable to keep up with demands, and in order to provide "uncongested skiing," the owners of Arapahoe Basin agreed with the Forest Service to limit the number

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 118-21; Michael Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 323-32; Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 200-37.

of skiers on the mountain to 1,600 at any one time.<sup>20</sup> The idea proved to be a bad business decision and bled the company dry until 1978 when Ralston Purina, the owners of nearby Keystone Ski Resort, bought Arapahoe Basin. Still, the area's demanding terrain and higher elevation, which ensured longer seasons, kept Arapahoe Basin a favorite of Colorado skiers throughout the rest of the century.

## Vail

In the winter of 1957, Peter Seibert and Earl Eaton hiked to the top of what would eventually become Vail Ski Resort. After a seven-hour climb through waist-deep snow, the two men finally summited. "Beneath the brilliant blue sky we slowly turned in a circle and saw perfect ski terrain no matter which direction we faced," Seibert reminisced with some dramatic license in his memoir on the creation of the iconic ski resort nearly a half century later. "We looked at each other and realized what we both knew for certain: This was it!"<sup>21</sup> With mellow slopes, abundant snow, easy access via U.S. Highway 6, and an incredible view of the Gore Mountains, the unnamed mountain was perfect for what both hoped would one day become a world-class ski resort. Four years later, Vail Ski Resort opened as the largest ski resort in North America, with more than 4,000 acres of skiable terrain served by Colorado's only gondola, and with three other lifts, with the beginnings of what would become Vail Village resting at the base of the massive terrain. But in 1960, when Siebert and Eaton imagined the possibilities, Vail remained largely unknown to most Coloradans. So, Siebert had a simple sign hung alongside U.S. Highway 6 stating, "This is Vail, Open for Skiing December 1962," to explain the

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<sup>20</sup> Memo George Tourtillout to Forest Supervisors, Subject: Arapahoe Basin Reserved Skiing, November 2, 1970.

<sup>21</sup> Peter W. Seibert, *Vail: Triumph of a Dream* (Boulder, CO: Mountain Sports Press, 2000), 32–33.

mixture of buildings and a dirt parking lot to passers-by. A second similar sign, painted in large block letters, also appeared on the side of the lower terminal of the gondola, which was the largest structure in the valley at that point.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the decade Seibert and Eaton's vision grew from a collection of ranches at the base of a no-name mountain into a world-class ski resort that attracted millions of visitors a year and became the model for future ski resort development throughout North America.

To many who drove along U.S. Highway 6, Vail seemed to appear out of nowhere. The transformation of the once-idyllic pasture into a clutter of buildings and chairlifts came rather abruptly to many locals living in the area, but Vail's emergence was anything but sudden. Many within the Forest Service considered the development of Vail overambitious and inappropriate. In his initial survey of the mountain in 1957, Forest Service Ranger Paul Hauk agreed with Seibert and Eaton on the mountain's potential, but noted that the development of another ski resort in the area posed some problems regarding the Forest Service's policy of orderly timing in the development of ski resorts throughout the state to ensure fair competition to those areas already in operation. With applications from at least four other proposed ski resorts in the region, most of them near existing towns, as well as Vail's uncertain finances, Hauk initially denied Vail Corporation's permit request. Vail's difficulty in receiving a permit from the Forest Service also stemmed from the agency's struggle over its policy on how to best allow for the development of ski resorts on national forests. In 1959, to meet skier demand without causing over-development the White River National Forest, located just west of Denver and the Front Range, instituted a "staging-in" policy of ski areas to meet public need and

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<sup>22</sup> Siebert notes that many did not believe that Vail would open on time. Despite numerous construction delays, weather, and even shipping problems with the gondola from Switzerland Vail did indeed open on December 15, 1962 as scheduled. Seibert, *Vail*, 101.

restrict the over-development of national forest lands. Hauk's rejection of Vail's application set off a two-year fight over the private development of public lands and public demand for recreational access to national forests. After years of political wrangling and intense negotiations between the Forest Service and Vail ownership, a permit was granted in 1961, allowing the resort to open to the public the following winter. In the end, the Forest Service abandoned its stage-in policy, permitting Siebert and fellow investors to build Vail, but retained greater oversight for the future development of ski resorts throughout the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Few men became more synonymous with Vail than Pete Seibert. A veteran of the 10th Mountain Division and graduate of the prestigious L' École Hôtelière de Lausanne hotel management school in Chamonix, France, Seibert had fallen in love with skiing as a boy. At age seven he discovered his mother's maple skis hidden in the family barn in Sharon, Massachusetts. Having given up the sport and the skis after having children, his mother agreed to give the skis to the young Seibert. "Never have I experienced a more complete sense of joy and adventure than when I first stuck my hunting boots into the leather toe straps and proceeded down the modest hills outside of my town," wrote Seibert of his first years on skis.<sup>24</sup> The nation's economic upheaval during the early 1930s led to the Seibert family to move to New Hampshire, where young Pete continued his obsession with skiing, becoming a region skiing champion by his late teens. But like so many young Americans, the United States' entry into World War II dramatically changed Siebert's life. In 1943 he joined the elite 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, eventually ending up fighting in Italy. After surviving wounds suffered when a motor round

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Hauk, *Chronology of Vail*, 4. Paul Hauk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>24</sup> Seibert, *Vail*, 46.

exploded in a tree over his head, tearing through his right arm and face, destroying his right kneecap and breaking his right femur, with a second shell hitting him in the chest and the calf of his right leg. After recovering from his wounds, Seibert returned to Colorado to work as a ski patroller at Aspen Ski Area before moving to France to attend school. Upon graduation from L' École Hôtelière de Lausanne, Siebert once again he returned to Colorado, briefly running a hotel in the southern Colorado mining town of Silverton before taking a job managing Loveland Pass Ski Area in 1957. It was at Loveland that he met Earl Eaton.<sup>25</sup>

A Colorado native, Eaton had dropped out of high school to work in the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s. After serving in the army during the war, he returned home to work in the molybdenum mines near Leadville before moving to Aspen to work first on the packing crew and eventually as a ski patroller. Like Seibert, Eaton dreamed of opening his own ski resort. In his ceaseless wanderings throughout the Colorado high country in 1954 he stumbled upon what would become the back bowls of Vail. Unable to secure any financial backing, Eaton's dreams of developing the mountain remained just that until he met Seibert at Loveland. The two then made their fateful trip to the top of the unnamed mountain on the western side of Vail Pass.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hauk, *Chronology of Vail*, 1-2; Seibert, *Vail*, 28-30; Dick Hauserman, *The Inventors of Vail* (Edwards, CO: Golden Peak Publishing Company, 2003), 16 - 18.

<sup>26</sup> Seibert, *Vail*, 31-32, Hauserman, *The Inventors of Vail*, 19-20.



Photograph 5. Peter Siebert. Photograph courtesy of Vail Resorts, Inc.

Convinced they had found their mountain, Eaton and Seibert sought help purchasing enough land to build the ski area. Seibert contacted Richard Folwer, a lawyer from Denver who he had met while working in Aspen. Agreeing to join Seibert and Eaton in attempting to build a ski resort, Folwer suggested hiring the services of Denver real estate appraiser John Conway. The four men quickly began looking for land on which to develop a resort village at the base of the proposed ski mountain. Identifying the five-hundred-acre Hanson ranch as ideal, Conway approached John Hanson, the ranch's owner, about buying the property. Suspicious as to why the four men would want to buy the ranch at the base of Vail Pass, Hanson declined to sell at first. Conway continued to work on Hanson, stopping in to visit the rancher on multiple occasions throughout the

next year. Conway's patience finally paid off in the fall of 1958 with Hanson accepting the offer of \$110 an acre for the ranch.<sup>27</sup>

Seibert remained optimistic about the mountain's potential and pressed forward, searching for investors to help finance the resort's development. Considerable money was needed not only to build the ski area, but also to plan and develop a base village. Seibert suggested their group approach George Caulkins. A successful oil man, Caulkins spent many of his winters in Aspen, where he owned a house a block away from Seibert's. After touring the site, Caulkins was unconvinced as to the viability of the new resort and returned to Aspen. But Seibert persisted, and in 1959, finally convinced Caulkins to invest. Jack Tweedy, Fowler's law partner, soon joined the group and the six men incorporated, forming the Vail Corporation in 1959. Retaining 50 percent of the new corporation for themselves, the six sold the remaining half to twenty investors from around the country. Comprised of lawyers, architects, oil men, avid skiers, and even an executive with Time Inc., the fledging corporation began constructing their resort.<sup>28</sup>

The first order of business was to secure a permit from the Forest Service in order to build the ski area. While Forester Paul Hauk had been encouraging about the potential of Vail as a ski area, problems in Forest Service policy led to a two-year battle between the government agency and the resort's investors and their political allies in the state. Hauk, a twenty-year Forest Service veteran, was a graduate of Colorado State's forestry program and an avid skier. He had quickly earned the reputation within the agency for his understanding of what made a good ski mountain. During the 1940s, he had served as the "snow ranger," or sort of forest ranger on skis, at both Berthoud Pass and Arapahoe

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<sup>27</sup> Hauserman, *The Inventors of Vail*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.



Basin. Following the war, Hawk served as the District Forest Ranger in both the San Juan National Forest and the Arapahoe National Forest before transferring to the White River National Forest in 1957. Until the early 1950s, the Forest Service placed little value on the recreational use of national forest lands except for camping, hunting, and fishing. Many within the service did not believe that skiing would become more than a fringe activity, despite the opening of several ski resorts in the 1930s and 1940s including Aspen in Colorado and Sun Valley in Idaho. “The few of us in the Forest Service that skied or predicted the sport would become a major use were called FBI’ers (Flat Board Idiots),” Hawk recalled of the era.<sup>29</sup>

Despite such disparaging views of skiing by many within the Forest Service, Hawk’s knowledge of skiing served the Forest Service well. On his transfer to the White River National Forest Office in Glenwood Springs, Hawk was given the title of Staff Officer in charge of Recreation and Lands, and assigned to survey the district’s peaks for their skiing potential. Hawk’s surveys became the basis for the development of ski resorts throughout the White River National Forest, and Hawk himself was a central figure in the state’s ski industry through his retirement in 1977. As a result of his influence, the Forest Service played a more active role in ski area operations during Hawk’s tenure in the White River National Forest. Hawk often found himself not only surveying potential ski areas, but he was also much more involved in on-mountain operations such as avalanche control and visitor safety. With fewer environmental regulations, and fewer ski resorts, Hawk also enjoyed greater control over the day-to-day operations of ski areas within the forest. Until the late 1970s, the Forest Service regulated everything from the size of the

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<sup>29</sup> Book 1, Ski Area Monographs, 1996 #28. Paul Hawk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

ski resort to lift ticket prices within the White River National Forest. With such overarching control, the agency managed virtually every aspect of ski resort development and operations. The explosion in skiing's popularity, combined with the growing number of ski resorts throughout the White River National Forest, the state, and the region, and the Forest Service's concentration on environmental legislation eroded much of the agency's control by the late 1970s. Such changes were to occur in the future. In 1957, Hauk remained solely in charge of the development of skiing in his corner of the Colorado mountains.

After touring Eaton and Seibert's mountain with them in fall of 1957, Hauk concluded that it possessed greater potential and variety of terrain than Aspen, especially when the mountain's expansive back bowls were added. "The area has quite a [lot of] potential and I would venture to say that Seibert might resign his job at Loveland Basin and start promoting the financial backing which for him, with all his contracts would not be too difficult," summarized Hauk in his report on the unnamed mountain.<sup>30</sup> Yet, despite Hauk's general support for the development of the mountain as a ski area, he noted a few unfavorable factors that might cause the failure of the venture. One was the cost of the private land on which the resort would sit. With the majority of the land in the valley floor in the hands of private ranches, once word got out that investors were interested in purchasing land, Hauk concluded that property values would skyrocket, making any venture extremely expensive. Second were the costs of developing a ski area of such a size. The need to build not only ski lifts and trails, but also an entire village from scratch potentially could grow into the hundreds of millions of dollars. Without any firm

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Hauk, Memo Mill Creek, Two Elk Creek Ski Area Proposal, September 4, 1957. Paul Hauk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

financial backing, the Forest Service remained uncomfortable granting a permit for such an extensive project. But the money would be only one issue in gaining a permit to develop the ski resort.

Concerned about the rising number of requests for permits for ski area development, in 1959 the White River National Forest announced a Master Plan aimed at managing the development of new ski resorts within the forest. Concluding that Colorado would need at least two new chairlifts a year just to keep up with skiing's rate of growth in the state, White River Forest officials argued that a systematic approach to ski resort development was needed to head off any potential economic collapses at ski resorts within the forest. Faced with the problems of meeting public demand for skiing and ensuring the economic stability of any new ski resort, the Forest Service initiated a "step-in" policy in which issuing permits for new ski resorts would be based upon public need and the financial stability of existing areas. Under the plan, priority was given to allowing existing ski resorts to become economically solvent before allowing the construction of new resorts. White River officials also worried about allowing too many ski resorts to be developed within the forest, which would over saturate the ski market and cause potential future economic harm. In order to best manage ski resort development the plan identified two major growth areas, or "zones of influence," for skiing in the state.<sup>31</sup> The first centered on the Aspen area, and included Aspen, Buttermilk, Ski Sunlight, and Snowmass. The second included the numerous ski resorts in the mountains west of Denver and the Front Range. Within each zone the Forest Service would allow the development of new ski resorts based on public need and economic feasibility. The plan also included the survey of potential sites with target dates by which ski developments would be needed. To Hauk

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<sup>31</sup> "Forest Draw Ski Boom Plan," *The Denver Post*, October 4, 1959.

and others within the White River National Forest Office, such a plan made sense. Fearing that public demand for new ski resorts would eventually slow, they did not want to be left holding the bag financially if ski resorts failed. White River National Forest officials argued they could manage ski resort development sensibly with the systematic development of new resorts.<sup>32</sup>

The White River National Forest's Master Plan immediately ran into controversy in the spring of 1957 Seibert and Eaton applied with the Forest Service for a special use permit. Construction on the resort was to begin in 1960, or as soon as the financial issues were resolved, with Vail opening early the next year. The following day after submitting their request, the two men met with Hauk and White River Recreational Forester Charles McConnell for two hours to discuss the permit. During the meeting, Hauk delivered the news to the two ski entrepreneurs that the Forest Service would not be issuing Vail Corporation. a permit. Citing the Master Plan's staging-in policy, Hauk informed Eaton and Seibert that there was no real public need for the development at the time and that the agency had an obligation to existing areas, especially at Aspen and Aspen Highlands, which were entitled to complete their developments and become profitable before new areas were permitted in the area. To the members of Vail Corporation the Forest Service's "obligation" appeared more as favoritism than sound policy. Incensed by what they saw as the Forest Service's protection of Aspen and its sister ski areas Aspen Highlands and Buttermilk, Vail Corporation partners Tweedy and Fowler filed a twenty-one-page appeal, which noted that there was, in fact, a public need for another ski resort

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

and that the decision by Hawk and others was “arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion.”<sup>33</sup>

The issue remained unresolved through the summer until Congressman Wayne Aspinall and Senator Gordon Allott interceded on Vail’s behalf. The senator and congressman wrote the White River National Forest Office inquiring as to why Vail had not been issued a permit. District Forester Donald Clark responded, pointing out the Forest Service’s policy of phasing in ski resorts according to public demand. Clark stated that the problem of issuing Vail a permit was more one of timing than of feasibility. Senator Aspinall’s position as chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, which had jurisdiction over the Forest Service’s budget, carried significant weight when it came to Forest Service policy, especially in his district. Aspinall’s interest relocated the Forest Service’s attention on Vail. The intercession by the two politicians led to a negotiated agreement between the Forest Service and Vail’s partners, allowing for the issuance of a conditional permit with the understanding that the new resort would not open until 1963 or 1964. Citing the fact that the corporation had not raised the prerequisite \$2 million to ensure Vail’s solvency, Forest Supervisor E. H. Mason figured the delay in opening the resort would not inconvenience the applicants. “However, since we have never given you any encouragement regarding a permit and as discussed with you on May 12, we are disapproving your application for the conditional permit that

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<sup>33</sup> In the matter of the application of Earl V. Eaton and Peter W. Seibert for a Special Use Permit for the Vail Project in the White River National Forest Statement Under Regulation A-10. U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, White River National Forest. Paul Hawk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

would allow you to be in operation by November 1961,” Mason reiterated to Seibert and Eaton.<sup>34</sup>

The permit process was fundamental to the relationship between private interests and the Forest Service. Like all other commercial uses of national forests such as grazing and timber, the Forest Service relied primarily on private initiative for the initial planning of ski areas. Ski area developers had to demonstrate the suitability of the proposed area for skiing and the long-term economic sustainability of the operation. After determining that an area was suitable and economically sustainable, the Forest Service then issued a special use permit allowing for the construction of ski trails, buildings, and ski lifts on national forest property. As with all commercial concessions within public lands, the agency required multiple bids for the development of an area. And as was often the case in Colorado, such competition was not possible if the developer owned the property adjacent to the national forest under request, making a competing plan unfeasible. In addition, the Forest Service issued two types of special use permits for ski area development: annual and term. Annual permits allowed for the year-to-year lease of national forest property by permit holders. More common were term permits, which lasted thirty years as long as the permit holder continued to comply with the permit requirement and pay the requisite fees. Fees were initially set at a flat percentage of sales, but with the rapid expansion of recreational use of the national forests, the service adopted a graduated rate system. In the graduated system, fees were charged based upon a combination of a ski resort’s gross receipts and assets. As a ski area’s sales increased in relation to its assets, its annual fees rose. Conversely, if sales decreased, so too did the

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<sup>34</sup> E. H. Mason to Earl Eaton and Peter Seibert, May 28, 1959. Vail Associate Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

fees. The reasoning behind such a fee schedule was to maximize both investment and Forest Service profit without bankrupting the permit holders.<sup>35</sup>

Despite their victory in securing a conditional permit, Vail's owners continued to press for an earlier opening date. But the main obstacle to an earlier opening remained the corporation's lack of funding. Not wanting a partially completed ski area sitting on national forest land, the Forest Service required the corporation to have enough ready cash to cover all building costs. Vail's board of directors had used the \$100,000 raised with the initial sale of stock to conduct a feasibility study on the construction of both a ski area and village. The study's findings estimated the costs to construct the ski area, village, and golf course to be roughly \$1.4 million, well within the board's fund-raising ability. Concluding that it was possible to do both simultaneously, the board then sought the necessary funds. Their first stop was the First National Bank of Denver. Securing a loan for \$500,000 from the bank, Seibert, who had become the board president, and Caulkins set off on a cross-country race to raise the remaining capital. Finding limited success, the pair managed to raise an additional \$1 million, which was still short of the required \$2 million mark set by the Forest Service. Unable to secure a loan without a term permit, Vail approached the Forest Service with a proposal that reduced the required on-hand cash from \$2 million to \$1.4 million in order to meet the loan requirements and avoid a public sale of stock.<sup>36</sup>

Negotiations over the amount of ready cash resulted in the Forest Service accepting the \$1.4 million mark and Vail scaling back its plans for a much larger gondola to a

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<sup>35</sup> Glen Robinson, *The Forest Service: A Study in Public Land Management* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 127–28.

<sup>36</sup> The Vail Corporation: Plans and Estimate, March 12, 1960. Vail Associate Papers. Box 1. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

smaller four-person Bell gondola from the village to Mid-Vail. With the financing settled, the Forest Service issued the final term and annual permits for the ski resort in January 1962 granting Vail access to a total of 6,470 acres, 3,900 of which was designated for future expansion. Reorganized as Vail Associates Ltd. just prior to being awarded the permits, the owners quickly moved forward building their resort. Construction crews began putting in the utilities for the village that spring. Within months, Colorado's newest ski resort took form and opened to the public in December.<sup>37</sup>

Vail's first decade was one of growth and promise. Vail Associates Ltd. became Vail Associates, Inc. in 1965. Peter Seibert was elected president of the new corporation at the first meeting of the new board of directors on October 2, 1965. The new board raised concerns over the prices of lift tickets, both from a financial as well as a public relations standpoint. Seibert argued that the current price of a season pass, \$100, was insufficient, but that Aspen's charge of \$8 for a daily lift pass the previous season was too high and had cost Aspen skier visitors. Fearing a loss in numbers, adult day lift passes at Vail remained \$6.50 for the following season.<sup>38</sup> Business continued to grow over the next several years. Skier numbers between the 1967–1968 and 1968–1969 seasons rose 13.1 percent annually, and revenues increased per skier by 11.4 percent. As more skiers visited the resort, Seibert and the rest of the board had less time to run the growing town at its base.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Minutes of a special meeting of the Board of Directors of Vail Associates, Inc., December 27, 1965. Vail Associates, Inc. Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of a special meeting of the Board of Directors of Vail Associates, Inc., March 19, 1966. Vail Associates, Inc. Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>39</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors of Vail Associates, Inc., February 3, 1968. Vail Associates, Inc. Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



A year after its formation Vail Associates, Inc., or VA as it came to be known, ceded municipal control of Vail Village. While Seibert and the board struggled to keep the resort's financial head above water, the emerging town had begun to experience growing pains. The community needed streets, schools, and law and order. "There was no law," Seibert told Vail historian June Simonton. "Dogs were running loose so I started locking them up and charging the owners room and board. In a little community where there were no rules or regulations, I ended up having to be the dog catcher."<sup>40</sup> Seibert's moonlighting as the town dog catcher, along with more pressing concerns over the corporation's role in operating a town, led the board to look into incorporating Vail Village. Under Colorado law incorporation required the signature of forty property owners. With only twenty-five qualified residents living in the Vail area, and approximately thirty more who did not own any property, VA enticed enough of the landless tenants to purchase property in order to permit them to sign a petition for the formation of a municipality. With enough signatures, Vail Village incorporated. But the relationship between the town and the resort remained intertwined, causing future conflicts over the direction and image of the Vail area. The ski resort continued to grow, and in 1968 barely held off the takeover efforts of an investment group with the ironic name of Unlimited Ltd. In 1970, Seibert resigned as president, taking over as board chairman. Seibert's resignation was vote of confidence in the company a sign of Vail's growing prominence as one of Colorado's premier ski resorts, a role that would place it at the center of many more controversies by the end of the century.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> June Simonton, *Vail: Story of a Colorado Mountain Valley* (Denver: Vail Chronicles Inc., 1987), 91.

<sup>41</sup> Tweedy, Mosley, Aley, and Young to Vail Associates, Inc. Memorandum, Subject: Sale of Land to Individuals Residing in Vail Area. May 5, 1966. Vail Associates, Inc. Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

## Breckenridge

Vail was not the only ski resort being built in Colorado at the time. In 1960, the Wichita, Kansas-based Rounds and Porter Lumber Company announced plans to develop a ski resort above the aging mining town of Breckenridge. Like most Colorado mountain mining communities, including Aspen and Telluride, skiing had long played a part in the area's history. Established following the 1859 gold rush, Breckenridge had been one of the most successful mining towns in the region. The gold rush drew more than men just looking to strike it rich; it also drew Father John L. Dyer, who in 1862 moved to the rough mining town to build a church. Known as much for his exploits on twelve-foot-long wooden skis as for his sermons, Dyer traveled between Breckenridge, Alma, and Leadville for twenty years on his "Norwegian snowshoes" in order to minister to the isolated mountain communities.<sup>42</sup> As the gold played out in the late nineteenth century, similar to many boomtowns in the West, Breckenridge began to fade. A hardy few remained to eke out a living mining and logging, and the town remained the Summit County seat. Prior to World War II, two small rope tows were constructed nearby, but they did not attract much attention beyond a few local skiers. World War II seemed to sound the death bell for the town when many left for better-paying jobs in Denver and other western cities. By the late 1950s Breckenridge's population dwindled below 400, and many expected that it would soon become a ghost town.<sup>43</sup> The announcement of the potential development of a ski resort above the town in the fall of 1960 came as welcome news to locals looking to save their town. But proposed development of Breckenridge Ski

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<sup>42</sup>Abbott Fay, *A History of Skiing in Colorado* Montrose, CO: Western Reflections Inc., 2000), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Hauk, "Breckenridge Ski Area Chronology" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1979), 2. Paul Hauk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado; Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 334.

Area embroiled the Forest Service in yet another controversy over the impacts of increased competition within the White River National Forest. Ironically, the protest this time came from VA, which had just won its battle with the Forest Service over the need for further ski resort development in the region.

With interests in timber, oil, agriculture, and real estate, the Rounds and Porter Lumber Company expressed a desire to invest in the emerging ski industry. This desire came in part from company owner Ralph “Bill” Rounds’ interest in skiing and his friendship with Aspen Highlands’ owner Whip Jones. Identifying the mountains surrounding Breckenridge as an ideal setting for a ski resort along the lines of Aspen, Rounds and Porter Lumber created the Summit County Development Corporation (SCDC) to develop a ski resort and contacted the Forest Service for a feasibility survey of the mountain known as Peak 8. One of ten peaks that make up the Tenmile Range along the Continental Divide, Peak 8 looms directly above Breckenridge. Rising to an elevation of 12,987 feet above sea level, most of Peak 8 is above tree line and unsheltered, making its skiing potential somewhat limited when compared to Vail or Snowmass. Paul Hauk, the Forest Service’s ski expert, voiced such concerns, but after having been disillusioned by the controversy over Vail’s permit process, he pressed forward in his survey of Peak 8. After gaining the tentative go-ahead from Hauk, the SCDC submitted its formal request for a permit to develop the mountain in March 1961.<sup>44</sup>

Fearing the impact of a new ski resort opening in roughly the same region within the same year, VA filed a protest with the Forest Service. Pete Seibert wrote Hauk that he was unhappy with the prospect of a development at Breckenridge because he had hoped for the start of construction on Vail in May, almost the same time as Breckenridge, which

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<sup>44</sup> Hauk, “Breckenridge Ski Area Chronology,” 2.

would place their openings within the same season. He felt that Vail should be permitted to open at least a year before any other new area to help establish the new resort's financial health and that the opening of both areas during the same year would be harmful to both parties as well as detrimental to their fund-raising.<sup>45</sup> Hauk met Seibert in Aspen to discuss Vail's concerns. After hearing Seibert's arguments for a delay in authorizing Breckenridge's permit, Hauk replied that Seibert could expect no sympathy from White River in view of the "all for competition" and antitrust law arguments Vail had used in its permit appeal statement and related meetings and correspondence. Hauk later wrote of the meeting: "My personal opinion, as mentioned to Bill Rounds late in December at Aspen was that the Vail Corporation had no grounds for objecting since Vail is not an operating or existing area and it does not have a final permit in any sense of the word." He also pointed out the fact that while Vail was still struggling to find investors, the Summit County Development Corporation had sufficient assets to not only develop Peak 8, but also to develop other sites in the area such as Peak 1 south of Frisco and Cooper Mountain at the Junction of Highways 6 and 91.<sup>46</sup> Seibert conceded Hauk's arguments and the matter appeared resolved. But within a month tempers flared again when VA refused Hauk's request to write a letter supporting the SCDC's application for a special use permit to begin construction.<sup>47</sup>

VA protested the SCDC's development of real estate adjacent to the national forest, a model Vail itself had created just a few years prior. In what must be the most

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<sup>45</sup> Henry Harrison, Chief, Division RLAM, by Robert Cardner. Memo January 10, 1961. Breckenridge Chronology. Paul Hauk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library Denver, Colorado.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Hauk, "Special Use Permits—Breckenridge Winter Sports Area and the Vail Corporation," memorandum, January 17, 1961. Breckenridge Chronology. Paul Hauk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

contradictory correspondences concerning the development of ski resorts in national forests, VA board member John Tweedy wrote Forest Supervisor Henry Tiedemann that “[t]he installation of this type of equipment on its own land would enable its owners to advertise the winter recreational potential as a stimulant for real estate sales without making the Public Domain for the Forest Service a part of their promotion.” Tweedy went on to write that “[w]e believe this matter is of sufficient importance to ourselves, to the Forest Service, and to the general public to justify our intervention in this matter.”<sup>48</sup> Tweedy argued that Breckenridge was ill-conceived because skiing would be allowed above the timber line and would therefore not be not subject to the same Forest Service controls. This would affect the future orderly planning of ski areas in the region. Both Hauk and Tiedemann rejected this argument.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime, Breckenridge mayor Frank Brown contacted Senators Gordon Allott and John Carroll and Congressman Wayne Aspinall, the powerful chair of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, asking for their help in expediting the Forest Service’s approval of a special use permit for the SCDC’s development of Breckenridge. Pointing to proposed ski resorts’ close proximity to Denver and Pueblo, Brown argued that the new ski resort would be a much-needed “Family Ski Area” as opposed to Vail, which was selling itself as more of a destination resort rather than a regional resort. In March 1961 the SCDC submitted its application for a special use permit. Facing pressure from both the Forest Service and key legislators’ support of Breckenridge, Vail Associates withdrew its protest in May. In a June 23 memorandum, Forest Service

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<sup>48</sup> John Tweedy to Henry Tiedemann, February 9, 1961. Breckenridge Chronology. Paul Hauk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>49</sup> Hauk, “Breckenridge Ski Area Chronology,” 8.

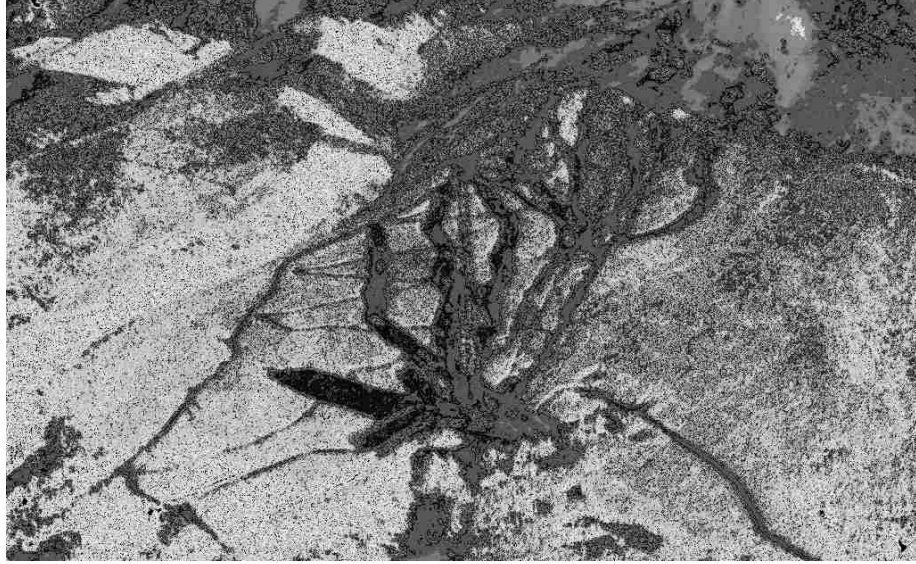
employee Henry Harrison drolly observed, “You can be sure Vail Pass is more directly concerned with competition than [its] high sounding ideals.”<sup>50</sup>

Breckenridge Ski Area opened the following winter with one double lift, a single T-bar, and a base shelter and restaurant. The new area quickly grew into one of the more popular ski areas in the state. Attendance jumped nearly tenfold from 17,000 in 1961 to over 165,000 by 1970. Similar to other Colorado ski areas, by the mid-1960s it became apparent that to meet this increase in demand, Breckenridge would need to expand. In 1967, district rangers Paul Wachter and Mike Penfold organized a Forest Service team to review the skiing potential of the slopes on the southern face of adjacent Peak 9. Concluding the southern face was adequate for development, the Forest Service quickly approved Breckenridge’s proposed expansion two years later. In 1969, Breckenridge Ski Area opened several hundred more acres to skiing on Peak 9, made accessible by three ski lifts and three T-bars. The following summer, real estate developer Dan Fowler announced plans to develop a \$52 million resort near the base of Peak 9, beginning with the construction of 160 condominiums. At the same time the Aspen Ski Company, owners of Aspen Ski Mountain, Buttermilk, Aspen Highlands, and Snowmass, revealed its plans to purchase the entire Breckenridge Ski Area and add another two lifts and 200 acres to the area.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Henry Harrison, “Special Use Permits—Breckenridge Winter Sports Area,” Memo, June 23, 1961. Breckenridge Chronology. Paul Hawk Papers. Box 2. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver Colorado.

<sup>51</sup> Hawk, “Breckenridge Ski Area Chronology,” 7–8.



Photograph 5. Breckenridge Ski Resort, 1967. Paul Hawk Collection. Denver Public Library

The opening of Breckenridge and Vail in the same year linked the ski resorts not only as competitors, but as symbols of the maturation of the Colorado ski industry. Unlike Winter Park and Berthoud Pass, which had both required federal funding to open, the immense amount of private money invested in the Vail and Breckenridge resorts demonstrated, combined with the opening of Steamboat Ski Area, also in the same season, reaffirmed that skiing, and by extension recreation, was becoming big business in the state, and sparking a boom in the development of ski resorts throughout the Colorado that lasted through the 1970s. In order to remain competitive in a growing market, ski resorts began to have to offer more terrain and better amenities. But while the number and size of ski resorts grew, highway access remained a limiting factor. The construction of an intermountain interstate would solve this problem. The battle over the route of the new interstate, as well as the environmental costs of building such a road through the heart of the Rockies, quickly replaced the struggle over the development of Breckenridge.



## A Mountain Corridor

While the economics of ski resort development changed Forest Service management in the postwar era, the building of Interstate 70 through the heart of the Colorado Rocky Mountains forever changed the face of the Colorado high country. Limited access had long isolated the state's western slope and its high mountain peaks from the majority of the state's population along the Front Range, and the thousands of tourists who visited Colorado every year. The construction of the Denver mountain parks, as well as a concerted effort by the Forest Service and National Park Service, had relied extensively on the growing ownership of automobiles beginning in the late 1910s to make visitors mobile enough to travel where they desired. Car ownership grew exponentially following World War II. By 1950, there were more than 49 million cars on American roads. Automobile travel increased access to the nation's public lands, allowing millions to enjoy their national parks, forests, and other open spaces.<sup>52</sup>

The interstate highway system became the lifeline of modern America. Four-lane highways spread across the country, connecting the nation's metropolitan areas and redefining not only American identity but people's sense of space and time. Able to travel fifty-five miles an hour, Americans crisscrossed the continent in enormous numbers. Interstates reshaped American lives. The new four lane highways often bypassed rural regions, causing many small towns to collapse in economic ruin. Municipalities lucky enough to have an interstate pass nearby enjoyed an economic windfall, as new businesses such as gas stations and motels drew visitors, and, more importantly, tax dollars. Tourism blossomed along these interstate routes. In places like

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<sup>52</sup> Mark Rose, *Interstate: Express Highways Politics, 1939–1989*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 31.



Colorado, automobile access allowed increasing numbers of Americans to visit the mountains. While the interstate system increased tourism, it also changed how Americans traveled. Able to take in large chunks of country in a single day, many travelers stopped for only short periods of time before hitting the road for the next scenic overlook or national park. Interstates also allowed greater numbers of tourists to visit areas at one time, leading to increased development. Once-isolated rural towns found themselves growing, seemingly overnight, as new businesses opened alongside the interstate. This growth, in effect, stretched urbanization farther outward from metropolitan areas, creating tentacles of urban growth into the nation's hinterlands. Driven by economics, the nation reorganized along the emerging interstate highway system.<sup>53</sup>

While the number of Colorado's ski resorts grew, the state's West Slope remained largely isolated due to a lack of adequate roads. The passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1956 appeared to hold the answer to local boosters' calls for better roads into the region. But fears of difficulties in construction and the necessity of an interstate through the heart of the Rocky Mountains initially steered federal highway engineers away from routing a new super highway over the Continental Divide through Colorado. Instead, federal highway officials routed interstates through Wyoming to north and New Mexico to the south. Only after an intense period of lobbying led by Colorado's powerful U.S. Congressman Wayne Aspinall did the Federal Highway Administration approve the extension of Interstate 70 from Denver through the mountains and into southern Utah. The decision to build an interstate through Colorado's mountains began an intense period

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<sup>53</sup> On the history of the U. S. interstate highway system, see: Rose, *Interstate: Express Highways Politics*, 69–84; Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997); Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

of lobbying by western slope boosters fearful that the new super highway would bypass their corner of the state. Ultimately chosen on technical and economic grounds by the state's Department of Transportation, the route of Interstate 70 radically changed Colorado's mountain landscape. Communities and ski areas lucky enough to find themselves next to the interstate prospered, while those bypassed struggled. As with the opening of the Moffat Tunnel in 1928, the completion of I-70 opened the Colorado high country as never before, creating an urban corridor from the growing Front Range metropolitan area through the heart of the Rockies. By improving access, the interstate allowed increased growth, further stressing the Forest Service's ability to cope with growing numbers of recreationalists and demands for more ski resort development.<sup>54</sup>

The problem of access had long plagued Colorado's West Slope. Rather than a single range of mountains, the Colorado Rockies are comprised of a series of colliding mountain ranges that create a region of diverse topography. Rising to over 14,000 feet in elevation, the Continental Divide defines not only the state's geography, but also its history. Two narrow highways linked the majority of the state's mountain communities to the outside world. U.S. Highway 6 crossed the Continental Divide over Loveland Pass before passing through Dillon and Frisco. It then crossed over Vail Pass, through Glenwood Canyon, and westward into Utah. The more traveled of the two, U.S. Highway 40, made its way from Denver, over Berthoud Pass, through the Fraser Valley past Winter Park Ski Area, and over Rabbit Ears Pass to Steamboat Springs before making its way to Salt Lake City. Designated U.S. Highway 40 in 1925 after the passage of the national highway

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<sup>54</sup> Dissertations by Thomas Thomas and William Philpott each examine the politics behind the westward extension of Colorado's I-70 from Denver to central Utah. Both argue that tourism and the opening of the state's isolated western slope were the central reasons for the construction of an interstate through such difficult topography. Thomas A. Thomas, "Roads to a Troubled Future: Transportation and Transformation in Colorado's Interstate Highway Corridors in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century" (PhD dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1996), ; Philpott, "Consuming Colorado,"

numbering system, the more northerly route through the Rockies was paved or oiled almost its entire length by the late 1930s, making it much easier to drive than the more southerly Highway 6. Passing within thirty miles of the southern entrance of Rocky Mountain National Park, Highway 40 remained the more popular of the two highways for tourists visiting the high country during the summer months. The beginning of winter maintenance in the early 1930s over Berthoud and Loveland passes opened the region to the further development of winter recreation, but even then the state's mountain highways remained highly treacherous and often impassable during Colorado's long winter months.

New Deal funding helped finance the improvement of several highways through the Colorado mountains during the 1930s, including the widening of Berthoud Pass and the construction of Vail Pass over the Gore Mountains. Lying between Summit and Eagle counties, Vail Pass connected the long-isolated Eagle Valley by extending Highway 6. Named after state highway engineer Charlie Vail, the mountain pass opened in 1940. But, as historian William Philpott notes, U.S. Highway 40 remained the primary route through the state's mountains until long after the war.<sup>55</sup> Nearly double the number of cars crossed Berthoud Pass than Loveland Pass in 1948, until a decade later, when traffic numbers on each pass became relatively equal due in large part to the boom in outdoor recreation.<sup>56</sup>

Colorado's desires for a transmountain highway grew in earnest during the 1940s. To increase tourism throughout the state, Colorado politicians and business owners began lobbying the federal government for construction of a highway through the Rockies as early as the Truman Administration. Despite their efforts, state boosters failed to

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<sup>55</sup> Philpott, "Consuming Colorado," 186.

<sup>56</sup> Colorado Department of Highways, *Interstate Highway Location Study Dotsero to Empire Junction*, E. Lionel Pavlo Engineering Company, March 1960, figures 19 and 20.

convince federal agencies such as the Public Roads Administration (PRA) as to the necessity of a transmountain highway. The PRA's proposal for a nationwide system of highways in 1940 had failed to include a highway through the state's mountains. The agency believed that any such road would be too expensive and too difficult to build. This line of reasoning continued with the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1956. The passage of the act brought both elation and distress to Colorado politicians and business interests. The act ensured that billions of federal dollars would be spent constructing four-lane highways throughout the nation, including two in Colorado. Despite this good news, Colorado boosters quickly became upset when they learned the main east-west interstate would fail to cross the Continental Divide, thus isolating the state's West Slope. Following the existing plan from the 1940s, the Federal Highway Administration planned two interstates through Colorado: one stretching from the north to the south, designated Interstate 25, and another stretching from Kansas City to Denver, designated Interstate 70. Colorado politicians immediately decried the decision to terminate Interstate 70 in Denver and demanded that it be extended across the Continental Divide into Utah. Citing the difficulty and expense of such a highway, as well as the Utah Road Commission's resistance to the construction of an interstate, which they argued, was unnecessary, federal officials initially refused requests from Colorado business interests and politicians for the construction of an east-west interstate bisecting the state. Led by men such as Colorado governor Edwin Johnson and state businessman Aksel Nielsen, state boosters launched an intensive lobbying campaign to extend Interstate 70 from Denver, over the Continental Divide, and into Utah.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> On the story of Colorado's lobbying for the extension of Interstate 70 through the Rocky Mountains, see: Thomas, "Roads to a Troubled Future," 185-242; Philpot, "Consuming Colorado," 165-219.

Elected to his second term as Colorado governor in 1955, twenty-two years after serving his first term as governor, Edwin Johnson was an untiring advocate for the extension of Interstate 70 through the Colorado Rockies. Pointing to the importance of such a highway to the state's tourism industry, Johnson pressured members of Congress, Federal Highway Administration officials, and President Eisenhower himself. While Johnson worked from the governor's office, Colorado businessmen such as Aksel Nielsen also pressed the case for the extension of the interstate to ensure the growth of the state's tourism industry. A personal friend of Eisenhower, Nielsen and the president often fished on Nielsen's ranch in the Fraser Valley. Nielsen used his personal relationship with the President to impress upon Eisenhower the necessity of completing I-70 across the state. But even with their collective lobbying efforts, Colorado politicians and business interests failed to win the support they needed for Interstate 70's extension. The U.S. House and the Senate declined to add the sought-after miles in the final version of the Federal Highway Act of 1956. Disappointed but resolved to eventually gain the extension, Colorado boosters redoubled their lobbying efforts. By the end of 1957, they made some headway on the matter by earning the sympathy of the Eisenhower Administration. With the president leaning on Congress, a bill was passed quickly, which added the 547 miles onto Interstate 70. The extension was slated to cross the Continental Divide, and would open the Western Slope to increased tourism before it entered Utah where it joined with Interstate 15 near Cove Fort.<sup>58</sup>

With the decision made to extend Interstate 70 through the mountains, one important question remained—what route it would take? To many, it appeared that the new interstate should roughly follow one of the two highways that traversed the state's

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas, "Roads to a Troubled Future," 236-42; Philpott, "Consuming Colorado," 188-90.

mountain counties. The more heavily traveled of the two, U.S. Highway 40, stretched from Denver, over Berthoud Pass, through the Fraser Valley, home of Winter Park Ski Area, over Rabbit Ears Pass, into Steamboat Springs, and onward to Salt Lake City. The second highway took a more southern route along U.S. Highway 6, crossing the Continental Divide at Loveland Pass, before making its way over Vail Pass and through Glenwood Canyon, exiting the state just west of Grand Junction. Both highways were narrow two-lane roads that wound over high mountain passes reaching over 10,000 feet in elevation. And despite the state highway department's attempts to keep both highways open during the winter, heavy snows and avalanches often closed whole sections of both for days. The solution to this issue, argued Governor John Love, seemed to be the construction of tunnels under either Berthoud Pass or Loveland Pass. Such a suggestion proved popular, but failed to answer the ultimate question of the interstate's route.<sup>59</sup>

The debate over the advantages and shortcomings of both Highway 40 and Highway 6 raged for the next two years, ending in deadlock. Finally, in 1959, the state hired New York engineering firm E. Lionel Pavlo to study both routes. The firm examined eight options for the interstate, each roughly following either Highway 40 or Highway 6. After noting the strengths and weaknesses of each route, the firm issued a report identifying two routes as the best options for construction of the new interstate highway. The first, designated Route B crossed through a tunnel under Stanley Mountain, passed Winter Park Ski Area through the Fraser Valley, and then follow the Colorado River to Wolcott. Route H, crossed the Divide through a tunnel at Straight Creek next to Loveland Pass, through the town of Dillon and would either cross Vail Pass or through a long tunnel

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<sup>59</sup> "Summary of the Facts Concerning the Red Buffalo Route on I-70 in Colorado," Governor's Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970–1971. Governor John Love Papers. Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

under the Gore Range. Citing that “cost estimates for final route studied indicate a decided advantage in favor of Study Route H,” the firm declared that Route B would cost \$133,410,000 while Route H would cost only \$78,050,000. Based largely upon the differences in costs the Pavlo Report recommended the more southerly route, roughly following U.S. Highway 6.<sup>60</sup>

Following the Pavlo Report’s recommendation, the state began conducting its own studies of the proposed route. Publishing their report in 1963, state engineers agreed with the Pavlo Report’s conclusion on the suitability of the southern route, with one small exception. Rather than following U.S. Highway 6 over Vail Pass, which would have required the construction of a steep switchback on the eastern side of the pass, the Colorado Department of Highways requested permission from the Forest Service to route the interstate through the Gore Range–Eagle’s Nest Primitive Area across Red Buffalo Pass. Instead of building over the pass, state engineers hoped to tunnel under it, and proposing the construction of a sixteen-mile tunnel under Red Buffalo Pass. The state’s engineers argued that a tunnel would not require the difficult construction of a switchback and appeared to have a favorable benefit-cost ratio. Federal officials, particularly Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman, were skeptical of such a plan and asked for the state to provide more specifics on the costs, environmental impacts, and engineering specifications. In 1966, Colorado submitted a revised report based on data the state highway engineer developed and in August the Federal Highway Administration

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<sup>60</sup> Colorado Department of Highways, *Interstate Highway Location Study Dotsero to Empire Junction*, E. Lionel Pavlo Engineering Company, March 1960, 10–23.

approved Route H, including the tunnel, pending a public hearing.<sup>61</sup> The decision to construct a sixteen-and-a-half-mile-long tunnel under a federally designated primitive area, soon to become a wilderness area, swiftly became the center of a controversy over the definition of wilderness and the importance of economic development.

For many local boosters, the construction of Interstate 70 meant increased tourist dollars. The bypassing of any community with the construction of the tunnel could cause the loss of any potential gains brought by increasing access to the state's mountain areas. From a purely engineering standpoint tunnels made perfect sense. Rather than solving the problem of how to build a four-lane highway over the mountains, engineers simply planned to go under them. This logic infuriated local businessmen and politicians, as well as conservationists opposed to the construction of a tunnel under a primitive area, leading to a struggle over the proposed construction of the Red Buffalo tunnel under the pass and the eventual route of Interstate 70. In a letter to U.S. Senator Peter Dominick, a Republican from Denver who solidly supported the construction of the interstate, State Chief Engineer Chas Shumate noted two groups opposed the tunnel. The first was made up of local politicians and business owners who felt "that the closer the Interstate System can be brought to their communities the more they will benefit" explained Shumate. The second, and probably the most concerned group, was a coalition of various conservation organizations represented by the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council (COSCC). "Certainly, the effort of these people to preserve the maximum amount of open space is a most commendable one," wrote Shumate. "However, we cannot agree that the construction of the highway through this area will destroy this great natural beauty and

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<sup>61</sup> "Summary of the Facts Concerning the Red Buffalo Route on I-70 in Colorado." Governor's Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970–1971. Governor John Love Papers. Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.



area. In fact, it will give millions of Americans the opportunity to see an area which most of them would never have the opportunity to view otherwise.”<sup>62</sup> By framing his defense of the Red Buffalo tunnel in terms of preserving open space, Shumate clearly understood the interstate’s role in drawing tourists to the region, but failed to comprehend the fear of many locals regarding the negative impact of the tunnel on the local economy and the mounting concern over the development of Colorado’s mountains by an increasingly vocal coalition of environmental groups.

Upon the announcement of the state’s selection of the southerly route for the new interstate, immediate concerns arose over its impact on the region’s local economies. Newspapers ran angst-ridden editorials warning of the impending ruin if the state followed through with its plans to build the Red Buffalo Tunnel. “Unless the truly phenomenal happens, Interstate 70 is going to substantially by-pass the High Country in its path through the mountains by boring under them in the now famous and commonly called ‘Buffalo Red Mountain’ route,” announced the editor of *The Summit County Journal* in one such piece.<sup>63</sup> Such fears of being bypassed by the interstate led many business owners in Summit, Lake, and Eagle counties, the three counties most affected by the proposed tunnel dependent on tourism dollars, to write letters to Governor Love and Chief Engineer Shumate imploring them to step in and halt the tunnel’s construction. Breckenridge business owner Edward Emrich wrote, “Obviously the interstate cannot pass through or near every town in the state. But when it is possible to follow existing highways, as it has been so far, at a lower construction cost and without appreciably

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<sup>62</sup> Chas Shumate, Chief Engineer, to Hon. Peter Dominick, U.S. Senator, July 19, 1967. Governor’s Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970–1971. Governor John Love Papers. Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>63</sup> “I-70 to By-Pass High Country,” *The Summit County Journal*, September 30, 1966. Governor’s Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970–1971. Governor John Love Papers. Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

higher mileage, it seems to me that the Department of Highways has some duty to consider the welfare of communities whose very existence has to this point been solely based upon highway frontage.”<sup>64</sup> Officials from Vail agreed with such sentiments, adding their voices to the opposition of Red Buffalo by arguing that the tunnel would violate the spirit of the Wilderness Act.<sup>65</sup> It was clear by the end of 1967 that while local communities wanted the interstate they did not want the tunnel.

Environmental groups had further objections to the Red Buffalo Tunnel and the possible routing of the interstate through the Gore Range–Eagle’s Nest Primitive Area. The rugged mountain range between Summit and Eagle counties was among the most inaccessible areas in the state. For this reason, as well as the public’s growing desire during the 1930s to preserve some of the more spectacular areas under Forest Service management, the agency set aside the Gore Range–Eagle’s Nest Primitive Area in 1933 and later designated the area as wilderness after the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964. The Gore Range–Eagle’s Nest Primitive Area held a unique place in the 1964 act. Fearing that designating the entire region wilderness would hinder the potential construction of Interstate 70 through the area, Congress added a caveat to the Wilderness Act, which allowed the Secretary of Agriculture to remove up to 7,000 acres from the southern tip of the Gore Range–Eagle’s Nest Primitive Area if needed to construct the new interstate.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Edward Emrich to Charles Shumate, Chief Engineer Colorado Department of Highways, October 18, 1966. Governor’s Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970–1971. Governor John Love Papers. Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>65</sup> Town of Vail to Governor John Love. July 24, 1967. Governor John Love, Governor’s Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970-1971 Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>66</sup> *Wilderness Act of 1964*, Public Law 88-577, 88th Congress, 2nd sess. (September 3, 1964), 2. I want to thank Ralph Swain, Sara Dant, and Mark Harvey for helping untangle the story on the Wilderness Act’s setting special conditions on the designation of the Gore Range–Eagle’s Nest Primitive Area as wilderness.

The Wilderness Act had grown out of wider concern by national groups such as the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society over the development of the West's public lands. Beginning with the controversy over the damming of Echo Park Canyon in Dinosaur National Monument in 1956, a growing number of Americans questioned the real impact of commercial development on public lands. Federal and state authorities had long believed in the Progressive Era ideal of providing the greatest good for the greatest number, an ideal that had meant encouraging the development of natural resources. By the late 1950s, this belief came under attack by a growing number of activists who argued that the preservation of public lands was the highest of all uses of public lands. Led by men such as David Brower, Howard Zahniser, and Bob Marshall, the modern environmental movement sought to protect wild lands throughout the country, especially in the American West.<sup>67</sup>

Concomitant with the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964 was the nation's increasing embrace of preservationism and desire for outdoor recreation. Recreational access to public lands became an increasingly important measurement for quality of life to millions of Americans, especially those moving to the growing metropolitan regions of the American West. As environmental writer and renown law professor Charles

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<sup>67</sup> Wilderness became one of the most contentious public land issues in the American West. Opponents argued that wilderness undercut rural economies by removing lands from extractive use, while wilderness advocates argued that the preservation of large sections of public lands would provide an important counterpoint to the nation's rapidly growing metropolitan regions as well offering protection of fragile ecosystems. As William Cronon has pointed out, in this manner wilderness was largely a white urban construct. One that said as much about the changing culture of the American West during the second half of the twentieth century as the region's growing cities and suburbs. On the early history of the wilderness debate see: Donald Baldwin, *The Quiet Revolution: The Grass Roots of Today's Wilderness Preservation Movement* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1972), 183–96; Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 118–19; Mark Harvey, *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Michael Johnson, *Hunger for the Wild: America's Obsession with the Untamed West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); Sara Dant. "Making Wilderness Work: Frank Church and the American Wilderness" *Pacific Historical Review* (May 2008): 237-72.

Wilkinson noted recreationalists often sought expanded opportunities in the region's vast public lands but questioned traditional extractive development.<sup>68</sup> In order to protect the nation's national forests from the axe and bulldozer, recreationalists often sided with preservationist groups in creating wilderness. But this alliance was tenuous at best, for recreationalists wanted to use public lands for activities while preservationists wish to halt the use of such areas. The Wilderness Act's language held this very contradiction, defining wilderness as an area "where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."<sup>69</sup> The marriage between recreation and preservation created a potent mixture of politics that came to oppose traditional extractive uses of public lands and helped give rise to environmental groups such as the COSCC during the 1960s, but would lead to further conflicts over the use and management of public lands in the future.<sup>70</sup>

The potential passage of the interstate through, or underneath, the newly appointed Gore Range–Eagle's Nest Wilderness Area greatly alarmed conservationists, recreational advocates, and wilderness proponents. The most outspoken of these groups was the COSCC. Formed in 1965 under the leadership of longtime environmental activist Ed Hilliard, the COSCC quickly grew from a small group of environmental and recreational organizations into a broad-based coalition of more than twenty-five different

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Wilkinson, "Paradise Revised," in *Atlas of the New American West*, William E. Riebsame, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 17.

<sup>69</sup> *Wilderness Act of 1964*, Public Law 88-577, 88th Congress, 2nd sess. (September 3, 1964), 1.

<sup>70</sup> On the definition of wilderness through recreation see: Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?'" Work and Nature" in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995), 171–85; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Mark Daniel Barringer, *Selling Yellowstone: Capitalism and the Construction of Nature* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Liza Nicholas, Elaine M. Bapis, and Thomas J. Harvey, eds., *Imagining the Big Open: Nature, Identity, and Play in the New West* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003); Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Hal Rothman, *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

organizations with more than 50,000 members, including the Colorado Mountain Club, the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Trout Unlimited. Later renamed the Colorado Environmental Coalition, the COSCC reflected the changing political and cultural tenor within the state. Young activists, including future Colorado governor Richard Lamm, quickly became the backbone of the coalition, and began tackling issues such as wilderness and outdoor recreational access throughout the state. Through these political battles Lamm and others gained the invaluable experience used in the coming fights over the Denver Winter Olympics and development of ski resorts during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>71</sup>

During the public hearing over the Red Buffalo Tunnel held in Frisco, COSCC Executive Director Roger Hansen argued in a strongly worded statement that the tunnel was “unwarranted and unjustified invasion of an area soon to be reviewed by Secretary of Agriculture, the President, and Congress for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.”<sup>72</sup> The COSCC not only opposed the tunnel’s violation of the spirit of the Wilderness Act, but also attacked the costs of constructing and maintaining the tunnel, its impacts on the region’s tourism industry, and the tunnel’s safety. Hansen took issue with the Colorado Highway Department’s argument that the tunnel would save taxpayers roughly \$4 million a year. Scenic beauty and recreational access, he argued, was more valuable in the long term to the state’s economy than the savings created by constructing the tunnel; savings that would only come after taxpayers

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<sup>71</sup> Andrew Kirk, *Collecting Nature: The American Environmental Movement and the Conservation Library* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 105; “Colorado Open Space Council,” Box 2. Edward Hilliard Jr. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>72</sup> Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Statement in Opposition to the Red Buffalo Tunnel through the Gore Range–Eagle’s Nest Primitive Area at a Public Hearing of the Colorado State Highway Commission, October 20, 1966. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 35, FF10. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

paid off the tunnel's construction costs. "What dollar value can be assigned to the scenic, wilderness, wildlife, and recreational resources in the Gore Range-Eagle Nest Primitive area that would be destroyed by the proposed highway?"<sup>73</sup> Construction of the interstate over Vail Pass was be easier and far less costly he argued. Routing the interstate over Vail Pass would also have the added benefit of keeping the Gore Range-Eagle's Nest Wilderness Area intact, allowing for its entire inclusion as a wilderness area in the years to come.

In the end it was not the protests from environmentalist groups or local business interests that killed the Red Buffalo Tunnel, but simple economics. Colorado Department of Transportation cost estimates for constructing the tunnel hovered around \$40 million. Projected costs for building the interstate over Vail Pass were less than half that amount.<sup>74</sup> Adding only another ten miles onto the total distance proved too cost prohibitive. When faced with the cost difference, Governor Love dropped his support of the tunnel, spelling its end. In May 1967, Secretary of Agriculture Freeman denied the state's request for access through the primitive area, stating in a terse one-page statement, "Through four decades, this Department has maintained that the National Forest Wilderness System should not be invaded—even for important purposes—if there is a feasible alternative."<sup>75</sup> The costs, both economic and environmental, were too high, Freeman believed, for the Department of Agriculture to allow Colorado to build the Red

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> "Summary of the Facts Concerning the Red Buffalo Route on I-70 in Colorado." Governor's Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970–1971. Governor John Love Papers. Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>75</sup> Statement by Orville L. Freeman, Secretary of Agriculture, "Decision on the Request by the Colorado Department of Highways to Route Interstate Highway 70 through the Gore Range-Eagle's Nest Primitive Area, Arapaho and White River National Forests," 1968. Forest History Society. [http://www.foresthistory.org/Research/usfscoll/policy/Wilderness/1968\\_I-70.html](http://www.foresthistory.org/Research/usfscoll/policy/Wilderness/1968_I-70.html).

Buffalo Tunnel. With the secretary's denial of the state's request, the Red Buffalo Tunnel died.

The COSCC's strong objections to the Red Buffalo Tunnel demonstrated the beginning of a sea change in Colorado environmental politics that not only focused on issues such as wilderness, but on larger quality of life issues including recreational access to public lands. Concerns over preserving open space and planning for growth lay at the heart of this shift in state, local, and regional politics, and came to influence final rejection of the interstate's passage through the Eagle's Nest Wilderness, the rejection of the Winter Olympic Games by Colorado voters in 1972, the struggle over the development of Beaver Creek Ski Resort in 1974, the opposition to the construction of the Interstate 470 beltway around the Denver metropolitan area in the late 1970s, and the fight over the Two Forks Dam during the early 1980s. In these and many other cases, competing desires to increase recreational access, and bolster the state's economy, led to complex and often bloody fights over growth and the environment.<sup>76</sup>

The debate over the Red Buffalo Tunnel foreshadowed the larger struggle within the state over the Winter Olympic Games and their economic and environmental impact on the Colorado high country. Chosen as the site for the 1976 Winter Olympic Games in 1967, a year before the final decision on the Red Buffalo Tunnel, Colorado quickly became the frontline in an emerging struggle over the shape of the modern West. But before the fight over the Winter Olympics, the decision on the route of Interstate 70, along with the opening of ski resorts such as Vail and Breckenridge, transformed Colorado's high country into a recreational empire stretching along the length of the

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<sup>76</sup> Abbott et al., *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 4th ed. (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2005), 373–91.

newly constructed interstate. The potent mixture of increased access and increased development would radically changed the shape of the once-isolated region, and led to further struggles over its identity, economy, and environment.

Construction on Interstate 70 began in 1971 with the section of highway stretching from Denver to the foot of Loveland Pass. At Loveland Pass, the state excavated two seven-mile tunnels under the Continental Divide. Weak rock and shifting pressures caused massive delays and cost overruns for both bores. The westbound tunnel, named the Eisenhower Memorial Tunnel after President Dwight Eisenhower, opened in 1973. In an attempt to learn from the mistakes made while drilling the westbound bore, state engineers spent five years designing the tunnel before opening the job to bids. Other miscues and unforeseen mishaps plagued the second bore, causing further delays and cost overruns. The eastbound tunnel, named after former Colorado governor Edwin Johnson, opened six years later. Even so, capacity became an emerging issue as early as the 1980s. By the end of the century over 10 million cars and trucks passed through the Eisenhower and Johnson Tunnels creating massive traffic jams and leading to calls for the widening of Interstate 70. Once again, the state faced the unenviable position of weighting economic and environmental costs against increasing demand for transportation access.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

“It is difficult to believe, but three winters ago there was no Vail,” remarked *Sports Illustrated* journalist Fred Smith in 1964 with a sense of awe on the speed with which the ski resort appeared alongside Highway 6. “Never in the history of U.S. skiing has a bare

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<sup>77</sup> Colorado Department of Transportation, "Eisenhower Tunnel Traffic Counts," <http://www.dot.state.co.us/Eisenhower/EdwinCJohnson%20Bore.asp>.



mountain leaped in such a short time into the four-star category of ski resorts.”<sup>78</sup> Smith’s reaction to the seemingly sudden appearance of Vail reflected the nation’s larger amazement over the rapid development of the Colorado mountains in the decades following World War II. Over a dozen new resorts had opened in Colorado between 1945 and 1966, and more appeared on the horizon. This growth in new ski resorts was in large part due to skiing’s skyrocketing popularity during the period. Lift ticket sales in Colorado grew from 204,640 in 1954 to 1,168,159 in 1966.<sup>79</sup> Facing such numbers, the Forest Service embraced the private development of ski resorts. But with the introduction of private development came the problem of the Forest Service’s balancing the public’s calls for recreational access with increasing demands by ski resorts to maximize profits. It proved to be an unwinnable position for the agency, who continued to struggle in regaining in ski resort developers quest for greater profits while meeting federal environmental legislation.

The boom in new resorts did meet the public’s growing thirst for skiing, ski resorts became increasingly driven by the bottom line. Ski resorts such as Vail and Breckenridge, complete with base villages, sought to exploit national forests for more than their recreational opportunities. Each offered a new model of public land use, with the development of real estate alongside ski areas on national forest bolstering resort profits. While many within the Forest Service became comfortable with the agency’s new relationship with ski resorts, a growing number of critics from both inside and outside the agency began to question the larger impacts of allowing profits to steer policy. By the early 1970s, the development of ski resorts became part of a much larger regional debate

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<sup>78</sup> Fred Smith, “Six Square Miles of Powder,” *Sports Illustrated* (November 23, 1964), 52–62.

<sup>79</sup> C. R. Goeldner, et al., *The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998–99 Season* (Boulder: University of Colorado Graduate School of Business Administration, Business Research Division, 1998), 5.

over growth and the environment, and would emerge with the awarding of the 1976 Winter Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to Denver in 1970.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RICH MAN'S GAMES, POOR MAN'S TAXES

As athletes from around the world celebrated the closing of the 1972 Sapporo Winter Olympic Games in the Makomanai Indoor Stadium, the scoreboard above them jubilantly announced “We Meet Again in Denver ‘76.” Two years later that jubilation turned into disbelief when, with a resounding three to two margin, Colorado voters rejected any further funding of the 1976 Winter Olympic Games, effectively ending Denver’s Olympic dreams. The decision of Colorado’s voters shocked the world. No previous host city had ever rejected the Olympic Games after winning the right to host the two-week-long international event. Believing that the Games would bring international fame and considerable economic windfalls, cities from around the world had long competed for the privilege to host the Olympics. Colorado’s lieutenant governor Mark Hogan argued that very point defending the state’s quest for the Games, telling reporters, “The influx of Olympic visitors, plus a continued flow prompted by the exposure given the host city will be a benefit to all facets of business in the state.”<sup>1</sup> What was good for the state’s tourist economy, Hogan and other Olympic proponents reasoned, would be good for the state. But a number of Coloradoans questioned such logic. Colorado State Representative Richard Lamm, who would ride anti-Olympic sentiment into the governor’s office, criticized the Olympics as little more than “rich man’s games paid for by poor man’s taxes.”<sup>2</sup> To Lamm and others the Olympics symbolized less an economic opportunity and

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<sup>1</sup> *Denver Post*, December 13, 1969, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Citizens for Colorado’s Future, Records 1971–1972. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver Colorado.

more of a multi-million-dollar snow job meant to line the pockets of real estate and resort developers at the price of not only Coloradoans' tax dollars but also their way of life.<sup>3</sup>

By the late 1960s, Colorado, like much of the West, experienced a tremendous boom in population. Between 1950 and 1960, Colorado's growth rate exceeded 30 percent, with the vast majority of the state's new population settling in the rapidly expanding metropolitan area along its Front Range.<sup>4</sup> In addition, an explosion in the development of ski resorts along with the decision to extend Interstate 70 over the Continental Divide during the 1950s and 1960 had also driven growth throughout Colorado's once-isolated western mountain communities. Anchored by ski resorts, tourism grew into a multi-million-dollar-a-year industry in Colorado driving not only lift ticket sales but also real estate. Resort communities such as Vail and Breckenridge had grown tremendously during decade prior, due in large part to the development of ski resorts. But while growth brought prosperity, it faced new opposition by conservationists. Rising concerns over the negative impacts of growth led many to question the prosperity it wrought. Such concerns came to the forefront in a venomous, albeit short, fight over the proposed construction of a sixteen-mile tunnel under the Gore Range–Eagle's Nest Wilderness Area in 1965.<sup>5</sup>

The fight over the proposed Red Buffalo Tunnel had been a part of a larger region-wide environmental movement. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall captured the new

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<sup>3</sup> The American West experienced tremendous population growth in the decades following World War II. According to the U.S. Census between 1940 and 1970 the region's population grew from 13.8 million people to 33.7 million. California saw the greatest increase in population during the period, growing from 6.9 million residents to 19.9 million. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census counts.

<http://www.census.gov>. On impacts of this growth see: Richard White "*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*": A New History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 496-539; Walter Nugent, *Into the West: The Story of Its People* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 286-97.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Census of Population 1960: Colorado," vol. I, part 7, Characteristics of the Population (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 7.

<sup>5</sup> "I-70 to By-Pass High Country," *The Summit County Journal*, September 30, 1966. Governor's Office, PUC Correspondence, Various Projects. 1970–1971. Governor John Love Papers. Box 66772. Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado; William Philpott, "Consuming Colorado: Landscapes, Leisure, and the Tourist Way of Life" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2002), 212-14.

environmental ethos of the era in the introduction of his book *The Quiet Crisis* by writing, “We stand today poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power, yet we live in a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space and of an overall environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight. This, in brief, is the quiet conservation crisis.”<sup>6</sup> The belief that the West stood between the pinnacle of wealth and power and vanishing beauty shaped politics throughout the region, pitting beliefs of the primacy of growth against desires to preserve the landscapes that defined the West. In Colorado, the fight over the Denver Winter Olympic Games reflected this larger debate over the future of the West’s economy and environment and made ski resorts the target of a growing environmental movement.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the fight over the Olympics was also part of a larger debate over the necessity and benefits of economic expansion. Colorado voters identified the Denver Organizing Committee’s poor planning, arrogance, secretiveness, and escalating costs as the reasons they voted against any further city and state funding for the Games. Such sentiments stemmed from the organizing committee’s failure to understand the changing political climate within the state as well as Coloradoans’ growing mistrust that the Winter Olympics were in fact a good economic deal for the state. By drawing millions to watch the Games, Olympic boosters, men historian Paul Whiteside describe as “prominent, well-heeled, and widely respected business and political leaders for whom growth and economic development were gospel,” hoped to better Colorado’s fortunes by building

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<sup>6</sup> Stewart Udall, *The Quiet Crisis* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), xvii.

<sup>7</sup> James Whiteside, *Colorado: A Sports History* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1999), 146-47. Also see: Mark Foster, "Little Lies: The Colorado 1976 Winter Olympics," *Colorado Heritage* (Winter 1998), 22-33.

upon its natural beauty, mountain access, and growing ski industry.<sup>8</sup> For critics such as Lamm and members of anti-Olympic groups such as Evergreen's Protect Our Mountain Home (POME) and Citizens for Colorado's Future (CCF), tourism equaled increased real estate development, which in turn threatened the state's quality of life, most notably by drawing new residents. "The trouble with tourists," wrote *Denver Post* columnist Tom Gaven, "is that having looked around, many wish to return."<sup>9</sup> The Olympics, many feared, would only make matters worse. Ironically, many of those who opposed the Olympics for this reason were themselves recent comers to the state. Lamm himself had moved to Colorado in the early 1960s drawn in part by the mountains. Despite such realities, fears over increase growth greatly influenced voters' opinions and shaped Colorado politics for the next decade. The state's ski industry came to play a central role in this political shift, beginning with the controversy surrounding the selection of the site for the men's and women's alpine events for the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games.<sup>10</sup>

Until the rejection of the Games, there had been little public opposition to the development of new resorts throughout the state. Over two dozen ski areas opened in the forty years prior to the defeat of the Olympics at the polls. The early 1960s had seen a boom in ski resort construction, highlighted by the development of Vail, Breckenridge, and Snowmass ski resorts. The initial rejection of Vail by the Forest Service in 1960 was due to the agency's desire to retain control over the development of ski resorts. But as the state's population continued to grow throughout the 1960s, many Americans began to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 146.

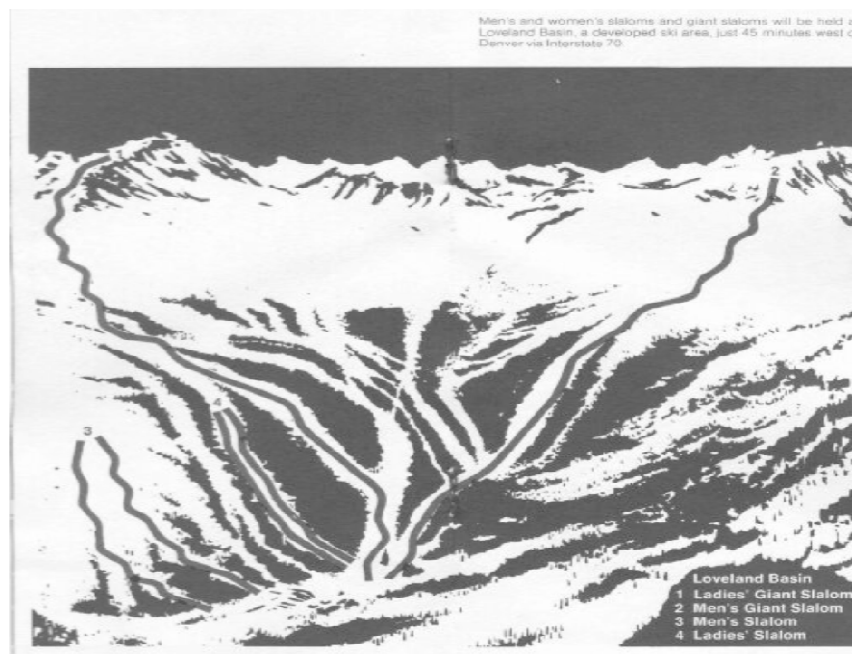
<sup>9</sup> Tom Gaven quote in Rick Reese, *The Denver Winter Olympic Controversy*, November 16, 1984. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library Central Branch, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>10</sup> On the role of growth in Colorado politics, see Whiteside, *Colorado*, 145–79; Carl Abbott, et. al. *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 4th ed. (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1994), 367— 91; Duane Smith, *Rocky Mountain Heartland: Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming in the Twentieth Century* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 192–217.

question the economic and environmental impacts of ski resort development on the state's mountains. A growing environmental movement began targeting ski resorts' impact on wildlife and delicate mountain ecosystems. Others worried about the incredible transformative effects of skiing on mountain communities. Still others wondered about the private development of public lands. Such concerns had wide-ranging ramifications regarding the future of tourism and skiing in Colorado. All of these concerns were encapsulated in the debates surrounding Denver hosting the Winter Olympics in 1976 and especially in determining where to hold the men and women's alpine events.

The fight over where to hold the Olympic alpine events began almost as soon as Denver became the United States Olympic Committee's nominee to host the 1976 Winter Olympic Games. The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) requirement that all events be within an hour's drive of the host city led to the Denver Olympic Committee's (DOC) selection of Mount Sniktau, near Loveland and Arapaho Basin ski areas for the alpine events. American ski officials deemed the mountain unacceptable due to its exposure to high winds and inadequate snow. In addition, the Forest Service did not like the mountain's future potential as a ski resort and requested the venue be moved to another undeveloped mountain, known as Copper Mountain, some sixty miles farther west. Despite these objections, Mount Sniktau remained the site for both the men's and women's Olympic downhill events until 1972, when in a closed-door meeting, Denver Olympic Committee members selected the yet-to-be-built Beaver Creek Ski Resort as the new site for the Olympic alpine events. Critics immediately decried Beaver Creek's selection. Not only was the new ski resort slated to be developed by Vail Associates (VA), many of whose board members were also members on the DOC board, but its

selection would have hastened Beaver Creek’s Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), cutting through years of red tape and bypassing legislation where environmental organizations had spent years getting passed. While Vail Associates assured an increasingly skeptical public that the resort would not cost taxpayers a single dime, many felt that the development of a new ski resort, and the growth it would bring, under the auspices of the Winter Olympics was indeed using public money to develop public lands for private interests.<sup>11</sup>



Photograph 7. Proposed layout of Mount Sniktau for men and women’s Olympic alpine events. Denver Olympic Committee Brochure. Colorado Ski and Snowboard Museum and Hall of Fame

<sup>11</sup> Whiteside, *Colorado*, 146 and 175; John J. Kennedy, Jr., “Innsbruck 1976,” in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 367–68; Laura Lee Katz Olson, “Power, Public Policy, and the Environment: The Defeat of the 1975 Winter Olympics in Colorado” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1974).



The Denver Winter Olympics was not the first time the Winter Olympic Games had been embroiled in a controversy over their use to bolster tourism. IOC President Avery Brundage had long maintained that the Winter Games were little more than a way for host cities to bolster their tourism industries. Considered an anachronism by his critics, Brundage spent most of his career attacking what he saw as the creeping influence of commercialism into the Olympic movement. This was especially true of downhill skiing, which he believed to be little more than a commercial enterprise promoting ski manufacturers and resorts. At the 1972 Sapporo Winter Games, Brundage launched a tirade against the Winter Games, stating, “Today, the Olympics Winter Games are still far from universal . . . they are monopolized by only a dozen or so countries and they are difficult to keep amateur. The winter tourist business is so important to some countries that their ski teams have literally become almost government departments and are subsidized accordingly. This is not sport. They [the Olympics] can only be given to large communities which can afford the enormous expense—and they are more likely to be a set of world championships than Olympic Games.”<sup>12</sup> This was true in Colorado where the Winter Olympics were promoted more for the benefit of the state’s tourism industry.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the controversies surrounding the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games were part of a much larger political shift throughout Colorado and the West in which mounting concerns over growth, the environment, and quality of life took a prominent

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<sup>12</sup> John Parr, “Face to Face with the Olympic Gods,” *The Capital Ledger* 1, no 3 (March 1972): 8. Richard Lamm Collection. Papers. Clippings. Colorado Historical Society Archive, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>13</sup> On Avery Brundage and the role of commercialism in the Modern Olympic Games, see Allan Guttman, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Robert Barney, Stephen Wenn, and Scott Martyn, *Selling the Five Rings: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2002); Vyv Simson, *The Lords of the Rings: Power, Money, and Drugs in the Modern Olympics* (London: Stoddart, 1991); John Gold and Margaret Gold, eds. *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning, and the Worlds Games, 1896–2012* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

role in shaping the region's politics and identity. For Colorado's ski industry, the rejection of the Olympics signified not only Coloradoan's growing concerns over the economic and environmental costs of the Olympics Games, but the beginnings of a much larger debate over growth and the development of public lands for private gain. To many Coloradoans, ski resorts like Vail, Breckenridge, and Aspen represented the state's unbridled growth. For decades, Colorado's business and political elite, of which ski industry insiders such as Vail founder and CEO Pete Siebert were now a part, had equated the idea that growth was an absolute good, bringing jobs, profits, and good publicity.<sup>14</sup> However, by the late 1960s an increasing number of Coloradoans questioned the wisdom of growth for growth's sake. The Olympics became the first target of what eventually became a wide coalition of environmentalists, anti-tax proponents, rural residents, urban intellectuals, ranchers, racial minorities, and others opposed to the Olympics, their costs, and the changes they promised to bring.<sup>15</sup>

The battle over the Denver Olympics were also reflective of America's changing national mood during the 1970s. Known as the environmental decade, Americans increasingly voiced their concerns over environmental issues relating to quality of life issues such as clean air and clean water. The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970, demonstrating American's growing environmental awareness. Such concerns translated into the passage of a multitude of environmental laws throughout the decade, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.<sup>16</sup> Beyond the emergence of the environment as a national political concern,

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<sup>14</sup> Whiteside, *Colorado*, 146.

<sup>15</sup> Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 265-72; Whiteside, *Colorado*, 176-179

<sup>16</sup> Historians often identify the emergence of a modern environmental movement in the decades following World War II. Based upon issues such as wilderness, dams, and pollution, this new movement reflected

Americans demonstrated growing frustration over the social and political upheavals of the previous decade. The failure of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society and its promises of social equality, or conversely the erosion of "traditional values," combined with the nation's involvement in Southeast Asia and two recessions, caused many Americans to feel powerless during the decade. Yet, the 1970s were not a decade of general malaise, but one of change. As Bruce J. Schulman notes, the decade marked a shift in American culture, economics, and politics. The counterculture movement and liberalism of the 1960s evolved into the free-market libertarianism of the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> Politics reflected a growing skepticism of government-run solutions. Even liberal Democrats such as Richard Lamm, who came to politics inspired by President John F. Kennedy's call for greater service, railed against federal largess by the end of the decade, writing in his 1982 treatise *The Angry West*, "They [Westerners] – we – are the new Indians. And they -- we -- will not be herded to the new reservations."<sup>18</sup> Such shifts in rhetoric and thought

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what Hal Rothman identified as American's declining faith in technology and increasing suspicion in pronouncements of authority that had shaped conservationists thought throughout the first half of the century. Robert Gottlieb argues that environmentalism, as understood during the second half of the twentieth century, was more the culmination of an era of protest against decades long history of development and environment degradation. In either case, the emergence of the environmental movement during the 1960s and 1970s came to have a significant impact on American life, politics, and identity throughout the late twentieth century. For more on the environmental movement during the century see: Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993); Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); John Opie, *Nature's Nation: An Environmental History of the United States* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 404-33; Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 250-261; Hal Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee).

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), xi-xvii. Schulman is among a growing number of historians and journalists who have come to question the causal dismissal of the historical importance of the 1970s by arguing that American underwent often seismic transformation during the decade between the end of Vietnam to the election of Ronald Reagan. For more see: Elsebeth Hurup, ed. *The Lost Decade: American in the Seventies* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996); David Frum, *How We Got Here The 70s Decade that Brought You Modern Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Beth L. Bailey, Dave Farber, eds. *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Richard Lamm, interview July 13, 2006; Richard D. Lamm and Michael McCarthy, *The Angry West: A*

signified the larger cultural shift of the 1970s, a shift that not only redefined the nation, but western politics, economics, and identity. In Colorado, this transformation began with the battle over the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games.

### The Winter Olympics

The first Winter Olympic Games were held in the French alpine village of Chamonix in 1924. From their very beginning, the Winter Games were embroiled in controversy over their costs and the development of multiple facilities in order to host thousands of athletes, spectators, and media. At Chamonix, athletes from sixteen countries participated in five different events: bobsledding, ice hockey, skiing, speed skating, and figure skating. Hundreds of eager spectators overwhelmed the village's few hotels, causing Olympic officials to ask village residents to open their homes to visitors. Such crowds led Olympic organizers to claim the Games a popular success, but they were not a financial success. Costs for the Games ran into the millions of francs, while gate receipts garnered only a quarter-million. Despite such woes, the IOC planned on continuing its Winter Games. The second Winter Olympics held in St. Mortiz, Switzerland, fared much better in 1928, producing the Winter Olympics' first superstar, Norwegian figure skater Sonja Heine. The Games made their first visit to North America in 1932, when Lake Placid, a small resort town in upstate New York, hosted the world's winter athletes. Alpine skiing finally made its Olympic debut in the 1936 Garmisch-Partenkirchen Games.<sup>19</sup>

Sadly, global hostilities in 1939 put both the Summer and Winter Games on hold until 1948. But following World War II, alpine skiing quickly became one of the most popular

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*Vulnerable Land and Its Future* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 4.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the Garmisch-Partenkirchen Winter Games see: David Clay Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936* (New York: W.W. Norton Company Inc., 2007), 110-46.

Olympic events, cementing itself as a mainstay during the 1960 Squaw Valley Games, when for the first time television audiences watched the sports' heroes race down the resort's slopes. Throughout the decade, the Winter Games continued to draw larger and larger crowds, as well as more participants. Such growth drove the costs of the Winter Olympic Games ever upward so that by 1960, they cost millions of dollars not only to host, but also to develop the infrastructure required to host the world.<sup>20</sup>

The Chamonix Games did not officially become the first Winter Games until the IOC Congress subsequently sanctioned them as such during the committee's annual 1925 meeting in Prague. The decision to name Chamonix as the first official Winter Olympics created a wide-scale scandal throughout Europe. While the modern Olympic Games had begun in Athens, Greece, in 1896, a winter version of the Games traditionally had little support. Often called the father of the modern Games, Pierre Coubertin had long contemplated the creation of a Winter Olympics, but the logistics of holding events such as skiing at the same time as track and field provided too difficult to overcome and conflicted directly with the popular Scandinavian Nordic Games. Begun in 1901, and held once every four years thereafter until 1926, the Nordic Games were the creation of Swedish nationalist Victor Black. Much like Coubertin, and his promotion of European nationalism, Black desired to promote pan-Scandinavian nationalism and tourism to his native country. Under Black, Scandinavians did not want to see their dominance in winter sports challenged on the world stage and so remained resistant to the idea of a Winter Olympics. But by the early 1920s, the IOC had enough support to challenge the Nordic

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Rensen, "The Cool Games: The Winter Olympics, 1924–2002," in *The Winter Olympics: Chamonix to Salt Lake City*, ed. Larry R. Gerlach ed. (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2004), 41–86; Stephen Essex and Brian Chalkley, "The Winter Games: Driving Urban Change, 1924–2002," in *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning, and the Worlds Games, 1896–2012*, ed. John Gold and Margaret Gold (New York: Routledge, 2007), 48–58.

Games and so retroactively sanctioned Chamonix the first Winter Olympics. Swedish and Norwegian officials were outraged at what they viewed as Olympic subterfuge. The only reason Scandinavian athletes had attended Chamonix was because they were not sanctioned as part of the Olympics. Regardless, the Nordic Games proved to be short lived, occurring only once more in 1926, giving way to the Winter Olympics in 1928.<sup>21</sup>

Finding the appropriate venues and geography remained an enormous hurdle in organizing the Winter Games. Few countries had the right mixture of sporting facilities, lodging, high mountain peaks, and snow. Added to the problem was that prior to the 1930s, winter sports mostly remained the province of a handful European and North American countries. As a result, the Winter Olympic Games remained a poorer version of its summer sibling, but despite the sparse national participation, the Winter Games continued to grow in popularity. In 1936, alpine skiing was introduced as an Olympic sport in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, which garnered greater international attention. Following World War II, the Cold War reshaped the Olympic Games, turning them into ideological battlegrounds between the East and the West. Televised for the first time during the 1960 Squaw Valley Games, with its opening ceremony produced by Disney, the Winter Olympics grew into a commercial phenomenon. By 1968, the Winter Games were a truly international event, with 1,293 athletes representing thirty-seven countries in the Grenoble Winter Games. Despite the increasing popularity of the Winter Games, by the late 1960s many within the IOC wanted to cancel them. The most prominent of those holding this view was IOC President Avery Brundage. Calling the

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<sup>21</sup> Rensen, "The Cool Games," 41–46; Yves Morales, "Pre-Olympic Winter Games," in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 271–82; Paula D. Welch, "Chamonix, 1924," in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 283–88.

Winter Games the “Frostbit Follies,” Brundage hated what he saw as the crass commercialism of the Winter Games and the failure of many governing bodies to rein in the professionalism of athletes, particularly skiers. During his farewell address in 1972, he voiced his wish that “the Winter Olympics receive a decent burial in Denver.” That burial nearly came with Colorado voters’ rejection of the Games later that same year.<sup>22</sup>

Brundage was one of the most enigmatic figures in modern Olympic history. To many he was a tyrant and his zealous enforcement of the Olympics amateurism rules earned him nicknames such as “Slavery Avery” from athletes.<sup>23</sup> Though his near-religious fervor for the Olympic Movement often blinded him to the realities of the modern athletics, Brundage steered the IOC through many of its most turbulent years. In an organization dominated by European aristocrats, Brundage was a self-made American millionaire. Raised in a broken home, his father having left when Avery was five, Brundage attended the University of Illinois, earning an engineering degree and competing in decathlons. It was as an athlete that he was introduced to the Olympics, where in the 1912 Stockholm Summer Games he competed against the legendary Jim Thorpe. After the end of his athletic career, Brundage went on to start a multi-million-dollar construction company though never strayed too far from sports world; serving as president of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) for seven terms, as well as the president of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) for thirty, before being elected to the IOC board in 1936. Brundage’s election to the insular IOC was due in large part to his

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<sup>22</sup>Kennedy, “Innsbruck, 1976,” 367.

<sup>23</sup> John Lucas, *The Modern Olympic Games* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc., 1980), 166.

efforts in halting a boycott of the 1936 “Nazi Olympics.” Becoming the IOC’s vice president in 1945, he took over as the organization’s President in 1952.<sup>24</sup>

While Brundage navigated the IOC through the opening decades of the Cold War, negotiating the two China issue, South Africa’s policy of apartheid, and increasing role of nationalism in the Olympic Games, he remained obsessed over two issues throughout his presidency—amateurism and the growing commercialization of the Olympic Games.<sup>25</sup> In 1925, at the Olympic Conference in Prague, the IOC codified the definition of an amateur as “one who devotes himself to sport for sport’s sake.” While Coubertin had based his vision on amateurism of his idealized vision of the Greek Games, Victorian ideals of amateurism, which looked to ensure class distinction in competition by prohibiting middle- and lower-class participation, defined amateurism in the modern games. As World War II ended and the Cold War began, this elite ideal became antiquated as Communist nations fully funded their athletes in order to promote their national superiority. Even in non-Communist nations such as Austria and Norway, athletes enjoyed the financial support of their national governments and corporate sponsors. As sport became more commercialized and less amateur, athletes became prized commodities selling not only national pride but also morning cereal. A gold medal could mean millions in sponsorships and advertising dollars for an athlete. Nowhere was this more apparent than in skiing in the late 1960s.<sup>26</sup>

The 1968 Grenoble Games proved to be a bellwether in Winter Olympic history. The Games cost \$240 million, mostly due to the increased media coverage and the dispersed

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<sup>24</sup> Guttman, *The Games Must Go On*; Joanne Davenport, “Monique Berlioux: Her Association with Three IOC Presidents” *Citius, Altius, Fortius* 4, no. 3. (Autumn 1996): 10–18; Findling and Pelle, *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, 471–82.

<sup>25</sup> Barney, et al., *Selling the Five Rings*; Simson, *The Lords of the Rings*.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Hill, *Olympic Politics: Athens to Atlanta, 1896–1996* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 7–8.



events. Only two events were held in Grenoble itself—ice hockey and skating—with the other events occurring at five different locations. Many criticized spreading events across the region, believing that the lack of a centralized Olympic Village detracted from the Olympic spirit of the Games. Cold War politics also had created a minor stir before the Games even began when North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) forced its members to refuse visas to East German delegates. The French government rebuffed the NATO's demands, and allowed the East German team to enter the country.<sup>27</sup>

For Brundage, the real controversy of the Grenoble Games was neither geopolitical nor the escalating costs in hosting events across a wide region, but the dominant role of corporate sponsorship in alpine skiing. Such an incomprehensible position, especially in the light of the global strife caused by the Cold War, came from Brundage's belief in the purity of amateurism and his belief that commercialization was the single most corrosive force on the Olympic ideal. In his biography of Brundage, Olympic historian Allen Guttman argues that although Brundage was certainly anti-Communist, the promotion of amateur sports and their protection from commercialism were far more important to him than Cold War politics. His almost pathological obsession with what Guttman termed the "religion of Olympicism" was so intense that as president Brundage readily overlooked the Soviet Union's state funded sports program to ensure their role in the Olympic movement. Yet, he remained critical of sports such as alpine skiing whose athletes failed to meet Brundage's definition of amateurism because they accepted corporate sponsorships. Such an argument seems almost inexplicable, especially in the context of the many additional controversies Brundage faced as president of the IOC,

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<sup>27</sup> Hill, *Olympic Politics*, 38–39; Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 128–29.

including the murder of eleven Israeli athletes and coaches during the 1972 Munich Summer Games and the international condemnation of South Africa's policy of apartheid. But, to the former Olympic decathlete and self-made millionaire, the creeping influence of commercialism into the Olympic was the greatest threat to the Games.<sup>28</sup>

Skiing's role in the commercialization of the Winter Olympics lay in its string ties with tourism. "Everyone knows," Brundage complained in 1971, "both the French and Austrian ski teams are a part of their departments of tourism—and that is not sport."<sup>29</sup> Ski resorts actively sought to host the Winter Olympic Games, as well as other high-profile races, in order to draw attention in an expanding global market. The Olympics were used to sell everything from ski gear to vacations in the European Alps. Starting as early as 1960, manufacturers used images of Olympic athletes to sell their products in magazines such as *SKIING* and *Ski Magazine*. The televised 1960 Squaw Valley Games catapulted from an undeveloped corner of the California Sierra Nevada to an internationally known resort. Jean-Claude Killy, the French ski champion who had drawn Brundage's ire during the Grenoble games by prominently displaying his gloves in a newspaper photograph, gained international fame and recognition through his athletic exploits at the Olympics, fame which he then translated into corporate sponsorships. Killy was not alone in tapping into the growing commercialization of sport, especially skiing. The first American male ever to medal in an Olympic alpine event, William "Billy" Kidd became the face of Steamboat Ski Resort after his retirement from the sport in 1970. Even Hollywood got in on the action with the release of the Robert Redford film *Downhill Racer* in 1969. While the movie failed to attract huge numbers at the box office, it demonstrated the romance

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<sup>28</sup> Guttman, *The Games Must Go On*, 100–169.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

surrounding skiing and the Olympics. Millions ventured to the slopes for the first time after watching the Olympics on television, a fact well understood by the Colorado ski industry prior to the IOC's awarding Denver the 1976 Winter Games. While there was nothing new about advertising the Games to promote tourism, to Brundage the linkage between the tourism industry and the Games was a growing problem that threatened the very foundation of his Olympic ideal.<sup>30</sup>

After Grenoble, Brundage vowed to force skiing's international governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS), to adhere to the amateur code. In what proved to be his final undoing, the overzealous IOC president attempted to disqualify skiers whom he deemed had profited from skiing, especially through corporate sponsorship. In the end, only one skier was banned from the Sapporo Winter Games, which tarnished Brundage's reputation beyond repair. The FIS viewed Brundage as an iron-fisted executioner, and became increasingly bitter at his attacks on the organization's handling of its athletes. Skiing was not the only sport bitter toward Brundage's tirades against commercialism. Sports including hockey, basketball, and even track and field became increasingly disillusioned with the IOC's president's quixotic quest against the global tide of consumerism and its effects on amateur sports. In 1972, the embattled Brundage stepped down as IOC president largely due to his dogmatic conviction in the amateur ideal. Commercialism, it appeared, had won.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Barney, et al., *Selling the Five Rings*; Guttman, *The Games Must Go On*, 213–22; Annie Gilbert-Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 160–62; John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006), 280–82.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Brown and Gordon MacDonald, "Grenoble 1968," in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, ed. John Findling and Kimberly Pelle (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 351–58; David Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, Inc., 1984), 87; Rensen, "The Cool Games," 58–60; Hill, *Olympic Politics*, 38–39; Guttman, *The Games Must Go On*, 198; Guttman, *The Olympics*, 128–29.

## Colorado's Olympic Games

Colorado's interest in hosting the Winter Games began in the late 1940s when Governor Lee Knous offered to host the 1956 Winter Games in Aspen and at the Broadmoor Ice Palace, outside Colorado Springs. While Colorado failed to secure the bid to host the Games, the Olympic idea remained. Seven years later, William Tutt, owner of the Broadmoor Ski Area, and Steve Knowlton, founder of the state's promotional group Colorado Ski Country USA, presented a bid to host the 1960 Winter Olympics to the United States Olympic Committee. Colorado once again failed to win the USOC's nomination, losing out to Squaw Valley. In 1964, a small group of businessmen and state boosters consisting of Tutt, the president and founder of Vail Associates Peter Seibert, publisher of *Ski Magazine* Merrill Hastings, vice president of the Adolph Coors Company Joseph Coors, and United Airlines executive Donald Fowler, formed the Colorado Olympic Committee (COC) to study the economic feasibility of the state hosting the Winter Games. Richard Olson, the director of Vail Associates, replaced Coors on the committee a year later. Soon after forming, the group of business leaders and state politicians announced their intentions to secure the right to host the Winter Games. Over the next two years the committee lobbied USOC officials tirelessly to secure the nomination to host the 1976 Winter Olympics, which it received in 1967.<sup>32</sup>

Once the USOC granted the nomination, the Denver Organizing Committee (DOC) quickly formed to sell Denver to the IOC. Including many of the same members who had helped secure the national nomination, the DOC represented some the state's most prominent business leaders and politicians. Holding all of its meetings behind closed doors and forwarding its minutes only to the governor, the committee's work remained

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<sup>32</sup> Whiteside, *Colorado*, 147; Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 90-95.

hidden from most Coloradoans until after winning the bid to host the 1976 Winter Games nearly four years later. The reasons for such secrecy, as well as the belief that the state's residents would easily embrace the idea of hosting the Olympics, stemmed from many of the committee members' assertions that the state's continued economic growth was a good thing. Their failure to even consider that many Coloradoans might oppose such growth led to the Denver Olympics' ultimate defeat at the polls. The men who made up the DOC and its later iterations "equated their interests with the good of the state and all of its people. Growth had always been viewed as an absolute positive."<sup>33</sup> The Olympics, they reasoned, would be good not only for their financial interests, but for the state's as well. Such hubris proved to be the undoing of the Denver Olympics as state taxpayers questioned the logic of paying for the construction of Olympic facilities that would only benefit the state's few business elite.

Over the next three years, Denver officials wooed IOC members, presenting Denver as the perfect city in which to host the Winter Games, as it was close to the mountains, and already had established sporting facilities, an international airport, and more than enough hotel rooms. Reflecting on the final failure of the Denver Olympics, Ted Farwell, the DOC's technical director responsible for the planning, design, and development of all of the competition sites for the 1976 Games, pointed out the origin of the IOC's misconceptions about the Winter Olympics. "For the most part the IOC is made up of independently wealthy people," wrote Farwell, "who are insulated from what is going on in the world." Most of the IOC still believed in 1970 that the Winter Games could be held at a compact site such as Squaw Valley, ignoring the glaringly obvious fact that the 1968 Grenoble Winter Games included thirty-seven countries, 1,293 athletes, and countless

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<sup>33</sup> Whiteside, *Colorado*, 146.

spectators and members of the media and had barely accommodated them all.<sup>34</sup> Hosting increasing numbers of athletes, press, and spectators, as well as providing adequate sites for events as diverse as skiing, bobsledding, and ice skating meant that the Winter Olympics had to be held on a regional scale rather than in the smaller sites to which IOC members had become accustomed. Realizing the IOC's desire for a more compact Olympics, Denver officials sold the sprawling city as a quaint metropolis in the Colorado Rockies. The IOC bought the "magnificent piece of salesmanship," and in 1970 Denver became the host city for the 1976 Winter Olympic Games, beating out Sion, Switzerland, on the third ballot.<sup>35</sup>

The Colorado Olympic Committee withheld telling the people of Colorado for over a year after the USOC chose Denver as its nominee to host the Winter Games, and then it only released a brief press release. Members of the COC reasoned that by avoiding any disclosure to the press, it could minimize specific questions until it had had an opportunity to crystallize its plans. Such secrecy became a part of the culture of the COC, as well as its later incarnations; the Denver Olympic Committee (DOC), Colorado Organizing Committee, and Denver Olympic Organizing Committee (DOOC), and played an integral part in the defeat of Denver Games at the polls. In 1968, when residents of the Evergreen and Indian Hills communities discovered that their towns were the proposed sites for the bobsledding, cross-country skiing, and Nordic jumping events, they quickly protested, only to find little sympathy and even less information from the

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<sup>34</sup> Ted Farwell, "The Olympic Bubble," *Colorful Colorado* (January/February 1973): 20; Findling and Pelle, *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, 351. Farwell's article provides a rare insider look into the Denver Winter Olympics Organizing Committee's decisions concerning the selection of alpine skiing venue before his release from the DOC in 1971.

<sup>35</sup> Denver's organizing body changed three different times during its short history. First organized as the Denver Olympic Committee (DOC) it later became the Denver Organizing Committee (DOC) before finally restructuring into the Denver Olympic Organizing Committee (DOOC). *Rocky Mountain News*, April 4, 1971, 8.

organizing committee. “The public relations attitude of the DOC,” wrote Farwell in his scathing critique of the failed Olympics, “was ‘say nothing.’ Because if you answer you just dig yourself in deeper.”<sup>36</sup> It was this secretive behavior that drew the ire of many Coloradoans, who came to believe that the DOC was hiding the truth of the actual costs of the Games. Such beliefs led to a greater mistrust of the organizing committee’s competence to both organize and run the Olympics. Throughout 1971 and into 1972, Colorado voters grew increasingly disillusioned at what many saw as an elitist organization of business interests making decisions behind closed doors, decisions that greatly affected the economies and environments of their communities throughout the state. While many Coloradoans welcomed the continued development of the state’s tourist economy, especially the development of new ski resorts, the DOC’s lack of transparency allowed Olympic opponents to convince many residents that the Olympics were in fact a bad deal.

On winning its bid to host the 1976 Games, members of the DOC executive board never even considered that some Coloradoans would be less than excited about the Olympics and thought the only issue would be finding adequate financing for the Games. Through the early 1960s the expansion of the state’s ski industry had been welcomed by Coloradoans with open arms. The opening of Vail, Breckenridge, and Snowmass defined the high-water mark in the development of ski resorts in the state. By drawing increasing numbers of tourists, the state’s ski industry pumped millions into the state’s economy. Hosting the Winter Olympics appeared a natural extension of Colorado’s booming winter tourist market.

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<sup>36</sup> Farwell, “The Olympic Bubble,” 26.

But the problem was not the benefit of the Winter Games to the state's growing ski industry, but the cost of the Winter Olympics itself. Newspaper articles began appearing in the state's two major newspapers, the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Denver Post*, questioning the mounting price tag of the games and pointing out the unexpected expenses of past Winter Games. In a six-part series in 1971, *Rocky Mountain News* journalist Richard O'Reilly wrote out that previous Winter Olympic host cities had grievously underestimated their overall costs, a failure that had in turn brought higher taxes to area residents and enormous facilities with little after-use potential. The 1960 Squaw games had cost the State of California thirteen times as much as originally estimated. The city of Grenoble, France, spent over \$250 million on the 1968 Winter Games, and Sapporo, Japan, was in the process of spending anywhere between \$750 million to \$1.3 billion for the 1972 Winter Games.<sup>37</sup> Such articles, along with the DOC's continued silence on all Olympic matters including costs and site selection, only reaffirmed the belief of an increasing number of Coloradoans that the Olympics were more about profit and less about people. The DOC responded that there was no way it could offer the State of Colorado a guarantee that the Olympics would not cost taxpayers. "Whatever that cost might be, we know it will be small in comparison to Olympics which have been hosted by our predecessors. We also know it will be small in comparison to the opportunities presented to the State by the Olympics."<sup>38</sup>

The selection of event venues became a final point of contention between Olympic organizers and opponents. In making their bid for the Games to the USOC, the COC had

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<sup>37</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, April 1971, 5–10.

<sup>38</sup> "The 1976 Winter Olympics Some Questions and Answers Dealing with Financial Aspects of the XII Winter Games," February, 1971. Denver Olympic Organizing Committee Records. Papers. Colorado Historical Society Library, Denver, Colorado.



focused on economic and geographic factors in selecting event sites, arguing that any changes on site selection could be made once the city had won the bid. The failure to consider the opinion of locals who would be most affected by the development of venues for the Games became apparent when the residents of Evergreen and Indian Hills reacted negatively to their communities being turned into competition sites. Fueled by concerns over property values and the long-term environmental impacts of the infrastructure needed to host thousands of spectators tromping through their town, locals formed Protect Our Mountain Home (POME) to fight the DOC on the selection of their town as an Olympic venue. Lead by Indian Hills resident and retired University of Denver law professor Vance Dittman, POME did not necessarily oppose the Olympic Games, they simply opposed hosting the Games in their backyards, fearing that bringing the Olympics to the Evergreen area would attract too much growth to the town and surrounding area and cause a loss of rural character. “We don’t want to keep people out of here,” stated Dittman in an interview with *The National Observer*, “but we are just like a theater. When all the seats are sold, they don’t keep selling tickets and putting people on your lap. We are sold out.”<sup>39</sup> Dittman’s sentiments reflected those of many Coloradoans at the time. Even though many did not wish to see an end to the state’s economic growth, many newcomers wanted to close the gate behind them when it came to further growth.

Several technical problems faced the selection of the Evergreen area in any case. The simple lack of snow made the area a poor choice for the cross-country skiing events. Less than five inches of snow had fallen annually in the area since 1963.<sup>40</sup> When DOC officials suggested the use of snow-making machines to compensate for this lack of

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<sup>39</sup> Douglas Looney, “‘Bah!’ . . . Say a Lot of Colorado Folks When Talk Turns to the Olympics,” *The National Observer*, February 19, 1972, 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Denver Post*, August 8, 1970.

snowfall, POME members questioned the amount of water needed to produce enough manmade snow to hold the events. Other problems, including the leveling of hillsides to build parking lots, the construction of a four-lane highway, and the proposed biathlon course which required competitors to “ski right through Evergreen High School and Wilmont Elementary School,” led POME members to argue that hosting any events in the Evergreen area was “completely out of the question in every respect.”<sup>41</sup> After several unsatisfying meetings with DOC officials, the group embarked on a prolific letter-writing campaign. Most letter writers argued against the destruction of the area's natural beauty. “The very thought of thousands of our beautiful evergreens being destroyed, Bear Creek re-routed and practically covered to make way for a gigantic ski jump, Evergreen lake and our municipal golf course being taken away from us, helicopter pads and parking lots, an interchange of roads and highways, television cables and poles everywhere, plus all of the other scars such events will inevitably leave, makes me ill,” wrote Evergreen local Lolo Wright to Governor Love.<sup>42</sup> In another letter to Love, Mrs. John Steidl took on more NIMBY-like tones. “Please, try to see our point. Many people are moving and more have planned to do so. Our mountains here will be ruined for open community living [here]. We look to you to protect our investments and way of life by urging the selection of one of the more appropriate alternate sites like Winter Park or Steamboat Springs.”<sup>43</sup> The fight between Evergreen residents and the DOC gained national media attention when *Newsweek* published a story entitled “Nevergreen” on the fight over the area’s selection as an Olympic venue. In a letter to State Senator Harry Locke, the Chairman of

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<sup>41</sup> *Rocky Mountain News*, October 25, 1970, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Lola Wright to John Love September 2, 1970. Governor John Love Papers. Colorado State Archives, 1976 Olympics, Box 66339.

<sup>43</sup> Mrs. John Steidl to John Love August 31, 1970. Governor John Love Papers. Colorado State Archives, 1976 Olympics, Box 66339.

the Joint Budget Committee, Dittman explained, “Such sports facilities will degrade the whole community environment as a place to live, and will have no reasonable after-use in the Denver Mountain Parks and will require maintenance beyond that now available from the city and county of Denver.”<sup>44</sup>

The DOC finally relented to POME’s protests during its meeting in Sapporo, Japan, and agreed to relocate the cross-country and jumping events. While it was apparent that the DOC needed to relocate the alpine and Nordic venues, there remained another question. A DOC report had concluded that “[t]he scope of a modern Olympics with an official party of over 15,000 requires facilities of a major city. The practical compromise . . . is to select competition sites within logical commuting distance of housing facilities.” Any new cross-country site needed to be at or below 7,800 feet in elevation, leaving only three potential sites—Steamboat Springs, Buffalo Creek, and Indian Park. Buffalo Creek and Indian Park had questionable snow, leaving only Steamboat. IOC officials only agreed to the selection of Steamboat, which lay 160 miles west of Denver, only after the DOC promised to use aircraft to shuttle athletes and Olympic officials between Denver and the resort town.<sup>45</sup> The move of the Nordic events to Steamboat not only opened the door for holding alpine events on the West Slope, but also marked the turning point in the debate over Olympics. Now, not only was the secrecy surrounding the Olympics an issue, but also was the effect of Olympic development would have on Colorado’s mountain communities also became a source of concern.

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<sup>44</sup> Lance Dittman to Senator Harry Locke, January 1971. Protect Our Mountain Home Collection. Papers. Colorado Historical Society Library, Denver, Colorado. Mark Foster, "Colorado's Defeat of the 1976 Winter Olympics," *Colorado Magazine* (Spring 1976), 173-176.

<sup>45</sup> Sport Site Relocation XII Olympic Winter Games. Denver Organizing Committee for the 1976 Winter Olympics. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

In western states such as Colorado, these concerns translated into conflicts over the issue of growth. Led by Governor Love, Colorado looked to seize the economic benefits of growth with its “Sell Colorado” campaign beginning the early 1960s.<sup>46</sup> For Love, the idea of growth itself appeared a win-win situation. New residents, drawn to the state by its beauty and economic opportunities, got the quality of life they sought, and Colorado’s economy blossomed. While some residents enjoyed the economic gains brought by the state’s growing population, by the end of the decade many feared that too many people were moving to the state too fast. The specter of the unbridled growth of Southern California led many Coloradoans to call, for as a popular bumper sticker of the time put it, to put an end to the “Los Angelization” of Colorado.<sup>47</sup> John Denver’s 1972 hit “Rocky Mountain High” reflected the sentiments of both longtime and newly arrived Colorado residents. As the bespectacled singer happily crooned of the quiet beauty of his new life in the Colorado Rockies, he also lamented, “Now his life is full of wonder but his heart still knows some fear of a simple thing he cannot comprehend. Why they try to tear the mountains down to bring in a couple more. More people, more scars upon the land.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For more on the “Sell Colorado” campaign see: Governor John Love, “Sell Colorado Campaign,” Governor’s Office. Governor John Love Papers. Colorado State Archives, Box 66948.

<sup>47</sup> CCF, bumper stickers, Files of CCF, Folder 4. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado; Olson, “Power, Public Policy, and the Environment,” 30.

<sup>48</sup> John Denver, “Rocky Mountain High,” RCA, 1972. David Wrobel notes that such anti-California statements stemmed from anxieties over the development and destruction of pristine landscapes and the eradication of simple and affordable lifestyles as wealthy Californians and others, notably Texans in Colorado resort towns, migrated into western states such as Oregon and Colorado. Such sentiments illustrate the larger problem of westernness and a thematic construct, argues Wrobel by bringing into question differing understandings of what it means to be “western.” California immigrants often saw states such as Colorado as promised lands free from pollution, crime, racial tensions, and high property values found in California. In response, locals often drew on their primacy in identifying newcomers, who Hal Rothman termed neonates, as the culprits in the destruction of what made such places unique. Such tensions continued throughout the twentieth century, and often sat at the center of debates over growth in ski resort communities. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains*, 26; David Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 189-91; For local reactions to newcomers throughout the American West during the late twentieth century see: Peggy Clifford and John M. Smith, *Aspen/Dreams & Dilemmas: Love Letter to a Small Town* (Chicago: The Swallow Press Inc., 1970); Rick Bass, *Winter: Notes From Montana* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,

Such contradictory viewpoints defined how many Coloradoans viewed their state. While many had moved to state because of its beauty and opportunity, like Denver, they too lamented the changes economic growth and increasing population brought to along with them. Such apprehensions over the impact of unbridled growth lay at the heart of debate over the Denver Winter Olympics, which eventually played out in the selection of the alpine events.

In 1967, Aspen Ski Resort board member and chairman of the COC site selection committee George “Parry” Robinson asked the Forest Service’s resident skiing expert Paul Hauk to join the selection committee to help identify a site at which to host the alpine events. Hauk was the ideal choice for the task.<sup>49</sup> After becoming Supervisory Forester in Charge of Recreation and Lands for the White River National Forest in 1957, he had conducted over fifty feasibility studies on the potential of mountains for the development of skiing throughout Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. Hauk also was no stranger to the Olympic Games. In 1960, he had served as a member of the avalanche control team at the Squaw Valley Winter Olympic Games. Beyond Hauk’s résumé, it was necessary to involve the Forest Service in developing any mountain site within the state. For these reasons, Hauk became a key member of the committee.

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1991); George Sibley, *Dragons in Paradise: On The Edge Between Civilization and Sanity* (Frisco, CO: Mountain Gazette Publishing, 2004); Jim Stiles, *Brave New West: Morphing at the Speed of Greed* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> Paul Hauk, *Chronology of Beaver Creek* (Glenwood Springs, CO: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, US Forest Service, 1979), 2-3. Paul Hauk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado. F. Georg Robinson to Paul Hauk. June 21, 1967. Paul Hauk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



Photograph 8 Paul Hawk. Colorado Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame

Composed of ski industry insiders, including Vail Associates president Pete Seibert, the group faced significant challenges in locating an acceptable site to host the men and women's alpine event. When in March of 1967, during the committee's first meeting, Robinson pointed out the essential need of adequate vertical feet, good snow conditions, and close proximity to Denver for any venue. Committee member and *Skiing Magazine* publisher Merrill Hastings noted that if Colorado won the USOC nomination, it would not obligate the committee to any site until the official IOC bid. Others on the committee questioned the assumption of hosting the downhill event at the same mountain as the other events. The meeting ended with the decision to have Hawk and Vail co-founder Earl Eaton further investigate sites on the West Slope and report to the committee at the next meeting. The following month, Hawk made a slide presentation of several potential venues, including Mount Sniktau, Independence Mountain, and Copper Mountain.

Believing that the United States Ski Association would never agree on an Eastern Slope site, the committee voted Copper Mountain the primary site with Vail as the alternate.<sup>50</sup>

Located at the junction of U.S. Highways 6 and 91, Copper Mountain had long been a favorite of Hawk's. "I recognized the skiing potential at Copper in 1952 when I became district ranger at Dillon," wrote Hawk in his history of the ski resort.<sup>51</sup> In 1954, he suggested the development of Copper for skiing to Regional Forester Dave Nordwall. Interest in developing Copper Mountain as a ski area remained, but despite Hawk's recommendations, the mountain remained undeveloped. That was until 1969 when the Righter family, heirs to the McCormick farm equipment fortune, requested a permit to develop a ski area on the mountain. The family's interest stemmed from the mountain's potential, and its selection as an Olympic venue as well as the construction of Interstate 70, which would pass by the base of the mountain. Final Forest Service permits allowing the development of 3180 acres were approved in August 1971, but financial delays kept Copper Mountain from opening until the 1972–1973 ski season. The resort became an instant favorite of Front Range skiers, who simply drove up the newly completed Interstate 70 and exited right at the lift. In 1977, Copper hosted the World Alpine Championships, the first international competition held in Colorado since the 1950 World Championships in Aspen.<sup>52</sup>

The selection of Copper as the Olympic venue quickly got the DOC into trouble, when USOC officials voiced their fear that its distance from Denver would hurt the city's

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Hawk, Site Selection Meeting of March 14, 1967, and Site Selection Committee Meeting of February 20, 1967. Paul Hawk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>51</sup> Hawk, *Copper Mountain Ski Area Chronology* (Glenwood Springs, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, White River National Forest, 1979), 1. Paul Hawk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-9.

bid. Desiring to keep alpine events within an hour's drive of Denver and meet the required vertical feet needed to hold the men's and women's downhill, the DOC quickly chose Mount Sniktau, a 13,000-foot, windswept peak adjacent to Loveland Ski Area on the Continental Divide, for the IOC bid, believing that any technical issues could be resolved after Denver won the bid to host the Games.<sup>53</sup> As was the organizing committee's practice, the selection of Sniktau remained hidden from the public, including the owners of Loveland Ski Area, which DOC officials slated as the site for the slalom events. Loveland's owner Bob Murri learned of the selection of his ski area and the neighboring mountain for the slalom races on the radio. Surprised on hearing the news, Murri pointed out the obvious problem with the DOC's argument that a ski area on Mount Sniktau would have commercial viability in the long term. Noting the peak's lack of snow, he told reporters, "I certainly don't think any private enterprise would want to go in there [Mount Sniktau] and put in the total package."<sup>54</sup> While Mount Sniktau met the IOC's standards as a venue in terms of height and location, it lacked the adequate snowfall and long-term viability to make it the right choice for the 1976 Games.

Exactly who chose Mount Sniktau as the initial site for Olympic alpine events remained a point of contention. Paul Hawk pointed to U.S. Ski Team Director Willy Schaeffler as the man behind the peak's selection. In turn, Schaeffler denied making any decision concerning Sniktau as the site of the men's and women's downhill courses,

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<sup>53</sup> Hawk, *Chronology of Beaver Creek*, 3; Farwell, "The Olympic Bubble," 5. Both Hawk and Farwell point the decision as an example the Denver Olympic Committee's early lack of organization, and the chaos surrounding the eventual selection of Beaver Creek as the venue. Hawk's assistant Erik Martin remembers ranging throughout the central Rockies during the period in order to survey as many potential sites as possible. Early ideas included the creation of a ski area on the backside of Vail Pass down into the Two Elks area, and also the development of Independence Mountain near the town of Georgetown. None of these ideas were ever followed up on, but Independence Mountain remains designated as a potential ski area site. Erik Martin. Interview by author, June 2008.

<sup>54</sup> "Olympic Alpine Site Conflict Brewing," *Rocky Mountain News*, April 7, 1971, 8.



arguing that by the time he was asked about the mountain's potential, it was, as Ted Farwell later wrote, "already decided."<sup>55</sup> The most likely scenario is that, pressed for time, DOC board member Merrill Hastings, who under pressure to get the proposal together, simply chose Mount Sniktau for its relative proximity to Denver over the suggested location of Copper Mountain.

By the summer of 1971, the need for a better site for the alpine events was apparent to all involved. Disturbed by the relocation of the Nordic events to Steamboat Springs, the IOC demanded that the Denver committee settle on an adequate site for the alpine events by the Sapporo Winter Games. In December, organizers appointed yet another subcommittee to select an event site. Many DOC committee members begged off holding any meetings until after the holidays. Farwell, clearly disgusted at the behavior of his fellow committee members, complained there were, "Two weeks went by before our first meeting. Two weeks when absolutely nothing was done."<sup>56</sup> After its holiday break, the committee finally met and began analyzing the proposed sites of Copper Mountain, Independence Mountain, Harrison Creek, Aspen, and Meadow Mountain, the site of Vail's proposed Beaver Creek development.

In response to mounting pressures by environmental groups, the DOC formed a commission of environmental experts known as the Planning Board in January to review the proposed alpine sites in terms of their environmental impacts on the land and surrounding communities. In its final report, the group ranked Harrison Creek near Steamboat Springs first due to its suitability for the men's and women's downhill event and its proximity to Steamboat which was already the site of the Nordic events. The

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<sup>55</sup> Farwell, "The Olympic Bubble," 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

board ranked the Beaver Creek site last, citing that the development of a ski resort under the guise of the Winter Olympics “would invite the most trouble” for the Olympic Committee.<sup>57</sup> In addition, board members feared the political ramifications of selecting a third venue. In a memo to fellow Planning Board members Bob Pringle and F.G. Robinson, Carl DeTemple relayed that Bud Little told Merrill Hastings that if the Olympic Committee selected any other sites except Sniktau and Copper, they were “in for trouble,” and that in fact “Avery Brundage may institute action to switch the Games” over the DOC’s apparent inability to select an agreeable venue for the alpine events.<sup>58</sup> Despite the creation of the Planning Board and its subsequent report, DOC officials failed to recognize the increasing importance of the environmental issues in the debate over the Olympic Games, and instead worried about the IOC’s perception of the DOC’s clumsy attempts to select adequate event venues.

### The Defeat of the Games

At the same time the DOC was struggling with its selection of a site for the alpine events, a small group of Colorado residents began to meet and discuss the environmental and economic consequences of holding the Olympics in Colorado, and what they could do to stop it. Led by political activist Sam Brown, the group included Democratic state representatives Bob Jackson and Richard Lamm, as well as fellow activists Margaret Lundstrom, John Parr, Estelle Brown, University of Colorado professor Donald Carmichael, and POME leader Vince Dittman. After a year of informal meetings, the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 34–35.

<sup>58</sup> Memo from Carl DeTemple to Bob Pringle and F. G. Robinson, January 20, 1972. Denver Organizing Committee for the 1976 Winter Olympics. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

small band incorporated as Citizens for Colorado's Future (CCF). The group's first action was publishing an "Olympic Fact Sheet" describing both the economic and environmental costs of the Olympics in the *Denver Post*.<sup>59</sup> The CCF quickly followed the fact sheet by circulating a petition to organizations such as the Sierra Club, Audubon Society, and League of Women Voters protesting the Denver Winter Games. More than 25,000 people signed the petition, surprising even the CCF. It was becoming increasingly apparent that many Colorado voters were unsure about the Olympic Games. Seizing upon this disillusionment, the CCF joined forces with other anti-Olympic groups in attacking the DOC's efforts to gain further state and city funding for the Games.<sup>60</sup>

The members of the CCF included some of Colorado's most liberal political activists. A vocal antiwar activist, Sam Brown had earned a master's degree in political science from Rutgers and had attended the Kennedy Political Institute at Harvard University before joining the Eugene McCarthy presidential campaign. Following McCarthy's loss to Herbert Humphrey for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination, Brown move on to help organize the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam before eventually settling in Colorado. Margaret Lundstrom and John Parr had both moved to Colorado the year before to work on the failed presidential campaign of Senator Fred Harris. Richard Lamm was perhaps the most recognizable figure of the group. Born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin with an accounting degree in

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<sup>59</sup> *The Denver Post*, October 11, 1972, 33.

<sup>60</sup> Olson, "Power, Public Policy and the Environment," 268-9. In her dissertation written in 1974, Olson argued that the Olympics simplified a wide range of complex environmental issues into the single issue of the Olympic Games. She further argued that, "Moreover, the Winter Games united the disparate environmental groups, each concerned over different aspects of the natural environment." While the Olympic did certainly provide a single target for criticism from a wide variety concerns and interest groups, the creation of the Colorado Environmental Coalition in opposition of the Red Buffalo Tunnel under the Eagles Nest Primitive area during the early 1960s suggests that Colorado's environmental groups were less disperse than Olson asserts.

1957. After serving in the U.S. Army, during which time he discovered Colorado, Lamm moved to California and earned a law degree from UC Berkeley.<sup>61</sup>

After graduating, Lamm then moved to Denver and settled in the affluent neighborhood surrounding the University of Denver where he worked as a CPA and lawyer, and later become a faculty member of the University of Denver's law school. He joined the Colorado Mountain Club and quickly became enamored with Colorado's mountains, hiking many of the state's fourteen-thousand-foot peaks, as well as learning to rock climb, and cross-country ski. Interested in the growing environmental movement of the time, he merged his love of the outdoors with his political ambitions. As young man Lamm had been drawn to political activism. Inspired by John F. Kennedy, he joined Colorado's Young Democrats in 1963. In 1966, he successfully ran for the state legislature, serving for eight years before becoming governor in 1976. Lamm promoted the protection of Colorado's open spaces, writing several position papers on the damming of the Grand Canyon, air and water pollution along the South Platte River, urban renewal, and the removal of billboards. As a member of the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council he became involved in the battle to build a tunnel under the proposed Gore Range-Eagle's Nest Wilderness Area. Young, brash, and liberal, Lamm quickly gained attention of the state's voters not with environmental activism, but by drafting the nation's first liberalized abortion law. But it would be the battle over the Olympics that would vault the young state legislator into national prominence.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Lamm, Interview July 13, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Norman Upeviz, "Small but Artful Activist Group Wielding Rare Power," *Denver Post*, October 11, 1972; Whiteside, *Colorado*, 168–69. On Richard Lamm's early environmental activism, see Richard Lamm Collection Papers. Box 3A FF14. Conservation and Environment Business, 1965. Colorado Historical Society Archive, Denver, Colorado.



Photograph 9. Governor Richard Lamm, Denver Public Library Western History Photograph Collection

With a groundswell of support, members of the CCF decided to take their concerns directly to the IOC. Pooling their resources, the group sent Estelle Brown, John Parr, and Sam Brown to the IOC's meeting in Sapporo, Japan. Literally breaking into the meeting, the three presented the shocked IOC board an eighteen-inch-tall stack of petitions along with several letters from state legislators, environmentalists, and property owners opposing the Denver Games. The stunt worked. After having police escort the three activists from the room, the IOC announced that it had withdrawn its invitation to Denver to host the 1976 Winter Olympic Games. The news stunned everyone. But before the CCF members could celebrate their victory the DOC secured an endorsement from President Richard Nixon as well as a special Congressional Resolution from Secretary of

the Interior Rogers Clark Morton, and Denver was reinstated as the host city for the 1976 Winter Games.<sup>63</sup>

Undaunted by their failure to stop the Denver Olympics in Sapporo, the CCF changed tactics. The group launched a petition drive to place a referendum on the November ballot that would create a state constitutional amendment capping the amount of state funding available to host the Olympics. The Denver City Council followed suit, placing its own initiative on the same ballot restricting the amount of funding the city could provide for the Games. Governor Love quickly responded to the petition, arguing that any vote on such a measure would be “too late,” and needlessly disastrous to DOC planning efforts. Denver Mayor Bill McNichols joined Love in his opposition to both the statewide referendum and the city initiative, and gave little credence to polls which showed a popular opposition to the Games.<sup>64</sup> But both Governor Love and Mayor McNichols misjudged Colorado voters’ growing anger towards the Games. In July, the CCF presented Colorado’s Secretary of State Byron Anderson a steamer trunk full of petitions with 77,392 signatures—27,392 more than were needed to place the referendum on the November ballot.<sup>65</sup>

In attempt to reflected the new political reality, which demand the consideration of environmental and community concerns, the organizing committee reorganized under the new name of the Denver Olympic Organizing Committee (DOOC). William Goodwin, president of the Johns-Manville Corporation, replaced Mayor McNichols as chairman

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<sup>63</sup> “A Presentation to the International Olympic Committee from the Citizens for Colorado’s Future, Sapporo Japan, January 29- February 1, 1972,” Richard Lamm Collection Papers. Box 2. Colorado Historical Society Archive, Denver, Colorado; “Denver Suffers Sapporo Ordeal,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 1972; Whiteside, *Colorado*, 168–70.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Carter, “Olympic Vote Proposed,” *Denver Post*, March 3, 1972; “McNichols Against New Olympics Vote,” *Denver Post*, March 15, 1972.

<sup>65</sup> *Denver Post*, July 6, 1972, 36; Olson, “Power, Public Policy and the Environment,” 188-189; Whiteside, *Colorado*, 171.

of the new board. Carl DeTemple, a former Denver city councilman and lobbyist for the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, took over organizing committee's day-to-day operations. Such changes were largely cosmetic with the majority of the previous DOC leadership remaining in place. The DOOC continued to promote the economic benefits the Winter Olympics would bring to the state, ignoring the growing skepticism over the real costs of such benefits.<sup>66</sup>

The debate over the Olympics raged throughout the summer, with each side's rhetoric becoming increasingly bombastic. Costs and growth became the two central issues around which the debate revolved. A *Denver Post* article in March quoted DeTemple as stating the Olympics would cost Colorado taxpayers \$1.5 million. That number soon ballooned to \$5 million, despite an additional \$15.5 million coming from the federal government. Pointing to the costs of past Winter Olympics, critics argued that such figures would only increase as the Games drew near. DOOC officials argued such economic costs would be largely offset by new tax revenues produced by the Olympics. The CCF responded that such revenues would fall far short of actual costs. Citing the DOOC's April 3, 1973, budget, the CCF pointed out that the state government would be responsible for \$4.7 million, the city of Denver for \$12.7 million, while revenues were estimated only at \$10.3 to \$15.8 million.<sup>67</sup> These costs could and most likely would increase, argued Olympic opponents. "The Olympics are unimaginable," Lamm told reporters in September. "They are full of economic land mines. I fear, based on Olympic history that costs will far exceed estimates, and the Colorado tax payers will have to pick

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<sup>66</sup> Whiteside, *Colorado: A Sports History*, 172.

<sup>67</sup> "'76 Olympics Cost \$1.5 Million," *Denver Post*, March 27, 1973; *The Colorado Destiny: A Publication of Citizens for Colorado's Future*, September 2, 1972. Citizens for Colorado's Future Records. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department. Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

up the tab.”<sup>68</sup> While the issue of costs remained highly contentious throughout the summer so too would concerns over growth.

In an October 22, 1973, editorial, the editors of the *Denver Post* asked rhetorically, “How can we shroud Colorado from view?” Rejecting the Olympics would not halt growth, they argued. Instead, they suggested, Colorado voters should approach the Games as both a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge to solve the major environmental issues facing the state, and an opportunity to promote Colorado’s continued prosperity through continued growth. But growth was precisely what Olympic opponents feared. A press release by the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club captured such fears, arguing that “the staging of the 1976 Winter Olympic Games in Colorado will encourage population increase, which will subsequently place a detrimental strain on the resources necessary to sustain life quality within the State of Colorado.”<sup>69</sup> The solution to the problem of growth, argued Lamm, was not to “build a wall around Colorado,” but instead to institute stronger land use controls rather than always accommodate growth. “One of the first things we do is stop ‘selling’ Colorado,” he wrote in the CCF’s newsletter. “Stop the mindless promotion and the Chamber of Commerce boosterism, exemplified by the Olympics, which has so characterized our past policies.”<sup>70</sup> To Lamm and other Olympic opponents, the Winter Games were nothing more than the use of taxpayers’ money to help fund the state’s tourism economy. And

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<sup>68</sup> Norman Udevitz, “Cost of Olympic Games Debated,” *Denver Post* September 29, 1973.

<sup>69</sup> Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club Press Release Concerning the Denver Winter Olympics. Richard Lamm Collection Papers. Box 2. Colorado Historical Society Archive, Denver, Colorado

<sup>70</sup> *The Colorado Destiny: A Publication of Citizens for Colorado’s Future*, September 2, 1972. Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Department.



nowhere was this more evident than in the emerging fight over the selection of Beaver Creek as the site for the Olympic alpine events.<sup>71</sup>

As early as 1957, Vail Resort founders Pete Seibert and Earl Eaton had played with the idea of developing Beaver Creek. Nestled ten miles west of Vail in a narrow drainage valley ringed by slopes covered in virgin forest, Beaver Creek seemed the perfect site for the development of another ski resort. But two issues stood in the way of Seibert and Eaton's vision. One, the ownership of much of the land needed to develop a base resort was owned by Willis Nottingham, who by all accounts was not too keen on having a ski area just up the valley from his ranch. The second was gaining the Forest Service's approval to develop the area for skiing. Prior to 1970, the Forest Service had determined Beaver Creek suitable for recreational development, but the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in 1970 changed the way the agency approved the development of new ski resorts on national forest land. The new legislation required the completion of an environmental impact statement (EIS) before approving any project funded by the federal government, located on public lands, or in any way falling under the purview of the federal government. Examining all the environmental and cultural impacts of a project, an Environmental Impact Statement can take years and add untold expenses to any project—time and expense Vail Associates hoped to forego. Soon after opening Vail Ski Resort in 1962, Seibert began asking Beaver Creek's owner about buying his 2,200-acre ranch at the bottom of the mountain valley. At first Nottingham resisted Seibert's overtures, but as the Eagle Valley continued to grow throughout the

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<sup>71</sup> Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*, 227–51; Adam Rome, *Bull Dozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119–52.

decade, the rancher began looking for greener pastures and in 1971 the two men struck a deal. Seibert began planning his next resort.<sup>72</sup>

After buying the Beaver Creek property, Seibert and Vail Associates immediately pressured the DOC for the selection of Beaver Creek as the site for the Olympic alpine events, hoping that its designation would cut some of the red tape in attaining permits from the Forest Service to develop the resort. In January 1972, in a closed-door meeting in Sapporo, Japan, the DOOC designated Beaver Creek as the official site of the men's and women's alpine events for the 1976 Winter Olympics, despite the DOC ranking the site last not six months prior, with Copper Mountain as the alternate. Critics immediately decried selection the of Beaver Creek, citing the DOC's previous assessment that the Beaver Creek site was less attractive than other proposed sites for the alpine events because its development would have allowed greater environmental and economic impacts on the surrounding area. Several members of the planning board resigned, enraged over the selection of Beaver Creek. Few believed Vail Associates' assurances that the development of the multi-million-dollar ski resort would have minimal impact on the area's environment, especially after learning that the ski resort's trails would actually be in a proposed wilderness area. Vail officials had hoped the designation of the area would help expedite Forest Service approval in developing the area, but Forest Service officials declined to make any quick judgment on the site.<sup>73</sup>

Seibert and other Vail Associates officials denied that the selection of Beaver Creek was meant to circumnavigate the Forest Service in gaining a permit to begin construction. But many saw the selection as an obvious ploy by DOOC insiders, especially as Vail's

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<sup>72</sup> June Simonton, *Vail: Story of a Colorado Mountain Valley* (Denver: Vail Chronicles Inc., 1987), 112–17.

<sup>73</sup> Hawk, *Chronology of Beaver Creek*, 4.

Director of Operations Richard Olson was a member of the DOOC's board of directors. Before the DOOC's selection of Beaver Creek in Japan, Olson had leaked the committee's dilemma to Vail officials, who in turn ordered Olson to "get Vail's plan into high gear."<sup>74</sup> Olson did just that, and with the help of chairman of the Alpine site selection committee George Robinson, sold Beaver Creek to the DOC as the logical choice for the alpine events. Interestingly enough, as the DOOC announced its selection of Beaver Creek, specially prepared booklets about Vail printed in three languages were circulating around Sapporo. To Farwell, who had been advocating Steamboat for both the Nordic and the alpine events, it appeared that the fix was in having the Beaver Creek site selected.<sup>75</sup>

With the purchase of the Nottingham ranch out of the way, only one sticking point remained in starting construction at Beaver Creek. The Forest Service was considering whether to designate the heavily forested slopes on which Vail hoped to build its new resort as a part of the proposed Mount Holy Cross Wilderness Area. Known as Mountain Meadows, the area not only provided excellent ski terrain—Forest Service plans had long regarded the area as available for recreational development—but also an excellent stand of virgin forest. Seibert believed that because the Forest Service had always considered the Mountain Meadows area as open for development, Vail Associates could be certain that the Forest Service would allow the development of the area even before its designation as an Olympic venue. Governor Love seconded this sentiment in a speech before the Colorado General Assembly, stating, "The proposed alpine ski area at Avon,

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<sup>74</sup> *The Ski Industry's Employees News Letter*, December 1971; quoted in Laura Lee Katz Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment: The Defeat of the 1975 Winter Olympics in Colorado" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1974), 152.

<sup>75</sup> Farwell, "The Olympic Bubble," 35.

near Vail, is going to be built in the next few years whether Olympic contestants come there or not.”<sup>76</sup> Such proclamations seemed premature, as the Forest Service still needed to determine whether to designate Mountain Meadows as wilderness. In order to make such a decision, the agency needed to hold public hearings, produce an environment impact statement, and submit its findings to Washington. The Forest Service’s decision on Mountain Meadows came in June. The agency decided not to include the area in the proposed Holy Cross Wilderness, opening the door to the development of the Beaver Creek and its use in the Winter Olympics.<sup>77</sup>

However, divisions remained over the selection of Beaver Creek for the Olympics. Hawk’s choice remained Copper Mountain, but in June, W. J. Lucas, the Regional Forester for the White River National Forest, voiced his support of Beaver Creek. In a letter to U.S. Senator Gordon Allott dated June 8, Lucas articulated Beaver Creek’s many attributes. “It has excellent potential for after-use in helping to meet the demand for public recreation winter sports, good access from the eastern slope cities via I-70, which is scheduled for completion by 1975, a minimum amount of environmental problems, ample land for base facilities (owned by Vail Associates) excellent terrain for the competitive alpine events, existing or acceptable service facilities, airport, plus available private capital and experience to create the facilities needed for a project of this magnitude.”<sup>78</sup> For Lucas and others within the Forest Service, Beaver Creek offered the perfect solution to two problems—the long term viability of any venue chosen for the Games and private funding. And Because the Forest Service’s budget remained linked to

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<sup>76</sup> Governor John Love, Speech before Colorado General Assembly, *Denver Post*, March 13, 1972.

<sup>77</sup> Richard O’Reilly, “Olympic Site Mullied as Potential Wilderness,” *Rocky Mountain News*, February 10, 1972, 46.

<sup>78</sup> W. J. Lucas, Regional Forester White River National Forest to Honorable Gordon Allott U.S. Senator, June 8, 1972. Vail Associates. Papers. Box 3. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

permit fees collected by the agency. Beaver Creek would guarantee revenues for both Vail Associates and the Forest Service. Such mutually beneficial relationships between the Forest Service and the timber industry had long drawn fire. Now, with the growing popularity of skiing the Forest Service looked to harness recreation's economic potential in augmenting its budget.<sup>79</sup>

In November, Colorado voters ended the dream of hosting the Winter Games. While resoundingly reelecting Richard Nixon, and with the war in Vietnam still the primary issue on the minds of voters across the country, Colorado voters passed the two referendums restricting state and city spending on the Olympic Games by a margin of 10,000 votes. DOOC officials bemoaned the defeat and blamed CCF's use of fear tactics in order to convince voters to reject the Games. "I feel that three of five people who voted against the Olympics did not realize the deep and far reaching implications of what they did and the damage to the state and nation," said DOOC member Neil Allen to reporters.<sup>80</sup> Opponents, jubilant in their victory, argued that the election was the final rejection of the "Sell Colorado" campaign and a desire by Colorado voters for a more sensible attitude toward growth. The day following the election, *Denver Post* columnist Joan Ditmer rhetorically asked if the rejection of the Games was going to save Colorado. "Not unless all of us—those pro and those anti-Olympics plus many more—work towards some positive action in the state," she wrote.<sup>81</sup> Colorado still faced tremendous

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<sup>79</sup> Glen Robinson, *The Forest Service: A Study in Public Land Management* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1975), 126–28; David A. Clary, *Timber and the Forest Service* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986); Dennis Le Master, *Decade of Change: The Remaking of Forest Service Statutory Authority During the 1970s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984); Paul Hirt, *Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests Since World War Two* (Lincoln: University Press of Nebraska, 1994).

<sup>80</sup> "Olympics: Even in Rest No Peace," *Denver Post*, November 8, 1972.

<sup>81</sup> Joanne Ditmer, "End of '76 Games Can be Beginning," *Denver Post* November 9, 1972.

challenges over growth, the economy, and the environment, primary among these being the development of the state's public lands by ski resort developers.

With its defeat at the polls, the DOOC faced the task of officially declining the Games. On Thursday, November 9, 1972, the DOOC met for the final time to officially dissolve and in doing so decline hosting the 1976 Winter Olympic Games. In a last-minute spasm of desperation, a small group of Olympic supporters won a temporary restraining order preventing the DOOC from notifying the IOC of its dissolution. Arguing that the voters had not rejected the Games—they had merely rejected paying for them—the group attempted to win an audience with IOC President Lord Killanin. Killanin refused the group's pleas and accepted the DOOC's declination of its rights to host the 1976 Winter Games. Several cities immediately appealed to the IOC for the right to host the 1976 Games, including Lake Placid, the site of the 1932 Winter Olympics, and Squaw Valley, site of the Winter Games in 1960. In the end, the IOC awarded the 1976 Winter Olympic Games to Innsbruck, Austria, which had hosted the 1964 Winter Olympics and which already had the needed facilities in place.<sup>82</sup>

### Conclusion

Richard Lamm and fellow anti-Olympic activists attended a raucous victory party the night of the election. "A guy named John Sally hoisted me up to the ceiling," recalled Lamm of the evening, "and said ladies and gentlemen the next Governor of Colorado! I looked around the room, and said you know, he is right."<sup>83</sup> The realization was a surprise to the eight-term state representative. A highly controversial legislator, Lamm had long

<sup>82</sup> "DOOC Dissolves, but Can't Say So," *Denver Post*, November 9, 1973; Kennedy, "Innsbruck," 368.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Richard Lamm, July 13, 2006.

viewed himself as a political outsider in the state. His sponsorship of a bill that made Colorado the first state to legalize therapeutic abortions, as well as his controversial stances on the environment, had earned Lamm the reputation of a liberal extremist in a rather conservative state not prone to such political rhetoric. But the battle against the Olympics shifted politics in Colorado by creating a broad-based coalition that included anti-growth advocates, environmentalists, ranchers, Latinos, African Americans, fiscal conservatives, and property rights advocates. With Lamm at its head, this alliance of varied interests propelled not only Lamm into the Governor's office in 1975, but also several other Democrats into state and federal office following the defeat of the Olympic Games. Long-time U.S. Representative and chair of the influential House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, and western Colorado resident, Wayne Aspinall lost in the Democratic primary to the younger and more liberal Alan Merson in 1972. Congressman James McKeivitt and Senator Gordon Llewellyn Allott, both Republicans, lost their jobs at the polls that same year. Allot lost to the energetic Patricia Schroeder who went on to represent Colorado's First District for next twenty-four years. Both Allott and McKeivitt's defeats were in large part due to the voters' anti-Olympic sentiments. Voter dissatisfaction came from more than unease over the costs of the Olympic Games; but larger concerns Coloradoans had about growth. By 1970, many Coloradoans had become increasingly alarmed over the consequences of such policies. Public concern led to a decade of increased state land regulation and continued struggles over the development of ski resorts.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Steven Schulte, *Wayne Aspinall and the Shaping of the American West* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 278–79; Stephen Sturgeon, *The Politics of Western Water: The Congressional Career of Wayne Aspinall* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 128–43. It bears mentioning that despite Democratic gains in the state the vast majority of Colorado voters voted for Richard Nixon for president

Antigrowth forces within the state quickly turned their attention toward the development of Marble Mountain near Aspen and the unfinished Beaver Creek. Unable to use the Olympics as cover, Vail Associates began a long struggle with Forest Service officials, environmental activists, and the state government to complete the resort. Long a critic of growth within the state, Lamm continued to question the environmental and social impacts of the development of Beaver Creek. As governor, he initially opposed the Forest Service's accepting Vail Associates' application to lease public lands on which to build Beaver Creek ski area. Critics of the ski area voiced worries about the resort's fragmentation of wildlife habitat with the construction of ski trails. In 1974, Dr. Wil Ulman, the land-use coordinator of the Colorado Land Use Commission, wrote Director of Colorado Division of Wildlife Jack Grieb that the construction of Beaver Creek "will all but eliminate the elk herd which winters here."<sup>85</sup> The debate over Beaver Creek continued through the decade, pitting many of the same forces that had fought over the Olympics against each other once again.

Despite the legacy of Colorado voters' rejection of the 1976 Winter Olympic Games, Colorado's Olympic dreams remained. In 1988, a group of Colorado politicians, business interests, and individuals raised \$500,000 to finance a Denver/Colorado Olympic Development Committee to make a pitch to the USOC to host the 1998 Games. A full 60 percent of Coloradans polled at the time stated that they would support hosting the games, many citing the economic benefits the Olympics offered host cities.<sup>86</sup> Colorado was a markedly different place in 1988 than in 1972. For the first time in years, the state

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over Democratic nominee George McGovern, reflecting the national election in which Nixon won his second term in a landslide victory.

<sup>85</sup> Jack Grieb to Dr. Wil Ulman. November 13, 1974. Colorado Environmental Coalition Collection, Box 20, Conservation Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>86</sup> *Denver Post*, December 2, 1988; Talmei Research and Strategy, Inc. "1988 Winter Olympics Survey of Colorado Voters," October 1988, 1.



was losing population and, with the collapse of the natural gas industry, was facing yet another economic downturn. The Olympics appeared to be a way to stop Colorado's economic freefall. "We can't afford to see things in black and white terms anymore, anti-growth versus economic development," said Governor Roy Romer, the Democratic governor who succeeded Lamm in 1986. "We've got to have a healthy environment, but we've also got to have a healthy economy." Even Lamm agreed that a Winter Olympics bid might be a good idea. "The people and the times were wrong in 1972," he said. "They may be right in 1989."<sup>87</sup> Colorado failed to win its bid for the 1998 Games, which eventually were awarded to Nagano, Japan, but with over a dozen ski resorts within a few hours' drive from Denver International Airport, as well as a new modern stadium, sports arena, and convention center, it seems just a matter of time before Colorado hosts a Winter Olympic Games.

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<sup>87</sup> William Schmidt, "Colorado Spurns Olympic No More," *New York Times*, April 19, 1988.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BOOM IS OVER

After a decade-long boom that saw dozens of new resorts open throughout the American West and skier numbers more than double, by the mid-1970s downhill skiing's growth appeared to be slowing. "The Western ski resort boom, which saw 14 new ski areas open in the Rocky Mountain States from 1964 to 1974, is just about over," wrote *New York Times* correspondent Grace Lichtenstein in 1976.<sup>1</sup> The nation's weakening economy combined with the passage of increasingly stringent environmental laws at both the federal and state levels were the main culprits in the decline in the number of ski resort under construction. "You can't just start with a rope tow and 10 years later be a little Vail," chairman of Montana's Big Sky Ski Area Gustav Raaum told Lichtenstein regarding the growing challenges new ski resorts faced in expanding under the new regulations.<sup>2</sup> Like Raaum, many within the ski industry pointed to increasing federal and state environmental regulation and environmental activism as the main reasons the industry's economic slowed down. Ski resort opponents responded that such regulations were necessary to protect public lands from being overrun by commercial development. "It shouldn't be an easy or quick decision. You're talking about permanent commitment of public land that belongs to everybody," argued Rick Applegate, director of the Bozeman environmental group the Center for the Public Interest, in response to ski industry complaints over environmental groups' actions obstructing the construction of ski resorts.<sup>3</sup> The struggle between these two opposing views, using public lands for

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<sup>1</sup> Grace Lichtenstein, "Ski Resort Boom is Over Despite Crowds in Rockies," *New York Times*, February 21, 1976, 51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

corporate and recreational development and reserving public lands for aesthetic enjoyment came to define not only the battle over ski resorts, but also the future of public land management throughout the American West.<sup>4</sup>

In Colorado, this debate played out on the front page of virtually every newspaper in the state. The rejection of the Denver Winter Olympics by the state's voters in 1972 set off a prolonged period of bitter debate within Colorado over the continued development and further expansion of ski resorts. The same year as the Olympic vote, the struggling Marble Mountain Ski Resort near Aspen closed due to financial pressures and mounting local resistance. But the struggle over the development of Marble Mountain only foreshadowed a much longer fight over the development of Beaver Creek Ski Resort, which had been selected as the venue for the men and women's alpine events just prior to the 1972 elections. Located some eight miles west of Vail, Beaver Creek first gained notoriety when it was picked by the Denver Olympic Organizing Commission (DOOC) as the site for the men's and women's Olympic alpine events just prior to the collapse of the Denver Games. The selection of Beaver Creek, which Vail Associates (VA) had yet to even break ground on by 1972, was shrouded a cloud of back-room deals and

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<sup>4</sup> In his account on working for the House Subcommittee on Forests during the 1970s, Dennis Le Master argues that the decade marked a significant period of statutory change within the Forest Service. From National Environmental Policy Act to National Forest Management Act of 1976, federal legislation placed greater constraints on how the agency managed the millions of acres under its purview. Such laws, argued Le Master, were not radical departures from the past. "Rather, they were securely tied to the statutory antecedents." What made the decade unique was the collective scope of environmental laws concerning the management of national forests. While Le Master focused on the ramifications of such legislation on the U.S. Forest Service, the same can be said of the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management during the same period. All three agencies underwent significant changes during the decade that had significant ramifications throughout the American West, home to the majority of the nation's public lands. Dennis Le Master, *Decade of Change: The Remaking of Forest Service Statutory Authority during the 1970s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 175-77. For the impacts of federal legislation on the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management see: Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 123-33; Richard West Sellers, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 233-42; James Skillen, *The Nation's Largest Landlord: The Bureau of Land Management in the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 87-100.

questionable political and economic motivations between the ski resort company, Denver businessmen, and state politicians. Critics pointed to Richard Olson's role as chairman of the DOOC, director and shareholder of VA, and director of the United Bank of Denver, which had been a major financier of Vail Resort, as proof that Beaver Creek's selection was tainted and VA meant to circumnavigate Forest Service regulation in developing the new ski resort. Olson and VA vehemently denied this charge. The defeat of the Olympics at the polls cast Colorado's growing antigrowth environmental coalition attention onto Beaver Creek, and for the next eight years the ski resort became the main political event in the state's ongoing battle over ski resorts, growth, and the development of public lands.<sup>5</sup>

The economy played a central role in the debate over the growth of ski resorts during the 1970s. The ski industry had ridden the nation's economic boom beginning in the 1950s through the late 1960s, growing into a multi-million-dollar industry as millions of Americans took up the sport. Driven by this rise in popularity, hundreds of new ski resorts opened. In Colorado, the construction of Interstate 70 through Summit, Eagle, and Pitkin counties only accelerated the development of ski resorts by facilitating access to the state's mountains. The combination of the sport's rising popularity and the construction of I-70 made skiing the base of an economic boom in Colorado's mountain communities throughout the 1960s. However, like past booms, skiing looked to be on the verge of a bust.

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<sup>5</sup> On the growth of Colorado and the American West during the late twentieth century, see John Burghardt Wright, *Rocky Mountain Divide: Selling and Saving the West* (University of Texas Press, 1993), 49–138; Philip L. Jackson and Robert Kuhlken, *A Rediscovered Frontier: Land Use and Resource Issues in the New West* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006); and William R. Travis, *New Geographies of the American West: Land Use and the Changing Patterns of Place* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2007). On the Denver Winter Olympics, see James Whiteside, *Colorado: A Sports History* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 145–80; Laura Lee Katz Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment: The Defeat of the 1975 Winter Olympics in Colorado" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1974).

The OPEC Oil Embargo in 1973 sent the state's tourism industry into a tailspin as tightening money markets made it harder for proposed ski resorts to secure loans from banks. Real estate sales, long an important component of ski resort's revenues, ground to a halt. In a memo to VA President Dick Peter, real estate developer Andy Norris explained the problems developers faced in securing financing from regional banks. "Mountain real estate has been difficult for lenders to accept for several reasons: highly seasonal occupancy, purely recreational (second home) orientation, short construction season, and high incidence of construction cost over-runs. The rapid growth of the Colorado mountain communities has put a particular burden on the limited financing capacity of the Denver financial institutions." Construction revenues plummeted in the Vail Valley between 1973 and 1974 from \$3.5 million to \$2 million, hurting the bottom lines not only of real estate developers but of ski resorts as well.<sup>6</sup>

The energy crisis had other impacts on Colorado's economy. Growing demand for a domestic source of energy turned the nation's interest to a region known as the Green River Formation which stretched from western Colorado to eastern Utah and southern Wyoming. There, trapped in trillions of tons of oil shale, sat more oil than existed under the entire Arabian Peninsula. The potential of oil shale as a source of energy was well known as early as the late nineteenth century. Virtually overnight the rural Colorado communities of Rifle, Silt, and New Castle turned into boomtowns reminiscent of the gold rushes of the nineteenth century. Both thrilled about the potential economic windfall and yet resentful of the thousands of new comers flooding their towns, locals grappled with a rising cost of living as transformative as that found in the state's growing ski resort

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<sup>6</sup> Andy Norris to Dick Peterson, Memorandum RE: Proposed Mortgage Banking Subsidiary, July 17, 1974. Vail Associates Papers, Box 4. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

communities. Looking to take advantage of the opportunities oil shale offered, energy giant Exxon joined forces with local oil corporation Tosco building a five billion dollar processing plant near the newly constructed town of Parachute.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, the ski industry remained wary of the growing oil shale industry. Many living in nearby resort communities voiced concerns that pollution produced by nearby refineries would turn ski slopes black with ash. Others feared the competition the new energy industry would create in hiring and retaining employees. Notorious for paying low wages, particularly for menial labor jobs, the ski industry could not hope to compete with oil companies willing to pay higher wages. “The people may not find working in the energy industry as much fun,” Aspen’s mayor Herman Edel told reporters, “but it will pay a hell of a lot more, and that’s where they’re going to go.”<sup>8</sup> Governor Lamm remained unconvinced as to the suitability of oil shale development forming the basis of the West Slope’s economy. Writing in his 1984 book *The Angry West*, Lamm attacked the oil shale industry as bad for the environment, economically unsound, and contained “the ability to destroy every other economic element around it.”<sup>9</sup> Oil shale, he argued, would damage tourism, ranching, farming, and stock raising by poisoning the ground water, turning rural communities into bedroom communities for enormous mining operations, and making much of the Western Slope into a colonial holding of large energy corporations, irrevocably damaging not only the region’s environment but also its future.

Lamm’s remarks came in large part in response to the Exxon’s pulling the plug on its

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Guilliford, *Boomtown Blues: Colorado Oil Shale, 1885-1985* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1989), 119- 50 and 151-95. Published in seven years after the collapse of the oil shale industry in western Colorado, Guilliford provides a recent account of Colorado's oil shale boom and bust, comparing it to previous oil shale booms and busts in the region's history.

<sup>8</sup> Candida Harper, Oil Shale vs. Tourism, Colorado is Caught Between the Rockies and a Hard Place,” *Aspen The Magazine*, 1977, 12-32, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Lamm and Michael McCarthy, *The Angry West: A Vulnerable Land and its Future* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), 35.

multi-million dollar Colony Project outside of Parachute in May, 1982. Christened “Black Sunday,” the corporation’s closing of the multi-million dollar project brought economic ruin to the region. After promising massive investments into the region’s infrastructure, causing many local communities to swell in population in anticipation of the promised economic windfalls, Exxon’s closure of the Colony Project caused widespread social and economic havoc. High paying oil industry jobs vanished, local banks failed, and mortgage companies foreclosed on local homes and businesses. To Lamm and other state politicians, Exxon’s imperialistic and irresponsible behavior demonstrated the inherent problems of relying on extractive industries for the state’s long-term economic stability. Concluding, “Colorado is not willing, today or ever, to become a sacrifice area,” Lamm reinstated his and others’ criticism not just of extractive industries but of all extractive industries’ quest to make a fast buck at the expense of the state’s environment, economy, and quality of life.<sup>10</sup> Oil shale’s promise, and eventual collapse, was a lesson to all Coloradoans on the damages the West’s boom and bust cycles wreaked on the region’s environment and population. A cycle many within the state feared was repeating itself in the ski industry.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>11</sup> Many scholars have noted the similarities of the collapse of the West's economic woes during the 1970s with previous periods of bust that defined the region's uneven economic growth during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Richard White argues that "nowhere was the boom higher and bust lower during the 1970s and 1980s than in energy production." White focuses on the role of the federal government in the regulation of the West's vast coal and oil shale fields, the vast majority of which are located on public lands, and the resentment to many state politicians on the perception that federal environmental and other regulatory acts were hindering the development of these energy sources, and it was out this resentment that a larger conservative backlash, symbolized by the Sagebrush Rebellions, swept across the region. Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, A New History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 562-63. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 142-52; Guifford, *Boomtown Blues*, 2-4; William Travis, *New Geographies of the American West: Land Use and the Changing Patterns of Place* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 20-22; Patricia Limerick, William R. Travis, and Tamar Scoggin, *Boom and Bust in the American West*, Report from the Center of the American West, No. 4 (Boulder: Center of the American West, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2002), 1-2.

Beyond the slumping economy, resort managers faced increasing federal and state environmental regulation, arguably the most important the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA). Under the act all new developments on public lands were required to submit an environmental impact statement (EIS), which often led to long delays and associated extra costs. The first ski area in the nation required to perform an environmental impact statement was Colorado's own Winter Park. Looking to add an additional 350 acres of new terrain in 1973, Winter Park began construction on its Mary Jane expansion only to run head long into the new regulation which required an exhaustive review of the expansion's environmental impacts. The EIS caused a cost overrun of \$400,000, forcing the ski area to cancel the construction of a lodge at the base of the new expansion. This was particularly galling to Winter Park Recreation Association, the nonprofit group that ran the ski resort for the City and County of Denver. Association President Gerald Grosword pointed that the EIS provided no substantive changes to the expansion's original plans beyond adding substantial costs to the project.<sup>12</sup> Such complaints were common throughout the industry, as resort managers and financiers argued that the new regulation hindered their ability to turn a profit and continue to offer the public a quality experience.

Ski resort managers also pointed to the increasingly obstructionist role of environmentalists as a major reason for the industry's economic woes. In 1977, D. R. C. Brown, president of Aspen Ski Company, which owned and operated Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands, Buttermilk Mountain, and Snowmass, argued that both skiers and developers were "losing out" because of the influence of "so-called environmentalists"

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<sup>12</sup> Gerald Grosword (Former President of Winter Park Recreation Association), interview by author, January 14, 2004; U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, *Final Environmental Draft for Winter Park Management Unit: Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests*, August 27, 1973.



on the Forest Service. To Brown and many others within the ski industry, environmental activists and groups such as the Colorado Environmental Coalition too often hindered the development of needed expansions and new ski resorts, costing both the industry millions of dollars and skiers the quality experience they had come to expect from ski resorts on national forest lands. Without continued development to meet the growing numbers of skiers, Brown argued, the slopes would become “more and more crowded and the lift lines longer and longer.”<sup>13</sup> Environmentalists responded by arguing that ski resort development was leading to uncontrolled growth and environmental disaster. Concerns over pollution, wildlife impacts, and growth steered most criticisms of ski resorts during the decade.

Similar to their role in previous conflicts such as the development of Vail and the 1976 Winter Olympics, the Forest Service was once again caught in the middle of these debates. All sides of the debate over ski resorts attacked the federal agency for being in bed with the opposition. In the brief but bitter fight over Marble Mountain, opponents to the new ski resort argued that the Forest Service had been, from the beginning, “grossly biased in favor of that development.”<sup>14</sup> When asked about his concerns over increased environmental regulation, the resort’s funder, United Bank vice president Tom Swanson told an audience at a seminar conducted by the Forest Service on the issue of ski resorts on national forest land, “I support the Forest Service’s need to make sure that new ski areas are well planned, well managed, and well capitalized. But the developers have to know what’s expected from them from the very beginning so that, at the eleventh hour

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<sup>13</sup> Jack Phinney, “Forest Service Blamed for Ski Lag,” *Denver Post*, January 20, 1977.

<sup>14</sup> J. E. DeVilbiss to William Lucas, Regional Forester, March 26, 1973. Colorado Environmental Coalition. Land Use Marble Ski Area: Correspondence, Environmental Impact Statement, 1973–1975. Papers. Box 20, FF 32. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

for whatever reason, there are no surprises, no delays, which are costly, and quite frankly just scare investors and bankers to death.”<sup>15</sup> Even state politicians got into the act, accusing the Forest Service of rubber-stamping the development of Beaver Creek before adequately investigating the larger implications its development would have on the region. Through it all, the Forest Service attempted, with varying degrees of success, to balance the demands for increased development and profits with demands for environmental preservation.<sup>16</sup>

By the end of the decade, the national attitude towards federal regulation changed, leading to a backlash against environmental protection. This adverse public response manifested itself in the call for the deregulation of the ski industry, specifically the Forest Service’s control of lift ticket prices. Newly proposed ski resorts faced an often unwinnable uphill battle in secure Forest Service approval and private financing, which was predicated on the touchy nature of the approval process. Ski resorts had long faced challenges in securing loans due to the nature of the Forest Service’s multiple and layered permit system. The ski industry as a whole had long decried the problems of what it viewed as Forest Service micro-management. But the bitterest pill was the agency’s control of lift ticket prices. In most National Forests, ski resorts were allowed to charge what they deemed adequate. But for some regions in the Rocky Mountains, including the White River National Forest, home to Vail and Arapahoe Basin, Forest Service officials

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<sup>15</sup> Phinney, “Forest Service Blamed,” *Denver Post*, January 20, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> The majority of controversies that faced the Forest Service during the 1970s were over clear cutting and wilderness. Linked directly to increased recreational use, the use of clear cutting became highly controversial beginning in the 1950s as millions of American began visiting national forests with expectations of seeing untouched forests. The Forest Service continues to struggle in balancing recreational users demands for scenery with efficient timber harvesting. For more on these issues see: David Clary, *Timber and the Forest Service* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 147-68; Paul Hirt, *A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests since World War Two* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 251-65; Harold Steen, *The Forest Service: A History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 308-23.

exercised their control over lift ticket prices to ensure equal competition and to protect forest service lands from overdevelopment. Such concerns over competition had led to a minor skirmish between the founders of Vail and the Forest Service in 1962, when the agency initially refused the ski resort a permit because of Breckenridge Ski Resort's opening the previous year. Ski resort owners complained about such oversight, claiming it unfair and that they could not remain solvent under such a system.

Following a devastating drought during the 1976–1977 winter, in which many of Colorado's ski resorts experienced enormous financial losses as poor snow conditions kept many skiers at home rather on the slopes, Colorado's larger resorts convinced the Forest Service to end its regulation of ticket prices and allow ski resorts to charge whatever cost the market could bear. In the ensuing season, lift ticket prices skyrocketed beginning a period of unchecked competition and the consolidation of the industry over the next two decades. From the rejection of the 1976 Winter Olympic Games to the battles over the development of new ski resorts such as Marble Mountain and Beaver Creek, the 1970s proved to be the most tumultuous decade in the Colorado ski industry's history. Ski resorts became the targets of anti-growth critics concerned about Colorado's rapid population growth during the decade. Yet downhill skiing continued to grow in popularity, with millions of new skiers hitting the slopes every winter. At the center of the struggle over the development of ski resorts in the state lay the issue of the purpose of public lands were meant for recreational enjoyment, or were they more valuable as natural habitats? The struggle between these two forces shaped not only state and regional politics but also redefined the ski industry, bringing a close to an era of massive resort development. The failure of Marble Mountain in 1975, along opening of Beaver

Creek in 1980 marked the end of a more than four-decade-long explosion in ski resort development in the state. Increasing concerns over the environmental costs of ski resorts on public lands, combined with changing national economic realities, shaped the decade leading up to Beaver Creek's opening, and brought an end to the ski industry's remarkable boom.

### Marble Mountain

In the winter of 1963, the *Glenwood Sage* published two short articles reporting that a group of investors had bought a sizeable piece of property above the town of Marble in the hopes of developing a ski resort. The Glenwood Springs paper noted that if this were true, a bit of a stretch according to one Marble resident who told the paper that he had heard such rumors for the past three years, then "Marble could boom."<sup>17</sup> In truth, such rumors were not uncommon throughout Colorado during the early 1960s, as every ski bum, banker, and real estate developer seemed to be looking to open the next Aspen. The ski resort near Marble appeared to be just another of the more than dozen proposed resorts rumored to be in development over the next several years. Despite being plagued by legal and financial issues, Marble Mountain resort did not manage to open until 1971. But mounting local and statewide resistance to growth, along with problems securing permits from the Forest Service, caused the collapse of the resort just three years later.

Nestled in the crux of the Crystal Valley in the heart of the Elk Mountains, the town of Marble grew up alongside the Yule Marble Quarry. Famous for its milky white stone used in both the Tomb of the Unknowns and the Lincoln Memorial, the quarry produced

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<sup>17</sup> "Rumors Rife on Ski Area at Marble," *Glenwood Sage*, December 5, 1963; "Rumors of Ski Area Near Marble Confirmed—Maybe," *Glenwood Sage*, December 12, 1963.

millions of tons of marble between 1887 and 1943. Marble's population dwindled to a mere handful of residents in the decades following World War II, reaching a point when many in the state considered it a ghost town. Developers returned to the area in the early 1960s, quickly identifying the town's idyllic mountain setting, relative isolation, and the gentle slopes abutting national forest's lands as ideal for the development of a ski resort.<sup>18</sup>

Interest in developing a ski area near Marble began in 1963, when Denver real estate investment firm Oberlander Corp. sought to purchase 1,500 acres from local real estate developer Howard Stroud for \$375,000. Oberlander president Robert Wylde quickly announced his intentions to develop a multi-million-dollar ski resort, but plans quickly fell through when Stroud failed to provide a suitable title for the property. After several months of legal wrangling, the Oberlander Corp. walked away from the deal, and the future of skiing in the area remained in doubt.<sup>19</sup> But the potential of the area kept investors interested in developing some sort of resort. Surrounded by millions of acres of national forests, including the Maroon Bells, Marble had the perfect blend of rural landscape with urban access which was drawing an increasing number of newcomers to Colorado.

Like the rest of the Intermountain West, Colorado during the 1960s and 1970s promised a higher quality of life to thousands of newcomers. Its beautiful scenery and access to the outdoors combined with economic opportunity made Colorado an attractive place to both live and play. While the majority of the state's immigrants settled in the

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Hauk, *History of Marble Ski Area from 1963 to 1984 and the Changing Scene for Other Proposals Primarily on the White River National Forest*, April 1993, 3–4. Paul Hauk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>19</sup> "Marble's Ski Future Clouded by Lawsuit," *Glenwood Sage*, August 13, 1964.

metropolitan area along its Front Range, many new residents moved to Colorado's rural mountain communities. Long-time residents resented the strain caused by the influx of newcomers on the state's resources. Aspen journalists Peggy Clifford and John Smith, both transplants from the East Coast, captured this sentiment in their book *Aspen Dreams and Dilemmas: Love Letter to a Small Town*, writing that Colorado's rural mountain towns were under siege by a marauding horde of developers, tourists, and newcomers. According to them, the creation of ski resorts threatened to destroy what made towns like Aspen special. "The ease and economy of jet travel can turn any town anywhere—if it is beautiful or interesting or unique—into a colony of a megalopolis, a play ground for urbanites," Clifford and Smith warned readers.<sup>20</sup>

Many Coloradoans shared these feelings, whether they lived in rural communities or along the sprawling Front Range. Between 1960 and 1970, Colorado's population grew by a nearly a half million people. Such growth seemed rather tame when compared to southern California, which saw the population of its two metropolitan areas grow by 4 million, but the transformation of once-rural towns into bustling resorts in such a short period came as a shock to many Coloradoans.<sup>21</sup> Antigrowth sentiments helped shape the state's politics during the 1970s, beginning with Colorado voters' rejection of the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games, the election of Democratic politicians like Richard Lamm, Gary Hart, and Pat Schroder, and the formation of environmental organizations like the Colorado Open Space Council (COSC). Local communities often organized in opposition to new developments such as ski resorts. It was into this atmosphere that

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<sup>20</sup> Peggy Clifford and John Smith, *Aspen Dreams and Dilemmas: Love Letter to a Small Town* (Chicago: Swallow Press Incorporated, 1970), 8.

<sup>21</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1970. Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population*, part 7, Colorado, 36; United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1970. Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population*, part 6, California, Section 1, 75.

developers stepped when announcing the construction of a ski resort in Marble.

Despite the collapse of the Oberlander deal, Stroud remained intent on he developing the property, which included much the town of Marble along with several hundred acres abutting national forest, into a year-round resort. In 1967, Stroud, along with new business partners Terry Granger and Donald Myers, met with White River National Forest supervisory forester Paul Hauk to discuss securing a study permit for the development of a ski resort on the national forest land adjacent to the large parcel of private land. After surveying the area, the Hauk issued the study permit, but voiced grave misgivings over the mountain's potential for skiing. Hauk rated the area as only marginal to good, pointing to the proposed resort's relative proximity to Aspen and proclivity for mudslides.<sup>22</sup> Even with Hauk's low appraisal of the area's potential, several investors voiced their interest, including Lee Stubblefield, president of the Colorado Western Development Company. Stubblefield had already begun construction of a \$3 million residential development near the small town of Larkspur, Colorado south of the Denver metropolitan area, and was excited at the prospect of developing a resort community anchored by a ski area.<sup>23</sup>

Resorts such as Breckenridge and Vail had proven highly successful over the previous decade, drawing thousands of skiers and producing millions of dollars in profits for their investors, spurring economic growth in the areas surrounding each resort. It could even be argued that skiing was no longer the purpose of ski resorts. Rather, real estate markets in mountain communities drove developers like Stubblefield to risk millions of dollars to build resorts. Vail Associates, owners of Vail Ski Resort, reported

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<sup>22</sup> Hauk, *History of Marble Ski Area from 1963 to 1984 and the Changing Scene for Other Proposals Primarily on the White River National Forest*, 3–4.

<sup>23</sup> "Perry Park Adds Ranch," *Denver Post*, January 19, 1971.

profits of \$13 million in 1973. Despite dwindling sales over the next two years, VA predicted sales of its newly completed Sunburst Condominiums to produce profits in excess of \$5 million in 1975.<sup>24</sup> Breckenridge produced similar profits during the same period. The promise of such huge profits drew many developers to search for a site to build their ski area. With more than a thousand acres of private land adjoining millions of acres of national forests, Marble held too much potential for Stubblefield to turn away.

Shortly after New Year's Day in 1970, Hauk met with Howard Stroud, Stubblefield, and several others to discuss the proposed development of Marble Ski Area. During the lengthy meeting, Hauk informed the party of possible future conflicts in developing the site; these included the potential expansion of the Maroon Bells Wilderness Area, the construction of Placita Reservoir by the Bureau of Reclamation, and Hauk's low assessment of the area's skiing potential. Despite these issues, Stubblefield and Stroud agreed to a deal on the purchase of the Crystal Creek property and began to seek Forest Service approval for a permit to utilize several hundred acres of adjacent national forest adjacent to the property. The White River National Forest (WRNF) conducted a feasibility study of the area and concluded that "[t]he ski area and related development land, when considered in light of the future potential summer use and attractions—wilderness, scenery and water related activities—could, in time, become partially competitive with the Aspen and Vail developments." The report's authors, including the

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<sup>24</sup> Don Little, "Vail Associates Attempt New Real Estate Methods," *Rocky Mountain News*, September 8, 1975; Preliminary Analysis of Hotel and Condominium Markets in Vail, Colorado, Prepared for First National Advisers by Harman, O'Donnell and Henninger Associates Inc., September 1975. Vail Associates Inc., Papers. Box 1. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



reluctant Hauk, recommended the development of the area, arguing that its favorable aspects outweighed the unfavorable.<sup>25</sup>

The report's recommendation found its way to the local press, which published a series of articles on the imminent development of a ski resort above Marble. The press' announcement proved to be premature as the Forest Service denied the proposed resort's, now named Marble Ski Area, application for a special use permit on the grounds that the agency had yet to complete its environmental analysis report (EAR) on the designation of the region surrounding Marble as a winter sports site. An in-house study compiled by the Forest Service, an EAR determined the environmental impacts of any action on national forest lands. The passage of NEPA in 1970 replaced EARs with environmental assessments (EA), each filling the same function in determining whether a project complied with federal law. The reason the White River National Forest undertook an EAR rather than an EA despite the passage of NEPA in January 1970 appears to have stemmed from the initial confusion over the enactment of NEPA following its passage. A very brief document, NEPA established the Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ), whose responsibilities included drafting the regulations for implementing NEPA. The CEQ would not issue its final regulation on how to conduct an EIS or EA until 1979, but the terminology was already in use throughout the federal government within NEPA's first three years. The initial confusion over the changing of terminology, as well as the

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<sup>25</sup> Preliminary Analysis of Hotel and Condominium Markets in Vail, Colorado, Prepared for First National Advisers by Harman, O'Donnell and Henninger Associates Inc., September 1975. Vail Associates Inc., Papers. Box 1. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

enactment of NEPA, led to further misunderstandings between the Forest Service, Marble Ski Area officials, and locals over the purpose of the EAR.<sup>26</sup>

By August 1970, the Forest Service had completed its review of Marble Ski Area's permit application. Citing the agency's rejection of designating the 4,000 acres of national forest surrounding the proposed ski area as a winter sports site, and thus allowing for the development of a ski area, Supervisor Tom Evans delayed making a decision on Marble Ski Area's application. In a letter explaining the delay Evans wrote Marble Ski Area's newly appointed president John Zakovich that the proposed ski area lacked a proper mix of skier ability classes, faced predominantly south placing its ability to hold snow in question, and had critical avalanche hazards, making it a marginal winter complex. Evans left the door open for a possible future awarding of a special use permit, "if the ski area being developed on your private lands can be significantly improved by locating the upper chairlift terminal and some ski runs on the National Forest."<sup>27</sup>

Upset over Evans's decision, Zakovich immediately went on the offensive, enlisting the help of close friends Congressman Teno Roncalio and Senator Gale McGee, both of Wyoming. Congressman Roncalio requested a meeting with the Forest Service to discuss Marble Ski Area. During the meeting the Forest Service representative pointed out the fact that the agency never committed to the issuance of a special use permit and so was not beholden to issue any such promises to the developers of Marble Mountain. Zakovich acknowledged the fact that the Forest Service had never made such a promise, but voiced his concern that if the agency issued a press release citing the unsuitability of the area for

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<sup>26</sup> Nicholas Yost, *NEPA Deskbook*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003), 267; Joshua Ross Ashenmiller, "The National Policy Act in the Green Decade, 1960–1981" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2004), 120–21.

<sup>27</sup> Tom Evans to John P. Zakovich, June 14, 1971. Paul Hauk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

skiing, the resort would be dead before it even opened. The meeting ended with a compromise that the Forest Service would hold off on the press release and Zakovich would return to Colorado and work with White River National Forest officials to resolve the issue of a permit to develop the national forest land adjacent to Marble Ski Area's private holdings.<sup>28</sup>



Photograph 10. Marble Mountain, 1968. Denver Public Library

Meanwhile, Marble Ski Area completed construction of its first chairlift, as well as a handful of trails, on its 1,500 acres of private land. The ski area opened for business in December 1971, but only on weekends by reservation. Construction of the resort's village began the following summer with the construction of thirty-five condominium units, a fifty-room lodge, ski and tennis club, and water sewage plant. Work also continued between the resort and the Forest Service on securing a permit for national forest land adjacent to the private development as previously suggested by Forest Supervisor Evans.

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<sup>28</sup> John Tucker, Marble Ski Area record of meeting, June 16, 1971. Paul Hauk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

It had quickly become apparent that the ski resort would need to extend its primary chairlift farther up the mountain onto national forest land in order to provide greater access to the mountain. In the fall of 1972, Marble Ski Area formally applied for a special permit for an additional 624 acres on which to build the new terminal for the chairlift. “The major question is not whether or not there will be a ski area at Marble, but rather how the use of adjacent national forest land can complement and harmonize with developments on private lands,” Evans told reporters regarding the Forest Service’s pending review of Marble Mountain Ski Area’s second application for a special use permit.<sup>29</sup> At issue was not whether there should be a ski resort at Marble, but rather what should be the proper mixture of private and public lands in developing the ski resort.

To the Forest Service the answer remained tied to the problem of mudslides in the Crystal Creek basin. After studying the basin, Colorado state geologists reported that periodic mudslides posed serious hazards to many of the resort’s proposed home sites. In his final report on the mudslides problem in the area, state geologist John Rold concluded, “Rapid erosion, mudflows, landslides and flooding present extreme problems.” Marble Resort officials denied that the state’s report added any information to their previously conducted private geologic survey, but did agree to trade lots, or refund buyers’ down payments, in order to satisfy the Forest Service’s concerns. Content that the issues appeared resolved the Forest Service approved the permit to extend the existing chairlift.<sup>30</sup>

To most observers, it appeared that Marble Mountain Resort was well on its way to becoming the next Vail. But local residents soon began voicing their unease over the

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<sup>29</sup> “U.S. Forest Service Land Added to Ski Area at Marble,” *Denver Post*, September 23, 1972.

<sup>30</sup> Chuck Green, “Marble Ski Resort Land Labeled Unstable,” *Denver Post*, June 16, 1972.

construction of a ski resort in their backyard. The primary concern of many residents living in the Crystal Valley was the potential loss of the valley's rural nature caused by the construction of the ski resort and the growing belief that the Forest Service was blatantly disregarding local concerns granting permission for the development of the ski resort. In reaction to such concerns, locals formed the antigrowth group Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association (CVEPA) shortly after the Forest Service awarded the resort a permit for the 624 acres. The association immediately attacked the Forest Service's approval of the permit, arguing that the agency had overlooked the resort's impacts on the local elk and deer herds, as well as the issues of avalanche control, watershed protection, and public access to the national forest on roads that would be closed due to the resort's development. But the primary concern of the CVEPA was the agency's failure to address the growth that the Marble Ski Area would undoubtedly attract to the area. In a letter to the White River National Forest's Regional Forester William Lucas, the group's spokesman, J. E. DeVilbiss, wrote, "The position of the Forest Service with regard to the Marble Ski Area, Inc., and its application for a permit to use Forest Service land for a ski area has, from the beginning, been grossly biased in favor of that development."<sup>31</sup> It was easy to see how DeVilbiss and other members of the CVEPA had come to such a conclusion. To many outside observers, it appeared as if the Forest Service was collaborating with the developers to build Marble Ski Area.

In fact, the agency did have a historical bias toward development of national forests as mandated by the Multiple Use—Sustained Yield Act of 1960, which required the Forest Service to administer the national forests "for outdoor recreation, range, timber,

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<sup>31</sup> J. E. DeVilbiss to William Lucas, March 26, 1973. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 32. Land Use Marble Ski Area: Correspondence, Reports, Maps 1970–1972.

watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes.”<sup>32</sup> For many within the agency the development of ski resorts on national forest land was both appropriate and necessary in order to meet the public’s growing demand for skiing and outdoor recreation. But by the early 1970s, growing public concerns over the negative impact of ski resort development on the environment and surrounding communities led many Coloradoans to question such developments. As older ski resorts such as Vail, Aspen, and Winter Park grew in both popularity and size, so too did their surrounding communities to accommodate the influx of visitors and new residents. Vail had grown from an open pasture in 1960 to a thriving village by 1972. The same was true of the Fraser Valley, home to Winter Park Ski Resort, during the decade. Tremendous growth in the valley led to the incorporation of the town of Winter Park in 1978, as well as the construction of several subdivisions and condominium developments throughout the valley. A former mining and ranching community, Aspen became the symbol of growth during the decade, leading many in the state to refer negatively to the transformation of their once quaint towns as “Aspenization.” Members of the CVEPA feared the very same fate awaited the Crystal Valley if Marble Ski Area were allowed to continue.<sup>33</sup>

Members decried the Forest Service’s awarding Marble Ski Area a special use permit, arguing that the resort had been poorly planned and that the agency’s actions had led to the “uncontrolled growth” of ski resorts and their adjacent communities throughout the state. In response to one particularly scathing letter from Crystal Valley local and

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<sup>32</sup> Multiple Use—Sustained Yield Act, P.L. 86-517. June 12, 1960. Also see: Le Master, *Decade of Change*, 3–15; Hirt, *A Conspiracy of Optimism*, 171–92; Steen, *The Forest Service*, 278–307.

<sup>33</sup> On the growth of ski towns in Colorado during the era, see Hal Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 227–51; Annie Gilbert-Colman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 182–214; Edward Duke Ritchie, “Living it Up in Aspen: Post-War America, Ski Town Culture, and the New Western Dream, 1945–1975” (PhD dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder, 2006).

member of the CVEPA David McCargo, Jr., White River National Forest Supervisor Evans wrote, “I do not agree that the area ‘has been badly planned’ as you stated. My opinion is that the area has more than adequate planning by several consulting firms that have covered all aspects of the project.” Evans argued that the main issue was not the “uncontrolled growth” of ski areas, but rather “the uncontrolled development and subdividing of private land in the mountains that can only be slowed down or controlled by state and County governments.”<sup>34</sup> Such arguments led to the passage of two state laws a year later that sought to increase state and local control over growth. But such actions were yet to come and another ski season quickly passed with little movement by either side in the fight over Marble Ski Area.

In the spring of 1973 heavy snow melt caused massive erosion to the ski area’s trails, and the one road into the ski area. The Forest Service had long suggested to Marble’s developers that they implement several safeguards against possible erosion problems, including using water diversion bars, straw mulching, reseeding of hill sides, and improving drainage. Early snows and a lack of funding, equipment, and manpower kept the ski area from putting many of these measures into place. The spring slides further reinforced the resort’s negative image when a *Denver Post* story ran stating that the area was known more for its mud than for its ski lifts. To many Coloradoans, Marble Ski Area appeared to be a development run amok.<sup>35</sup>

The public relations fallout over the mudslides Marble Ski Area highlighted the resort’s growing problems. In addition, the ski area’s problems persisted when in 1975,

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Evans Forest Supervisor White River National Forest to David McCargo, Jr., November 20, 1973. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 31 Land Use Marble Ski Area: Correspondence, Reports, Maps 1970–1972.

<sup>35</sup> Steve Wynkoop, “Moves Made to Scrape off Marble’s ‘Mud’ Image,” *Denver Post*, October 28, 1973.

the Forest Service failed to approve the EIS which would have allowed the area's proposed expansion into six hundred acres of national forest for environmental and social reasons. In a press release Forest Supervisor Evans noted "the expansion of the ski area at this time would prematurely trigger accelerated development of private land in geologically hazardous areas."<sup>36</sup> The decision was a victory for opponents of the ski area. Soon rumors began to circulate about the resort once again, but unlike a decade before, this time the rumors took on a more negative tone. Unable to keep its doors open, and forced to reimburse investors, the owners of Marble Ski Area filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. In 1979, Charles Weydert, a real estate broker who headed the struggling ski resort, was accused of fraud and violating federal securities laws. Weydert's partner, Lee Stubblefield, was fined \$1.3 million for failing to complete the construction of three roads and a sewer plant on three other development projects Larkspur, Colorado. The government probed the land sales for violations of federal sales laws, believing that Marble Ski Area sold properties to the public before the lots were registered with the federal land sales office, voiding their purchase. Colorado attorneys claimed that the developers also offered lots before the state's approval of the subdivision, which was in violation of state law.<sup>37</sup>

Marble Ski Area closed its doors to the public in late 1975. In the final draft of the EIS, Forest Service Supervisor Evans concluded that "[e]xpansion at this time will prematurely trigger accelerated development of private land in geologically hazardous areas. Furthermore, it is important to note that this action would not be irreversible. It

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<sup>36</sup> Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Disposal Recommended for Proposed Ski Area Expansion, October 31, 1975. Paul Hauk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Schneider, "U.S. Probes for Illegal Sales in Marble Ski Area," *Rocky Mountain News*, June 11, 1974; "Ex-Marble Area Broker Charged with Sales Fraud," *Glenwood Post*, February 19, 1976.



provides the opportunity for county government, if they desire, to find solutions for the potential social and environmental problem which would be created by the proposed expansion.”<sup>38</sup> With the Forest Service’s rejection of the resort’s expansion onto national forest lands, combined with the legal and financial problems of its developers, Marble Ski Area collapsed. Denver land developer Michael Stover attempted to resuscitate the dead resort in 1984, but the expansion of the Maroon Bell Wilderness in 1981 ended whatever dream he or others had in building a world-class ski resort on the site.<sup>39</sup>

### Beaver Creek

Located eight miles west of Vail along U.S. Highway 6, the future route of Interstate 70, Beaver Creek first garnered attention during the struggle over the Denver Winter Olympic Games. Despite the fact that the resort had not yet been constructed, Beaver Creek had been selected by the organizing committee as the venue for the men’s and women’s alpine events. Anti-Olympic critics charged that Vail Associates, Beaver Creek’s developer, intended to use the Olympics to fast track Forest Service approval of the resort. Colorado voters’ defeat of the Olympics brought increased attention onto the proposed ski resort. More so than any other proposed ski resort in the state, Beaver Creek came to represent the negative impacts of private development of national forest lands in Colorado. Ant-growth critics feared that the continued development of ski resorts in the state would lead to the urbanization of the western slope and forever change the character of the state. “When Beaver Creek came it seemed to me that we ought to slow down and

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<sup>38</sup> Tom Evans, Disapproval Recommended for Proposed Ski Area Expansion, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture Press Release, October 31, 1975. Paul Hauk Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>39</sup> Rick Karlin, “Developer Eyes Defunct Marble Ski Area Site,” *Glenwood Post*, March 2, 1984.

think about what parts of Colorado we really wanted to develop for ski areas, and whether or not we wanted them all along the I-70 corridor,” recalled Richard Lamm on the fight over Beaver Creek.<sup>40</sup> Elected governor in 1974 due in large part to his antigrowth stance, Lamm represented the changing face of Colorado, one that continued to question growth for growth’s sake.

While antigrowth and environmental activists such as Lamm linked the development of ski resorts with the negative Colorado’s growth, the Forest Service continued to believe its role was to meet the public’s need for skiing. Since the 1930s, this had meant the development of ski areas in national forests. The boom in skier numbers during the two decades following World War II had led to the Forest Service’s approval of over a dozen new ski resorts in Colorado alone. But by the late 1960s, ski industry critics began pointing to the Forest Service as a culprit in the urbanization of the state’s rural mountain communities. Forest Service officials acknowledged the growth brought about by the development of ski resorts, but argued that their mandate to meet the public’s need for skiing required that they allow the development of new ski areas. When asked why the Forest Service had so readily approved the designation of Beaver Creek as a winter sports site, the first step in VA’s process in gaining a special use permit to develop the resort, White River National Forest Supervisor Tom Evans told Colorado Land Use Commission member John Bermingham, “If we are to meet 1980 demand, we have to get this project under way now.”<sup>41</sup> It was this tension between growing skier demand and concerns over the impacts of growth that shaped the debate over Beaver Creek, and which brought an end to the development of ski resorts in Colorado by the end of the decade.

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Lamm (Former Representative and Governor of Colorado), interview with author, July 13, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Steve Wynkoop, “Beaver Creek Objections Pushed by State Agencies,” *Denver Post*, December 18, 1974.

The bitter fight over the Olympics had led to mounting concerns over the ability of local government's throughout Colorado to control growth. Many rural counties had unknowingly found themselves slated as the venues of Olympic events in the years leading up to the election of 1972. Combined with the rapid growth of many of these same counties, especially in areas adjacent to public lands, in the spring of 1974 the Colorado Legislature passed two land use bills that placed more control over the use and planning of public lands into the hands of local and county governments. The Local Government Land Use Control Enabling Act, known as HB 1034, gave county governments the power to plan for and regulate the use of land to ensure the orderly use of land and protection of the environment.<sup>42</sup> The Areas and Activities of State Interest Act, otherwise known as HB 1041, sought to broaden local and state oversight over any land development considered a "matter of public interest." The law defined these areas of public interest as mineral resource areas; natural hazard areas; areas containing, or having a significant impact upon, historical, natural, or archaeological resources of statewide importance; and areas around key facilities in which development may have a material effect upon the key facility or the surrounding community.<sup>43</sup> Both laws amended the 1970 Colorado Land Use Act, which had established the Colorado Land Use Commission (LUC) and placed greater control over issues of growth and development in the hands of county governments. Proponents of each act argued that federal agencies, particularly the Forest Service, often failed to take local interests into consideration regulating the development of private lands adjacent to public lands. This failure then caused the development of rural communities near the state's booming ski resorts.

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<sup>42</sup> House Bill 1034 section 1, chapter 106, Colorado revised statutes 1963, article 8, 1974.

<sup>43</sup> House bill 1041 section 1, chapter 106, Colorado revised statutes 1963, article 7, 1974.

Despite the intentions of HB 1034 and HB 1041 to slow down or prohibit the development of ski resorts, new resorts often gained approval from county governments anyway. In the case of Beaver Creek, Vail Associates quickly acquired the approval of Eagle County Commissioners by promising increased tax revenues and jobs. County commissioners often embraced growth and its promise of tax revenues for the county and jobs as means to meet increasing costs. The problem being, that growth quickly became a vicious cycle. The more growth counties approved in order to pay for new roads, schools, and other social services, the more roads, schools, and social services counties needed to provide. Such short-term thinking quickly became the defining characteristic of many rural western communities, leading to widespread criticism by antigrowth and environmental activists who identified unbridled growth as one of the most important issues facing the West. Ski resorts, like all recreational amenities, acted as magnets in causing growth by attracting thousands, or even millions, of newcomers to rural communities. Liking what they saw, many decided to stay.<sup>44</sup>

Such was the case with the town of Vail. Established in 1962, by 1970, Vail sprawled far down the valley from the ski resort. John Donovan, a supervisor at Vail's Ski School, bar owner, and member of the Town of Vail Board of Trustees, best explained the problem in a *New York Times Magazine* article: "When I first got here it was a Brigadoon. This was the most prolific deer country. Now development and people have pushed all the game off. It's the same with fishing—just too many people. The older people lean toward slow growth, but fresh money keeps showing up. I think we've been

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<sup>44</sup> In *Devil's Bargains*, Rothman labeled such new comers as neonatives, arguing that such new comers often move to resort communities in order to embrace a lifestyle perceived from the tourists own experiences. Such neonatives often replace longtime locals as residents of such communities creating what Rothman argued was an often unintended paradox where those who first embraced tourism as an economic panacea are slowly replaced by new comers. This then, is the cultural cost of tourism as an economic base, the devil's bargain. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*, 26-28.

overwhelmed. The growth was faster than our thinking.”<sup>45</sup> The issue of growth had arisen several times during 1972, Donovan explained, as Vail’s board of trustees debated specific taxing and zoning proposals that would effectively clamp a moratorium on further construction. But such a move would also create a severe financial hardship to VA, since the company’s long-term plans required for relatively consistent annual real estate sales and almost all of VA’s property sat within the town of Vail. Such pressures to increase profits often overran local efforts to slow growth. Or, as in the case of Beaver Creek, it divided locals over the competing desires to increase revenues and preserve open space.

A year after the defeat of the Olympics, VA submitted its application for a special use permit to Forest Service to begin the development of Beaver Creek. The Forest Service conducted an EIS on the proposed resort and its surrounding region, which the agency had labeled the Meadow Mountain Planning Unit—a triangle shaped section of national forest which stretched between the Beaver Creek drainage west to Grouse Mountain, also called Meadow Mountain, just outside the small town of Minturn, south to the foot of the Mount of the Holy Cross. The Forest Service released its draft EIS to the public on January 14, 1973, with Eagle County officials signing off on the project soon afterward. The news media made little mention of the EIS’s release or the county’s approval until late September of that year, when thirteen different state agencies, including the Department of Wildlife and the Department of Health, published a scathing assessment of the Forest Service’s work on the EIS. State officials charged that the Forest Service had violated NEPA in preparing its EIS by ignoring the proposed ski resort’s impact on local

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<sup>45</sup> Christopher S. Wren, “Environmentalism, Colorado-Style: I’ve Got Mine Jack,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 11, 1973, 34.

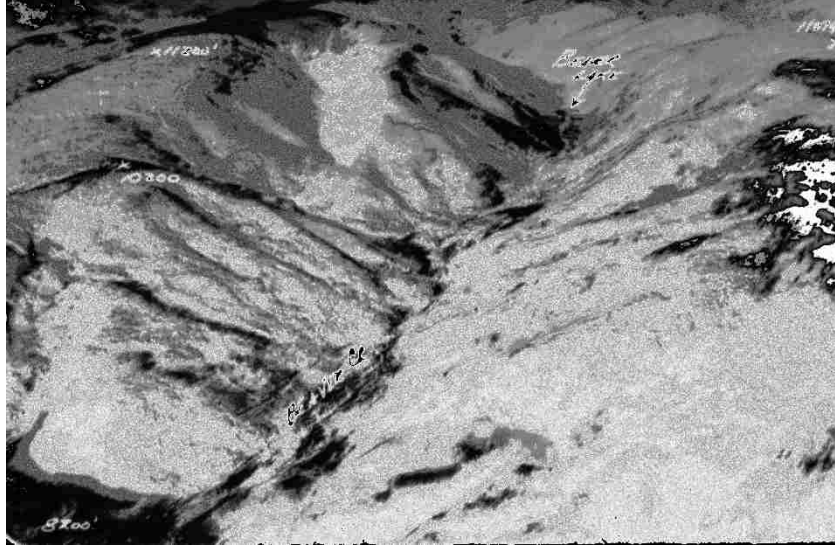
wildlife and water resources. They accused the Forest Service of failing to address what many within state believed to be the inevitable urbanization of the Upper Eagle Creek Valley that would follow the opening of yet another ski resort in the area.

In its review of the Forest Service's EIS, the Colorado Department of Planning argued that the Forest Service had failed to account for the increases in air and water pollution produce by increasing usage of the area, and thus violated the law. Colorado Department of Wildlife officials separately raised concerns over the proposed ski resort's impact on elk migration routes and loss of winter range. Jack Grieb, Director of Colorado Division of Wildlife, also noted the Forest Service had failed to mention the impacts of the neighboring Arrowhead Resort, and argued that the combination of both developments "will all but eliminate the elk herd which winters here, contrary to one of the original objectives of the plan."<sup>46</sup> Beyond elk, other species would see losses in habitat as well. According to a survey conducted by the Department of Wildlife, completed in the months just prior to the Forest Service's release of the final EIS, state biologists counted 209 bird species and 51 species of mammals, all of which would suffer a significant reduction in numbers with the development of the ski resort, and the thousands of houses planned for the area.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jack Grieb, Director of Colorado Division of Wildlife to Dr. Wil Ulman Land-Use Coordinator, Colorado Land Use Commission, November 13, 1974. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 17. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>47</sup> George T. O'Malley, Jr. Director of Colorado Division of Park and Outdoor Recreation to Dr. Wil Ulman Land-Use Coordinator, Colorado Land Use Commission, November 26, 1974. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 17. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado; Alex Cringan, P. H. Neil, and B. H. Hamilton, "Wildlife Impact Study of Avon-Beaver Creek, Colorado for Vail Associates, Inc. Conducted for the Rocky Mountain Center on Environment," June 1974. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 17. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



Photograph 11. Bachelor Gulch and the future site of Beaver Creek Ski Resort, 1972. Denver Public Library.

Other concerns included the potential pollution of the area's air and water. The Colorado Department of Health argued that urban runoff and sewage would contaminate the Eagle Valley, "[r]egardless of where or how many plants may be required, an exceedingly high level of treatment will be required."<sup>48</sup> Traffic was yet another concern. As early as 1973, the Colorado State Department of Highways had reported that the development of Beaver Creek would substantially increase development along the Interstate 70 corridor. Glenn Fritts, a planning and research engineer for the Colorado State Department of Highways, wrote Governor John Love's environmental affairs expert, John Beringham, that according to the state's initial analysis, the increase in traffic caused by the development of Beaver Creek would quickly exceed the carrying capacity of any road constructed from the interstate to the new ski resort. Such increases

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<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Webb. PE planning consultant to Dr. Wil Ulman Land-use coordinator, Colorado Land Use Commission November 13, 1974. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 17 .Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



in traffic would then have long term negative impacts on the valley's air quality.<sup>49</sup>

In light of these matters, and with an eye on the upcoming gubernatorial elections, Governor John Vanderhoof wrote Forest Supervisor Tom Evans requesting the postponement of the Forest Service's decision to designate the Mountain Meadows Area a winter sports site. In the letter Vanderhoof argued, "The detrimental effects of the proposed designation appear to outweigh the benefits so clearly that I must request you to postpone the proposed decision."<sup>50</sup> It was a bold move by a politician many had labeled as pro-growth. It appeared that Vanderhoof was betting his political future by delaying the Forest Service's designation in order to counter any Democratic opponent's use of the issue in the upcoming election. A little more than a month later, Evans denied Vanderhoof's request and announced his decision to recommend the designation of Beaver Creek as a winter sports site to Forest Supervisor W. J. Lucas. Evans defended his decision by arguing that any further delay in the process would hinder the timely development of a needed ski resort in the state, and that his staff had addressed the state's concerns in the EIS. Furthermore, concerns over the future growth of the Upper Eagle Valley fell under the purview of the state and local government and not the U.S. Forest Service.

Enraged by Evans' decision, Vanderhoof ordered the Colorado Land Use Commission to hold hearings on the designation in hopes of producing recommendations on how the state should best proceed in halting the development of Beaver Creek. As the

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<sup>49</sup> Glenn Fritts Planning and Research Engineer Colorado State Department of Highways to John Beringham, Assistant to the Governor Environmental Affairs, November 27, 1973. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 17. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>50</sup> Governor John Vanderhoof to Mr. Thomas Evans, Forest Supervisor, September 19, 1974. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 17. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



lead witness in the hearings, Evans reiterated that the Forest Service was not responsible for regulating growth outside the national forest. Opponents questioned such reasoning, arguing that the Forest Service's approval of Beaver Creek came with a tacit understanding of the larger impacts the development of a new ski resort would have on the valley. Marilyn Stokes of the Colorado Environmental Coalition underlined such concerns in her testimony before the committee by pointing out that often well-intended "good-projects" often precipitated additional poor developments. "We take the present urbanization of the lower Eagle Valley as an example. While the town of Vail was developed with good planning, the adjacent building was uncontrolled. I know that Vail Associates is the first to recognize this; but our question must be whether or not there are sufficient controls and fortitude to carry out this controls within the state and the county?"<sup>51</sup> State laws, she contended, were full of loopholes and gaps. Members of the commission agreed. Commissioner Beringham, who also worked as Governor Vanderhoof's environmental affairs director, sharply criticized the Forest Service's assertion that state law could regulate the increased pollution and growth by pointing out that many of the laws cited by the federal agency in its seventeen-page rebuttal against state concerns had either been repealed or did not apply.<sup>52</sup>

Ski industry proponents countered that such doom and gloom statements were worst-case scenarios and that existing laws and solid planning by VA and the Forest Service would mitigate most of the state's concerns. Pete Seibert, chairman of VA, argued that Beaver Creek would be the most environmentally sensitive ski resort ever built in the

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<sup>51</sup> Marilyn Stokes, Statement to the Land Use Council, December 17, 1974. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 17. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>52</sup> Steve Wynkoop, "Opponents Pressing Beaver-Area Attack," *Denver Post*, December 18, 1974.

Rocky Mountain West, warning that “[i]f Beaver Creek cannot receive approval by the state, then no new recreational development of any kind is possible for the foreseeable future.”<sup>53</sup> In many ways, Seibert was correct. By the end of 1974 Beaver Creek had cost VA \$6 million, and with its loan from the United Bank of Denver accruing \$425,000 in interest every year, along with an additional \$420,000 in taxes and wages annually, the corporation was eager to open the resort as soon as possible. Evans had all but cited VA’s mounting debts as one of the reasons for his recommendation to designate Beaver Creek as a winter sports site, testifying before the commission that “[t]o further delay our process at this time imposes an inequitable burden on private enterprise which has cooperated responsibly in the on- and off- site environmental planning of a public recreation area.”<sup>54</sup>

Critics pointed to statements as proof that the federal agency was complicit in promoting the development of public lands for private gain. One journalist best summed up anti-Forest Service sentiments by writing, “We’re getting another ski area and we’re getting it with the blessing of Colorado’s biggest and most ruthless land developer, the U.S. Forest Service.”<sup>55</sup> Antigrowth activists saw the Forest Service’s approval of Beaver Creek as the agency’s tacit approval of further development in the region. Evans and others within the Forest Service believed that the continued demand for skiing required them to open more areas to development and argued that the state and local governments were responsible for managing any growth that occurred as a result of the construction of new ski resorts. The struggle over the development of Beaver Creek came down to

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<sup>53</sup> “Vail Associates Defends Beaver Creek Ski Plan,” *Denver Post*, January 8, 1975.

<sup>54</sup> Steve Wynkoop, “Beaver Creek Area Sports Plan Pushed,” *Denver Post*, December 15, 1974.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Hauk, *Beaver Creek Ski Area Chronology* (Glenwood Springs, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, White River National Forest, 1979), 5.

competing views of jurisdiction and responsibility. State agencies argued that the Forest Service must account for the secondary growth caused by the development of ski resorts while the Forest Service maintained that such concerns lay outside its authority.

The Colorado Land Use Commission hearings on Beaver Creek ended with little resolution. Governor-elect Richard Lamm outlined his plans to ask the Forest Service once again for a one-year moratorium on designating the Beaver Creek area as a winter sports area. He also requested that Forest Supervisor Lucas withhold any action at all until the LUC made a formal recommendation to the governor's office. In the days just prior to Lamm's taking office, the LUC submitted its recommendations to Governor Vanderhoof. In a seven-to-two decision, the LUC recommended the approval of the project. Hours before leaving office, Vanderhoof gave the Forest Service the state's approval to move forward with the designation. Vanderhoof's approval infuriated Colorado voters who had just reelected Democrat Richard Lamm as the state's next governor.<sup>56</sup>

Following the Watergate scandal, Lamm rode a nationwide swell of anti-Republican sentiment into the governor's office. Within days of taking office, Lamm set out to reverse Vanderhoof's approval of Beaver Creek by first replacing two members of the LUC with antigrowth advocates, including J. E. DeVilbiss, who had lead the opposition to the development of Marble Mountain Ski Resort in 1972. Lamm also sent a telegram to Forest Service Regional Forester William Lucas asking for a ten-day delay on announcing their decision on designating the Beaver Creek area as winter sports site and a one-year moratorium on the development of any new ski resort within the state. Lucas ignored the governor's request and on January 24 named the Beaver Creek area a winter

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<sup>56</sup> "Land-Use Unit OKs Beaver Creek Resort," *Denver Post*, January 14, 1975.

sports site. The decision soured the already tense relationship between the Forest Service and the Colorado governor's office. Jim Monaghan, a Lamm aide, accused Lucas of "welching" on an agreement between himself and the governor's office to not make any announcement until he received a final copy of the governor's position paper. "We had the rug pulled from under us," Monaghan told reporters on hearing the news of the Lucas's decision. For his part, Lucas contended he had made his decision after carefully balancing the facts against the allegations in the case. In a note to Governor Lamm, Lucas explained, "I also reasoned that if I allowed on my part the opportunity for maneuvering to continue by failure to make a timely decision this could result in a decision by proponents of projects not to make environmental studies of the NEPA process as part of the decision-making process, but instead seek to use the political processes first in decision-making."<sup>57</sup>

Within days, Colorado's newly elected U.S. Senator Gary Hart asked Forest Service Chief John McGuire for an immediate review of Lucas's decision. McGuire agreed to conduct a full administrative review of the decision and met with Lamm to regarding the governor's concerns with the Forest Service's designation. Negotiations ensued over the next several months between the state, the Forest Service, VA, and Eagle County. At the same time, the Sierra Club appealed Lucas's decision, arguing that the regional forester violated the Forest Service manual provisions inventoried under the Roadless Area Review (RARE) process by not including 9,000 acres of national forest land near Beaver Creek as potential wilderness. McGuire agreed and postponed the designation of Beaver

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<sup>57</sup> Bob Juan, "Lamm Ousts 2 Who Supported Ski Area," *Denver Post*, January 17, 1975; Ted Carey, "Beaver Creek Area Named Sports Site," *Rocky Mountain News*, January 25, 1975; Sierra Club, Part IV Attachment to Responsive Statement of William J. Lucas Regional Forester. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 18. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

Creek for another twenty days, citing that at the time the decision was being made, the roadless policy was in its formative stages and unbeknownst to Lucas, Supervisor Evans had placed the Grouse Creek Management Area Unit in the proposed Holy Cross Wilderness Roadless Area for consideration.<sup>58</sup>

In July, McGuire announced that the designation of Beaver Creek as a winter sports site would stand, but agreed to the one-year delay in the development of Beaver Creek in light of the regional forester Lucas' failure to address matters such as air and water pollution and wildlife habitat in the original EIS. McGuire also stated that a second, more comprehensive EIS would be required.<sup>59</sup> With the state's objections apparently settled, all parties announced victory, yet the controversy over Beaver Creek continued. Soon after McGuire's announcement VA said that a second EIS would not actually be necessary, and that the company would instead conduct an Environmental Analysis Report (EAR). State officials remained skeptical that a much more truncated EAR would satisfy the legal requirements under NEPA.<sup>60</sup>

With the dust settled over Beaver Creek, Governor Lamm withdrew the state's objection to the development. Satisfied with the findings of the EAR, as well as with a number of compromises on the part of VA, Lamm told the audience at the announcement, "Never before has the state been able to participate in an environmental assessment to the

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<sup>58</sup> Before the Chief, United State Forest Service, Re: Winter Sports Site Designation for Beaver Creek, Meadow Mountain Planning Unit, White River National Forest. Sierra Club Appellant, Brief in Support of Apellent Sierra Club's Motion for Reconsideration and for Oral Presentation; John McGuire to S. Chandler Visher and H. Anthony Ruckel, Attorneys for the Sierra Club, October 9, 1975. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20, FF 18. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>59</sup> Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Inc. Beaver Creek Ski Area Review, press release, July 18, 1975. Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers. Box 20 FF 18. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>60</sup> Jill Vig, "Beaver Creek 'Dam' Broken," *Vail Trail*, July 25, 1975.

degree we have worked on this document.”<sup>61</sup> In exchange for the state’s rescinding its objections, VA agreed to lower the development’s density to 1,900 units from 4,000, to use mass transit to transport skiers from the interstate to the resort base in order to reduce air pollution, and to install a pumping system that would enable water to be taken from the lower part of Eagle Creek rather than farther upstream to guarantee minimum stream flows. A month later the Forest Service issued the requisite special use permit to VA for the development of 2,775 acres of national forest. Two minor last-ditch efforts to halt construction of Beaver Creek quickly failed, and finally on July 28, 1977, groundbreaking ceremonies took place on Colorado’s latest ski resort.<sup>62</sup>

After three years of construction, Beaver Creek opened to much fanfare on December 15, 1980. A tennis bubble rather than an opulent lodge operated as a temporary base for the new ski area during the resort’s first winter season. As promised, skiers parked far below the resort, and were shuttled to Beaver Creek’s base on a fleet of buses. Islands of trees sat in the middle of many of the trails to mitigate the visual impacts of huge swaths being cut out of the forests. Unlike Vail, Beaver Creek offered decidedly more advanced terrain, which frightened off many skiers and gave the mountain an uncrowded feeling even on the busiest of holiday weekends. Even with VA’s cautious approach, the growth many had feared came. By the mid-1980s, the town of Avon flourished and houses dotted the hillsides above Bachelor Gulch. Wealthy second-home owners, including former President Gerald Ford, built lavish homes near the ski resort.<sup>63</sup>

The lesson of Beaver Creek to the ski industry was not that the development of new

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<sup>61</sup> Charlie Meyers, “Beaver Creek Gets Lamm Nod,” *Denver Post*, February 20, 1976.

<sup>62</sup> Hauk, *Chronology of Beaver Creek*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Linda Harbine, “Beaver Creek Aborning,” *Skiing* (November 1981), 77–81, 202; Bill Pardue, “Ford’s to Buy Home Site at Beaver Creek Resort,” *Denver Post*, September 26, 1979.

resorts was not impossible, but that the costs were tremendous. By 1980, VA had paid more than \$300 million to develop Beaver Creek, more than six times the cost of Vail. Increased state regulation combined with federal environmental laws to create a sea of red tape for any development, especially ski resorts, on national forests in Colorado. The struggle over the development of Beaver Creek also changed the Forest Service's internal culture. While many within the agency remain pro-skiing, increasing numbers of Forest Service employees questioned the necessity of developing more ski resorts in the West. Yet despite the backlash against ski resorts, skier numbers continued to grow. By the 1980–81 season Colorado resorts hosted more than 7 million skier days, an increase of more than 5 million skier visits since the 1969–70 winter season. The combined pressures of growing demand and increased regulation eventually forced ski resorts, and the Forest Service, to change the way they did business, setting the stage for the industry's next phase of evolution during the 1980s.<sup>64</sup>

### Deregulation

Throughout the winter of 1976–77, drought gripped much of the American West. The lack of snow translated into plummeting skier numbers at Colorado's roughly two-dozen ski resorts, leading to tremendous revenue loss. Only Keystone Ski Resort, located near the growing community of Frisco along the Interstate 70 corridor, experienced a rise in visitor numbers. Further north, neighboring Winter Park Ski Resort survived the season with a minimal decline in visitor numbers, moving from the fourth to second most popular ski resort in Colorado, mainly due to its fortuitous million-dollar investment in

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<sup>64</sup> Erik Martin. Interview by author, June 2008; C. R. Goeldner, et al, "The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998–99 Season," 5.

snowmaking equipment the summer before. Two of the state's smaller ski areas, Purgatory near Durango and Geneva Basin near Leadville, experienced a 90 percent decrease in visitation. The University of Colorado's Business Research Division's annual report on the state's ski resorts noted "All in all, the 1976-77 ski season was not a very good year for most Colorado ski areas, as the lack of snow was a factor they could not control." In total, Colorado ski resorts experienced a 38 percent decrease in skier visits from the season before, the first decline in overall visits since 1962 when numbers dipped a paltry 1.2 percent.<sup>65</sup> While the drought wreaked financial havoc on the state's ski industry at large, the largest resorts, located in White River National Forest, used the devastating situation to leverage the Forest Service into lifting the price regulations on lift ticket prices and letting the open market dictate the cost. This reflected the larger problematic issue of private development of ski resorts in national forests during the twentieth century.

Home to half of Colorado's ski resorts, including Breckenridge, Aspen, Copper Mountain, Keystone, Snowmass, and Vail, the White River National Forest is the geographic center of Colorado's ski country.<sup>66</sup> Linked to the Front Range metro area by Interstate 70, by the late 1970s, these ski resorts comprised roughly 67 percent of the state's skier market and provided the economic base for the much of the region's thriving

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<sup>65</sup> Charles R. Goeldner and Sally Courtney, *Colorado Ski and Recreation Statistics, 1977* (Boulder: Business Research Division Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Colorado, 1977); Michael Strauss, "Colorado Turns More to Snow Makers," *New York Times*, November 28, 1976, 205. Skier numbers during the 1976-77 ski season dropped 38 percent from the previous year. Despite the Winter Park addition of snowmaking equipment and the opening of its 350-acre Mary Jane expansion, Winter Park still saw an 8 percent drop in visitor numbers. Goeldner, *Colorado Ski and Recreation Statistics, 1977*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> C.R. Goeldner, et. al., *The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998-99 Season* (Boulder: University of Colorado Business Research Division, Graduate School of Business Administration, 1999), 17. The National Ski Areas Association defines a skier day as one person visiting a ski area for all or any part of a day or night for the purpose of skiing. Rather than total number of visitors, the number designates total number of days skied by all visitors.



tourist economy during the era.<sup>67</sup> Yet, despite their economic success, ski resorts Like Vail and Aspen chafed under what they deemed as overly restrictive regulation by the Forest Service and “obstructionist” environmental policies. Aspen Skiing Company president and chairman of the National Ski Areas Association’s (NSAA) Forest Service Committee D. R. C. Brown, argued that ski resorts were losing out on potential profits because of the undue influence of environmental groups on the Forest Service and the miles of red tape they faced in meeting environmental regulations. Environmental groups responded that such regulations were necessary to protect public lands from being overrun by commercial development. In response to ski industry complaints over environmental groups’ actions in opposing the construction of ski resorts director of the Center for the Public Interest Rick Applegate argued, “It shouldn’t be an easy or quick decision. You’re talking about permanent commitment of public land that belongs to everybody.”<sup>68</sup> Caught in the middle of these mounting disputes between environmental groups and ski resorts, the Forest Service maintained its right to manage ski areas in the public’s interest.

Lift ticket pricing had long been a point of contention between ski resorts and the White River National Forest. In 1969, D. R. C. Brown, the same Aspen executive who would argue that environmental policies were hamstringing the industry following the drought a decade later, warned that, in its zeal to see that consumers paid fair and reasonable ski lift ticket prices, the Forest Service “could care less whether or not the area

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>68</sup> Grace Lichtenstein, “Ski Resort Boom is Over Despite Crowds in Rockies,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1976, 51.

operated at a profit.”<sup>69</sup> Forest Service officials found Brown’s criticisms absurd, countering that close regulation of lift ticket prices was necessary in order to balance public need with resort profits. Such arguments remained consistent with larger Forest Service policies at the time, which closely regulated timber and grazing fees to guarantee long-term sustainability. The problem was that the ski industry and the Forest Service often defined sustainability in different terms. Many ski resorts believed that to meet growing public demand for skiing, they needed to be able to demonstrate to investors and banks their long-term profitability. To do so meant being able to charge adequate prices for lodging, retail, and lift tickets. Environmental groups held a third opinion of sustainability, arguing that the development of public lands for corporate profit was disastrous. This three-way relationship demonstrated the polarization of environmental regulation and economic demands—a tension that would play out in the deregulation of lift ticket prices within the WRNF following the 1976 drought.<sup>70</sup>

One of largest stumbling blocks both proposed and existing ski resorts faced in securing financing was navigating the Forest Service’s cumbersome permit policy. The agency required that ski resorts hold two permits in order to operate: a special use for the land on which the ski lodge and other commercial facilities rested that lasted for one year, and term permit for the hundreds of acres of national forest on which to develop ski trails lasting thirty years.<sup>71</sup> The differences between the lengths of time of each permit caused uncertainty on the long-term economic sustainability of ski resorts. “I feel almost certain

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<sup>69</sup>D. R. C. Brown, “National Ski Area Association’s Forest Service Committee Report,” December 12, 1969. Recreation : Skiing—Snow Skiing on National Forests. Papers. U.S. Forest History Collection. Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>70</sup> David Clary, *Timber and the Forest Service* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 94–125; Paul Hirt, *Conspiracy in Optimism: Management of the National Forest Service Since World War Two* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 171–92.

<sup>71</sup> Glen Robinson, *The Forest Service: A Study in Public Land Management* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 127–28.

we would not be able to provide bank funding for new ski area unless a particular area had a very strong guarantee—and I guarantee that it would have to be very strong,” said Tom Swanson, Vice President of United Bank of Denver, on the growing worries over the ability of ski resorts to secure loans. When asked why he thought potential ski resorts no longer could provide the guarantees, Swanson pointed squarely at the increasing regulatory behavior of the federal government dictated by legislation such as the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act. “I am here to say that anytime government gets near an industry, we bankers get nervous,” said Swanson.<sup>72</sup> The solution to the long-term economic stability of ski resorts, he and others argued, lay in the reduction of federal oversight.

Yet, the profitability of ski resorts was not necessarily the Forest Service’s highest priority. Rather, Forest Service officials believed it was their job to ensure both affordable public access to national forests and long-term environmental sustainability by closely managing ski resorts. This understanding came from a strong culture of ownership within the agency. “We controlled everything. They were our ski areas,” recalled Erik Martin on the culture within the WRNF offices during the 1970s. Hired by the Forest Service in 1971 to help organize the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games, Martin succeeded Paul Hauk as the WRNF’s skiing expert in 1977 and remained with the Forest Service until the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics in 2002. Throughout the 1970s, both Hauk and Martin enjoyed immense power over how ski resorts operated within the White River National Forest. Ski resort operators had to gain the two men’s approval on myriad of issues, from the construction of new ski trails to the raising of ticket prices. “These guys would come in with their hat in their hand, literally, and be as polite as

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<sup>72</sup> Jack Phinney, “Forest Service Blamed for Ski Lag,” *Denver Post*, January 30, 1977.

possible and say can we raise our ticket price fifty cents or a dollar,” said Martin.<sup>73</sup> Such regulation seemed natural to WRNF officials, who saw themselves as stewards of the public trust and believed their management of ski resorts allowed them to retain some level of control over the commercialization of national forests. But ski resort managers increasingly argued that such oversight hurt their ability to meet public demand while turning a profit and called for a lessening of both economic and environmental regulation.

The ski industry’s demands for less government regulation reflected a growing call for a general deregulation of American industry in the 1970s. As the nation slipped into what President James Carter infamously termed “a crisis of confidence,” growing numbers of economists such as Alfred Kahn, economic advisor to the President, pointed to deregulation as one solution to rekindle the nation’s economy. Kahn and other deregulation advocates argued that opening industries such as the airlines to market forces would increase competition, encourage innovation, and bolster profits. Reflecting on the deregulation revolution of the late 1970s, Kahn wrote, “something of a consensus was already emerging in the early 1970s among disinterested students that regulation had suppressed innovation, sheltered inefficiency, encouraged a wage/price spiral, promoted a severe misallocation of resources by throwing prices out of alignment with marginal costs, encouraged competition in wasteful, cost-inflating ways, and denied the public the variety of price and quality choices that a competitive market would have provided.”<sup>74</sup> Such arguments became increasingly popular by the late 1970s as the nation suffered its second bout in ten years of high inflation combined with high employment. After

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<sup>73</sup> Erik Martin (Former Winter Sports Resorts Program Manager for the White River National Forest). Interview by author, June 6, 2008.

<sup>74</sup> Alfred Edward Kahn, *The Economics of Regulation: Principles and Institutions* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988), xvi.

assuming office in 1977, President Carter moved to deregulate a number of industries, including the airline, trucking, banking, and communication industries. Such deregulation activities underscored economists' growing belief that federal and state regulation stemming out of New Deal and Great Society policies laid at the heart of the nation's economic turmoil.<sup>75</sup>

These arguments appealed to many within the ski industry, particularly at large ski resorts, whose executives believed that federal regulation, both environmental and economic, were increasing their costs and hurting their competitiveness. Resort managers resented what they saw as the Forest Service's meddling in their day-to-day business, arguing that by keeping ski resort profits in check, the Forest Service was restricting their ability to maintain and even expand their resorts, both of which negatively impacted the public's enjoyment of their public lands. Many within the ski industry argued that if opened to the free market, ticket prices would become highly competitive and naturally meet the Forest Service's objective in protecting the public's interest by keeping prices low. The economic impact of the 1976 drought, combined with a growing national sentiment for greater federal deregulation of all industries, led to a concerted effort by the ski industry to deregulate lift ticket prices.

In order to better understand the effects of deregulating lift ticket prices, in 1976 the Forest Service contracted the accounting firm Laventhol and Horwath and regional consulting firm Ted Farwell and Associates to conduct a study on the economic implications of deregulation. The firms concluded that the Forest Service's control of lift

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<sup>75</sup> Anthony Campagna, *Economic Policy in the Carter Administration* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 190-98; Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Greatest Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001), 124-25; W. Carl Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in an Age of Limits* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 127-134.

ticket prices failed to reflect the actual costs of resort operation and that by opening the lift ticket prices to the whims of the market, the public's interest would balance "the highest quality skiing with the lowest possible prices for the largest number of skiers, while reasonably assuring the continuation of the supply and, under warranted conditions, the expansion of capacity."<sup>76</sup> The report's authors argued that market forces would more efficiently govern the development of ski resorts in national forests than the current system of government regulation. In essence, the idea was that by removing Forest Service oversight on lift ticket prices, the economic laws of supply and demand would ensure not only reasonable lift ticket prices to consumers, but also controlled development of ski resorts, tying them to public need rather than Forest Service perception.

But what constituted a reasonable price, and who decided? The report defined reasonable as "[w]here the price to ski equates with the skiers' concept of value received, and the rewards to the ski area adequately compensate for the risks and motivate rational expansion."<sup>77</sup> On the surface, such a supply and demand model appeared reasonable. To remain competitive and solvent, ski resorts needed the ability to maximize their profits, an ability Forest Service regulation impeded. So, by removing the Forest Service's control over lift ticket prices, ski resorts could charge a fair market value and increase their ability to not only raise capital but also secure loans to further meet public demands for more terrain and improved facilities. On reviewing the report, the Forest Service appeared amenable to allowing the market to decide ticket prices, allowing the agency

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<sup>76</sup> Laventhol and Horwath in Association with Ted Farwell and Associates, Inc., "Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture Ski Area Price Evaluation Study," vol. I. (April, 1977), 6.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 8.

could focus instead on larger issues such as wilderness, environmental impact statements, and grazing policy.<sup>78</sup>

But the issue quickly turned ugly when in April 1977, U.S. Senator Floyd Haskell attacked the Forest Service's contract with a private firm for \$90,000 to conduct the study on deregulating lift ticket prices as a backroom deal designed to benefit large ski resorts. One of the several Colorado Democrats who had ridden the state's anti-Olympic movement into office in 1972, Haskell had made a modest name for himself during his single term as a U.S. Senator by promoting tax reforms and environmental issues. Concerned that the Forest Service's decision would soon price downhill skiing out of reach of many middle-class Coloradoans, Haskell attacked the lift of price controls as a "travesty" and little more than the establishment of a subsidy for "fat-cat ski resorts." What he found particularly galling about the report was the fact that just the previous year, when asked if they would like to be included in a bill providing federal disaster relief for the drought, most ski resorts in the White River National Forest had declined. Instead, many resorts had opposed the bill. "They said the situation was not all that bad. So after working to deny help to small business which needed and continue to need it, they come in this spring and get their own disaster relief in the form of a permanent subsidy paid for by consumers," the irate Haskell told reporters.<sup>79</sup>

In many ways, Senator Haskell was right. Ski resorts had long sought the removal of lift ticket price controls in order to increase profits. The drought provided the perfect opportunity to secure this goal. By seizing upon the public's concern over the economic impact of the drought on the West Slope, ski resorts sought deregulation as an easy

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<sup>78</sup> "Letting Go," *SKIING* (October, 1981), 21.

<sup>79</sup> "Haskell Raps Ski Rate Hike Guidelines," *Rocky Mountain News*, April 23, 1977.

solution to the industry's economic woes. The Forest Service agreed and ceded its control over lift ticket prices starting with the 1977–78 season. Ticket prices immediately skyrocketed as ski resorts raised prices by as much as 25 percent. The 1977–78 ski season saw record-setting profits for the resorts within the WRNF due in large part to the combination of higher lift ticket prices, increased skier numbers, and heavy snows. If the 1976–77 season had been a bust for many resorts, the 1977–78 season was a bonanza. In its annual report the National Ski Areas Association noted, “For the first time in the 10 years of this annual economic study, profits were at a level that can be judged adequate to compensate for the risks.”<sup>80</sup> As ski resorts celebrated above-average profits, consumers protested the increasing lift ticket prices. Public outcry led to the Carter Administration's limiting price increases for the following season to 9.5 percent.<sup>81</sup> Such limitations did slow price increases, but over the next decade lift ticket prices continued to rise, playing a small part in the stagnation of skier numbers, and the beginning of the consolidation of the ski industry throughout North America.

The deregulation of lift tickets within the White River National Forest broadly demonstrated the problematic issue of private development of ski resorts in national forests—one that had defined the relationship between ski resorts and the federal agency since the mid-1940s. Resort owners and managers had long pressed for unfettered growth in order to maximize profits, sometimes at the expense of the both environment and the very public whom the Forest Service was attempting to serve. In this way, the deregulation of lift tickets within the WRNF was not unique in Forest Service. In fact, such issues have long shaped the contested nature of public land management, from the

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<sup>80</sup> C. R. Geoldner and Ted Farwell, “National Ski Area Association Economic Analysis of North American Ski Areas,” 45.

<sup>81</sup> Dave Danforth, “Ski Areas Limited to 9.5 Percent Increase,” *Glenwood Post*, April 10, 1979.



construction of concessions on the southern rim of the Grand Canyon during the 1910s, to battles over logging in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>82</sup> But deregulation also demonstrated the collision between the era's free market ideals and environmental concerns—two forces that continue to define the relationship between the Forest Service and the ski industry as the era of rampant development of ski resorts came to a close and a period of resort consolidation and expansion began.

### Mineral King

While resorts secured the deregulation of lift tickets, a related controversy of great concern to all ski resorts throughout the West came to a close. The proposed development of a ski resort in the Mineral King Valley had drawn wider national attention to the growing controversy over the development of public lands in the American West. Located just north of Sequoia National Park, the narrow valley had long been a favorite area for skiers. By the 1930s, skiing had become a major commercial use of national forests throughout the West. In California, most ski area development centered around the Donner Pass-Lake Tahoe area and Yosemite National Park. The Mineral King Valley first gained the Forest Service's attention as a potential site for a ski area in 1946, but it was not for another three years had passed that the agency sought bids for the development of Mineral King. Despite its historical opposition to the development of ski resorts in the San Gorgonio Mountains outside of Los Angeles in southern California in the late 1930s, the Sierra Club tacitly approved the development of a ski area in Mineral

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<sup>82</sup> Hirt, *Conspiracy of Optimism*; Nancy Livingston, *Forest Dreams/Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 157-200; Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobile Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 58-60.

King. For much of the 1950s and early 1960s, both the Forest Service and Sierra Club largely forgot Mineral King. Then in 1965, the Disney Corporation purchased two parcels of land along the valley floor. A year later, the entertainment giant signed a three-year development contract with the Forest Service. This produced opposition to the proposed ski resort immediately, especially since the State of California also announced that it would construct a four-lane highway into the valley. Mineral King quickly gained national attention, as the Sierra Club took on Mickey Mouse over the development of a ski area in a relatively unknown mountain valley.<sup>83</sup>

The Sierra Club sued to halt Disney's \$35 million resort complex in 1969. The case dragged on until 1972 when the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the Sierra Club's suit on the grounds that the club had not established that it suffered direct harm from the Forest Service's actions in allowing the development of Mineral King. The court's decision had long-ranging effects on future lawsuits that pertained to environmental issues. In rejecting the suit, the court defined that only individuals, not corporations, had standing in matters involving environmental law. All the Sierra Club had to do was find a single member with a particularized interest in a case and sue on his or her behalf, a strategy the organization used with a great deal of success throughout the remainder of the century. Despite the Supreme Court's decision, controversy continued to slow the development of Mineral King. In order to comply with NEPA requirements, the Forest Service spent years compiling an EIS. Political pressure opposing the ski resort increased with more environmentally minded politicians winning both state and congressional races. Finally,

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<sup>83</sup> The debate over the development of a ski resort in Mineral King Valley is one of the most contentious in National Park Service history. For more see: Lary Dilsaver and William Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resource History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (Three Rivers, CA: Sequoia Natural History Association, Inc., 1990), 278–82; Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 67–70.

in 1978, President Carter signed a bill annexing the Mineral King Valley into Sequoia National Park.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

The controversies of the 1970s left a lasting legacy of frustration and disappointment between the Forest Service, the ski industry, and the public. The opening of Beaver Creek along with the annexation of Mineral King Valley brought to a close a two-decade-long era of ski resort development throughout the West. With hundreds of ski resorts now open across the region, the West's ski industry saw a marked shift in not only economics, but also in the public's perception of ski resorts. No longer able to simply apply for a series of permits and begin construction, resorts became the subject of increasing public scrutiny, environmental regulation, and tightening economic realities. Environmental regulations such as NEPA added years to the process of developing ski resorts on national forests, making the development of new resorts too costly and too risky for many investors. The lifting of stringent price controls by the Forest Service in the White River National Forest opened up lift ticket prices throughout state to market forces. The combination of increasing environmental regulation and free market pricing dramatically reshaped the ski industry over the next two decades. Few new resorts opened within the state during the 1980s and 1990s due in large part to the costs in securing permits from the Forest Service and public opposition to any further development of new resorts. As the number of Colorado's ski resorts stabilized however, competition among the state's two-dozen resorts increased. Terrain expansions, along with real estate development, became the standard means of increasing the bottom line for most ski resorts. This

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<sup>84</sup> Dilsaver and William Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees*, 298–301.

development led to further criticism by environmental groups, who continued to question the impacts of skiing on national forests and the use of public lands for private gain.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

Flames quickly engulfed Two Elks Lodge as the homemade incendiary devices set by William Rogers exploded. Camped nearby, a group of elk hunters—brothers Dave and Ken Alt, Steven and David Gaal, and Neil Sebo—awoke to the sound of what Dave Alt described as the sound of flapping plastic on an unfinished building to journalist Daniel Glick.<sup>1</sup> Abruptly, realizing that the sound was a fire and remembering that Neil Sebo had decided to sleep in a heated bathroom structure further up the mountain, Dave Alt quickly roused his brother and the others. The four men quickly made their way up the mountain. Finding Sebo standing in his long underwear on the deck of the bathroom staring at the Two Elks Lodge engulfed in flame, they called 911. The call set off a flurry of activity as Vail's fire department quickly mobilized, sending a tanker truck up the mountain. Heavy snows combined with the sheer distance of the lodge from the valley floor, some 3,000 feet in elevation, kept emergency equipment from arriving in time to save the building. When firefighters did arrive, the Two Elk Lodge was completely engulfed in flames.<sup>2</sup>

Opened in 1988, the Two Elks Lodge had been Vail Ski Resort's crown jewel. Decorated with over one million dollars worth of Native American robes, blankets, murals, and other Western themed memorabilia, the lodge anchored the ski resort's Back Bowls, providing skiers and snowboarders a warm place to sit, eat, and enjoy the surrounding views of the Two Elks roadless area. Opulent in comparison to the older lodges at other ski resorts, Two Elks embodied Vail and the larger ski industry's shift

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Glick, *Powder Burn: Arson, Money, and Mystery on Vail Mountain* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 25-6.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Lipsher, "Remote Area Makes Fighting Fire Tough," *Denver Post*, October 20, 1998, 2D.

towards grander lodges, faster ski lifts, and greater terrain beginning the late 1980s. But by the following afternoon, all of it lay a smoldering ruin atop the resort's ridgeline.

A palpable tension filled the air throughout the Vail Valley in the days following the arsons as questions about who set the blazes led to wild speculation and fear. The resort had plenty of enemies after all. Some suggested that former employees, bitter at being fired by the resort were the culprits. Others blamed Vail Resorts Inc., owners of the ski resort, accusing the resort of burning down the outdated Ski Patrol Headquarters and lavish Two Elks Lodge in order to collect the insurance. Most fingered a small group of environmental protestors camped just outside the neighboring town of Minturn as the culprits.<sup>3</sup> National nightly news programs focused on the economic impacts of the fires on the resort and the surrounding community. "Whoever did this attacked the livelihood of every man, woman, and child in the valley," Vail resident Jonathan Stauffer told CBS reporters.<sup>4</sup>

Within days, the local newspaper and regional National Public Radio affiliate received an email purportedly sent by members of the extremist group the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) was claimed responsibility for the fires. Citing the Forest Service's approval of Vail's Category III (Cat III) expansion, which environmentalists had long maintained would disturb the habitat of the endangered lynx as well as an important migration route for elk in the region, the brief email proclaimed "Putting profits ahead of Colorado's wildlife will not be tolerated," and warned skiers to choose other ski destinations "until Vail cancels its inexcusable plans for expansion."<sup>5</sup> While the

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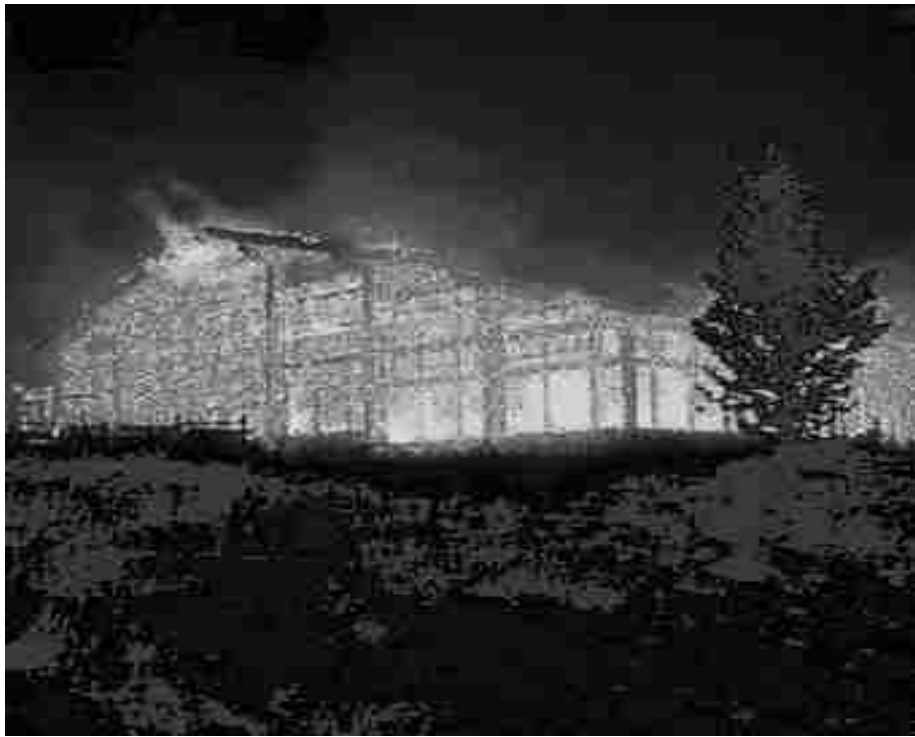
<sup>3</sup> Glick, *Powder Burn*, 35-46.

<sup>4</sup> "Security Beefed Up at Ski Resort,"

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/1998/10/22/national/main20785.shtml>. Assessed April 11, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> ELF Communiqué, October 19, 1998, in Leslie James Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front, 1997-2002*

arsons caused in excess of \$12 million in damages and \$13 million in lost revenues, in an ironic twist they proved a boon for the resort. Two years later Vail reopened Two Elks Lodge, a structure 5000 square feet larger than the original destroyed in the fire. That same winter Vail opened its 885-acre Category III expansion, renamed Blue Sky Basin, to the public.



Photograph 12. Two Elks Lodge on Fire, October 19, 1998. Photograph courtesy of Mark Mobley.

The Category III expansion had its roots in the mid-1980s with the purchase of Vail Associates (VA) by television mogul George Gillette and the release of the White River National Forest Master Development Plan by the U.S. Forest Service for Vail Ski Resort. The plan outlined the future expansion of the ski resort and included two major projects

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2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Portland: Arissa Media Group, 2007), 13.

designated Category II and Category III. Vail Ski Area's original 1962 permit had included more than 3,000 acres of national forest land in the Two Elks River drainage, which the resort had yet to develop. Focused on its development of Beaver Creek during much of the 1970s, VA, the original owners of Vail and Beaver Creek ski resorts, placed the development of the Two Elks area on the back burner. George Gillette's acquisition of the company, along with the changing economic realities within the ski industry in which bigger was better, brought the development of the area to the fore. The opening of Vail's Back Bowls on the southern side of the drainage in 1988 marked the successful completion of the Master Plan's Category II. But poor business decisions and a turbulent national economy led Gillette to sell his beloved ski resorts to the investment firm Apollo Management L.P. in 1991 before Category III could be get started.

Gillette's sale of VA began a chain of events that led to conflict over Vail's Category III expansion. Soon after taking control of Vail and Beaver Creek, the newly formed Vail Resorts Inc. entered into negotiations with rival ski resort owner Ralston Corps to merge the two corporations' six ski resorts. The merger began the corporate consolidation of the Colorado ski industry, increasing ski resorts' ability to offer even greater amenities and terrain in order to remain competitive. Resorts throughout the state consolidated in order to expand in the hope that more ski slopes would translate into more skiers and snowboarders. Of all the consolidations and appropriations, Vail's proposed Category III expansion in 1994 drew the widest attention from ski enthusiasts and environmental critics. At the center of the fight over whether or not the giant ski resort should be allowed to expand into the region known as the Two Elks Roadless Area was the threatened Canadian lynx. Many biologists considered the region to be the home of the



elusive feline, despite the fact that there had not been a verifiable sighting in the area since the 1970s. Due to the resort expansion's potential harm to the lynx's habitat, and additional impacts on the local elk herd and other wildlife, environmental organizations, hunters, and even the Colorado Division of Wildlife voiced strong opposition to the Vail's expansion. Beside its impacts on wildlife, expansion opponents pointed to Vail Resort's planned development of the 5,000-acre Gillman property adjacent to the Two Elks Area as evidence that the expansion was more about real estate than it was about skiing. Vail Resorts denied such claims, stating that the expansion was just the completion of the resort's 1986 Master Plan created in conjunction with the industry's overseer, the Forest Service.

The ensuing fight between environmentalists and Vail Resort over Category III pit economic windfalls against changing environmental concerns, and underscored the Forest Service's unenviable position in balancing recreational demands with environmental concerns at the end of the twentieth century. By the mid-1990s, the fight over ski resorts on public lands became particularly virulent as corporate giants consolidated their ownership of resorts and they expanded in terms of terrain and real estate sales. But flattening skier numbers combined with growing market pressures to start what some ski industry critics called an arms race among resorts. In attempting to draw more visitors, resorts began building massive base villages, large terrain expansions, and other amenities, all of which further extended their ecological footprint, bringing about more criticism from scientists, environmentalists, and resort town residents.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Criticisms of the ski industry from the time are best summed up in Hal Clifford, *Downhill Slide: Why the Corporate Ski Industry is Bad for Skiing, Ski Towns, and the Environment* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2002); Daniel Glick, *Powder Burn*.

The arsons, which constituted the most recognized of the protests against the Cat III expansion, brought national attention to the radical environmental movement. Beginning in the mid-1970s, radical environmentalism grew into a widely visible, although relatively small movement. The most notorious radical group organized in 1980. Called Earth First!, the group's use of "monkeywrenching," or vandalism, in drawing attention to issues such as logging became highly controversial throughout the country, provoking a conservative backlash against conservationist groups and the eventual arrest of many of the organization's leaders by the FBI.<sup>7</sup> By the early 1990s, Earth First! had significantly backed away from its use of vandalism, giving rise to a much more violent group known as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). Dissatisfied with the direction of Earth First!, members of the ELF embraced a clandestine campaign of vandalism and arson to draw attention to environmental concerns. By far the most ambitious action taken by the ELF, the Vail Arsons drew the attention not only of the national media and federal law enforcement as well, which labeled the ELF and other extremists groups as the single greatest domestic terrorist threat. While critics argue that such a label stretches the bounds of credibility, particularly in the context of the Oklahoma City and numerous abortion clinic bombings, the FBI's focus on radical environmentalism during the 1990s demonstrates the tension between economic growth and the environment during the periods. Two key issues embodied in the fight over Vail Resort's Category III expansion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> On the use of "monkeywrenching" see: Dave Forman and Bill Haywood, *Ecodefence: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* 3rd ed. (Chico, CA: Abzug Press, 2002). For more on the history of Earth First! see: Susan Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs: Earth First! and the Environmental Movement* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> The debate over whether or not actions taken by groups such as the Earth Liberation Front constitute acts of terrorism stem largely from the perception of such attacks. Members of both the ELF and its sister organization the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) have long pointed out the fact that their actions have never

## The New Vail

In March 1983, forty-five-year-old George Gillette submitted an offer of \$20.75 per share of common stock and \$5 per share of preferred stock to the VA Board of Directors. The owner of multiple local television affiliates and a Wisconsin-based meat packing plant, Gillette had long desired to get into the ski industry, and VA appeared ripe for the taking. Believing the offer to be disingenuous, VA's board rejected the offer. In the letter responding to the bid, VA Board Chairman Benjamin Duke explained to Gillette, "[T]he Board of Vail Associates does not and has not considered the corporation for sale."<sup>9</sup> After having received a warm reception just months earlier from VA's majority stockholder the Goliad Oil and Gas Company of Dallas, Gillette was surprised by the board's decision. Believing that the board had "cooled" and its attitude and abruptly "switched" its attitude, Gillette sought clarification from VA board member Bob Parker. Parker explained that the board had never considered selling to Gillette or any other part.<sup>10</sup> But to outsiders, Gillette's bid, and its rejection, demonstrated that for the right price the ski resort giant could be bought.

The first suitor to seek acquiring VA following Gillette's failed attempt was the corporation's majority stockholder, Goliad Oil. Owned by brothers Henry and Dick Bass, the Texas oil company had seized majority control of VA in 1976, pushing the resort's founder Pete Seibert out as VA's chairman. Two months after rejecting Gillette's initial offer, Vail Associates Chairman Duke sat down with a Bass family representative,

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injured or killed anyone. Critics respond that tactics like arson are meant to intimidate and terrorize.

<sup>9</sup> H. Benjamin Duke, Jr. to George Gillett, Jr., July 29, 1983. Vail Associates Records. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>10</sup> H. Benjamin Duke, Jr. to Executive Committee of Vail Associates, Inc., Harry H. Frampton and Harry W. Whittington, March 28, 1984, Vail Associate Purchase. Vail Associates Records; Robert Parker, Confidential Memorandum, January 3, 1983. Vail Associates Records. Papers. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

Richard Rainwater, in London to discuss the potential sale of VA. Rainwater explained that the Bass Brothers wanted to acquire “an interest in Vail Associates,” and indicated that the interest could range from a minority position to total acquisition, depending on the circumstances of the offer.<sup>11</sup> After making an informal offer in July, the two brothers decided that they had no desire to purchase the entire company. The VA board next rejected an offer by the Pritzker Family Holdings, owners of the Hyatt hotel chain, before finally deciding to sell to an investment group led by controversial land developer Bill Walters. Involved in a \$500 million effort to build a shopping center in Aurora, Walters was later implicated in the Silverado banking scandal when the bank’s director, son of the current President, Neil Bush, loaned the developer \$106 million as a part of an alleged deal that led to the collapse of the bank and a \$1.6 federal billion bailout.<sup>12</sup> The Walters deal inevitably collapsed after Vail Associates and the real estate developer failed to reach an agreement on the final price. Finally, in August 1985, VA stockholders accepted Gillette’s offer, and Vail Associates became the sole property of Gillette Holdings.<sup>13</sup>

Vail blossomed under Gillette. Highly personable, he quickly became popular throughout the Eagle Valley for his freewheeling ways and passion for life. “I can’t always tell you what I am doing next week,” Gillette told a journalist in 1987, “but tomorrow afternoon I can, I’ll be out on the links with Gerry Ford.”<sup>14</sup> Born in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1938, Gillette began building his fortune at age twenty-six when he moved to Chicago to work for the financial consulting firm of McKinsey and Company. In 1967,

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<sup>11</sup> H. B. Duke, Jr. to the Board of Directors of Vail Associates, Inc., May 12, 1983. Papers. Vail Associates Inc. Box 3 Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>12</sup> “Walters Group to Buy Vail,” *The Denver Post*, June 23, 1985; Stephen Labaton, “Bush’s Son Defends Role at Failed Savings Unit,” *Washington Post*, May 24, 1990; Steven Wilmsen, *Silverado: Neil Bush and the Savings and Loan Scandal* (Washington, D.C.: National Press Books, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> “Vail, Beaver Creek Ski Resorts Sold,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 24, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Rinker Buck, “George Gillette’s Private World,” *Channels*, September 1987, 30.

he moved to Miami, where he became a minority partner in the Miami Dolphins and owner and CEO of the Harlem Globetrotters. As CEO of the barnstorming basketball team, Gillette organized Globetrotter Communications and acquired radio stations across the country in order to broadcast Globetrotter games. He then sold the team and communications company in 1977 to form the Gillette Communications Company, buying three small-market television stations throughout the Midwest. By 1987, Gillette owned twenty television stations, the Packerland Packing Company, and Vail Associates, Inc.<sup>15</sup>

The same year that Gillette took ownership of VA, the White River National Forest released its new Master Development Plan for Vail Ski Resort. Under the Ski Area Permit Act of October 22, 1986, ski areas operating under a Term Special Use Permit from the U.S. Forest Service were required to have a Master Development Plan as a condition of their permit. Intended merely as a planning tool, Master Development Plans were not meant to be decision-making documents such as environmental impact statements (EIS) or environmental assessments (EA). Rather, they allowed the Forest Service to evaluate the impacts of a ski resort on the national forest as a whole and provide comprehensive guidelines for the future management of the national forest lands ski areas leased. Site-specific proposals outlined under the Master Plan such as chairlifts, restaurants, and even trails still had to undergo an EIS or EA as outlined by National Environmental Policy Act prior to any approval by the Forest Service. So, while Master Plans outline larger environmental concerns over potential development by ski resorts, any individual developments were bound by NEPA to undergo an EIS or EA in order to

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Titus, "Gillette Ends 10-Year Reign at Vail," *Denver Business Journal*, June 14, 1996; Mike Taylor, "250 Private Companies—Generations of Gillettes," *ColoradoBiz Magazine*, September 13, 2004.

gain Forest Service approval. In recent years, environmental groups such as the Ski Area Citizens Coalition have pointed to Master Plans as indicators of a ski resort's potential environmental impacts by arguing that such plans indicate ski resort's potential terrain expansions. Such causal arguments are misleading as there is no direct causal link between Master Plans and any further resort expansion or development. Every ski resort on national forest land is required to have a master plan, many of which will never be followed through for various reasons such economics, skier demand, and practicality. The Forest Service struggles to keep this differentiation between potential and actual future development clear, as it often lead to misinformation and mistrust, especially between environmental groups and the agency.<sup>16</sup>

Drafted in 1986, Vail's Master Plan identified three major phases, or categories, for the resort's future development. Category I included approximately 2,000 acres within the existing administrative boundary of the resort. Category II added another 2,000 acres of terrain on the southern side of Vail Mountain, including the addition of the China Bowl, Teacup chairlift, a Nordic center and trail system in Benchmark and Mushroom Bowls, and the possibility of a new ski lift in the Cascade Village area. Finally, Category III was a development scenario for the south side of the Two Elks Roadless Area, a roughly 1,000-acre section of national forest land, of which roughly 60 percent lay within the existing ski area boundary. With its north-facing slopes and gentle terrain, Category III was ideal for intermediate skiers, Vail's bread and butter clientele. The Forest Service approved the development of Categories I and II in 1986, but required more comprehensive planning for Category III. The resort immediately set to work developing

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<sup>16</sup> Don R. Dressler, e-mail to author, December 11, 2007. On the Ski Area Citizens Coalition's use of Master Plans in scoring ski resorts' environmental impact, see <http://www.skiareacitizens.com/>.

Category II, placing Category III on the back burner for economic reasons until the mid-1990s.<sup>17</sup>

Vail celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1988 with the opening of the China Bowl, which included the newly constructed 33,000-square-foot Two Elks Lodge. The new terrain nearly doubled Vail's skiable acreage, unseating California's Mammoth Mountain as the largest ski resort in the United States. The following winter, Vail hosted the World Alpine Ski Championships, the first time the event had been held in Colorado since 1950. The most popular destination for both out-of-state and in-state skiers, the resort topped 1.4 million skier days—nearly 15 percent of the state's total skier days during the 1988–1989 ski season.<sup>18</sup> Vail was on a roll. Even Pete Seibert returned to work for the resort in 1990. “Five years ago this industry was in big trouble. But if you were to say it was in trouble today, you'd be wrong,” Gillette raved to reporters in a 1988 Manhattan press conference touting Vail's new expansion.<sup>19</sup>

In truth, Gillette was only half right. Skier numbers in Colorado had indeed risen from 7.8 million skier days during the 1980–1981 ski season to 9.8 million during the 1990–1991 season. But of the state's thirty ski resorts in 1990, only seven comprised more than 70 percent of the market.<sup>20</sup> These larger, more popular, resorts offered more terrain, faster ski lifts with greater capacity, grander on-mountain facilities, and most importantly, lodging. Vail and Beaver Creek continued to be among the most popular ski

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<sup>17</sup> Vail Master Development Plan, September 1985. White River National Forest, Holy Cross River Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; Record of Decision: Vail Category III Ski Area Development, August 1996. White River National Forest, Holy Cross River Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.

<sup>18</sup> C. R. Groeldner, et al. “The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998–99 Season” (Boulder: University of Colorado. Business Research Division, Graduate School of Business Administration), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Jon Bowermaster, “Who Skis?” *New York Times*, November 27, 1988.

<sup>20</sup> The seven largest Colorado ski resorts in 1988 in order of percentage of skier days were: Vail (15.7 percent), Breckenridge (11.3 percent), Steamboat (10.6 percent), Keystone (9.5 percent), Winter Park (9 percent), Copper Mountain (8 percent), and Snowmass (6 percent).

resorts for both destination and day-use visitors, winning the *Ski Magazine* readers' poll top North American resort award three years in a row—1989, 1990, and 1991.<sup>21</sup>

The good times came to a crashing halt for Gillette in 1991, when mounting debt brought about by poor business decisions and increased competition by cable television forced the mogul to sell VA to the investment firm Apollo Management L.P. In 1986, Gillette had teamed up with 1980s junk bond king Michael Milken, borrowing more than \$2 million from the infamous brokerage firm Drexel Burnham & Lambert. Gillette used the loans to purchase twelve television stations, including six from Storer Broadcasting Inc. Considered highly overvalued by Wall Street investors at the time, the Storer stations included CBS affiliates in Detroit, Cleveland, Atlanta, and San Diego. Woefully overextended, the dam began to crack for Gillette and others reliant on loans from firms dealing in high-yield bonds (more commonly known as junk bonds) in 1987 when the stock market dropped a record-breaking 508 points in a single day, the largest one-day decline in market's history.<sup>22</sup>

Following the stock market crash, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) launched two investigations into the lending practices of Drexel Burnham & Lambert, specifically into Milken's potential in insider trading practices. The SEC charged Milken with 98 counts of racketeering and fraud. Found guilty, Milken was sentenced to 10 years

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<sup>21</sup>Reade Bailey, "The Survey Says—SKI's Readers Tell Which North American Resorts Are Tops," *Ski Magazine*, October 1989, 94; Reade Bailey, "Top of the Charts—SKI's Readers Choices for America's Best Ski Resorts," *Ski Magazine*, October 1990, 56; Reade Bailey, "Chart Toppers—Readers' Picks of Top North American Resorts," *Ski Magazine*, October 1991, 44.

<sup>22</sup> The 1987 Stock Market collapse had a wide-ranging impact on the U.S. economy, and led to greater federal regulation and oversight over the country's financial market. It also marked the end of the widespread speculation of the 1980s, and the beginning of a period of corporate consolidation. Robert W. Kamphuis, Jr., Roger C. Kormendi, and J. W. Henry Watson, eds. *Black Monday and the Future of Financial Markets* (Chicago: Mid-America Institute for Public Policy Research, Inc., 1989); Albert Kaff, *Crash: Ten Days in October* (Chicago: Longman Financial Services, 1989); James Stewart, *Den Of Thieves* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); Robert Sobel, *Panic on Wall Street: History of America's Financial Disasters*, 2nd ed. (Frederick, MD: Beard Books, 1999).



in prison, of which he served two, and \$1 billion in fines and settlements.<sup>23</sup> The collapse of the stock market eroded the foundation of Gillette's empire, raising the interest on one of his loans for the Storer Broadcasting conglomerate from 7 percent to an untenable 20 percent. With loan payments ballooning out of control and increasing competition from cable stations causing a paradigm shift within the communications industry, Gillette declared bankruptcy. In 1991, he sold his holding company, which included VA, to Apollo Management.<sup>24</sup>

### The Consolidation of the Colorado Ski Industry

Crowned the "Black Prince of Wall Street," Leon Black had earned a reputation as a ruthless investor while working for Drexel Burnham & Lambert. A protégé of Michael Milkin and former director of Drexel Burnham & Lambert's marketing and acquisitions department, Black emerged from the SEC investigation of the failed investment firm virtually unscathed. After paying a \$18 million fine for his role in the junk bond scandal, he undauntedly founded the limited partnership firm Apollo Management. The firm soon became notorious for buying up companies that Black and the other managers of Drexel Burnham & Lambert had overburdened with debt, including Gillette Holdings, Inc., and then breaking them apart, selling the pieces for a hefty profit. After buying Gillette's debt, Black immediately sold the television stations and meat packing plant but kept the two ski resorts.<sup>25</sup> In order to balance the "preponderance of expert slopes at Beaver Creek," Black acquired the small Arrowhead Ski Area adjacent to Beaver Creek in

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<sup>23</sup> "Milkin's Plea Bargain," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 30, 1990; Matt Spetalnick, "Milkin's Next Venture," *Reuters*, April 4, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Buck, "George Gillette's Private World," 33; Linda Sandler, "George Gillette's TV Kingdom Could Turn into Vast Wasteland," *Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 1989, sec 3, 1; Glick, *Powder Burn*, 144-55.

<sup>25</sup> Beth Selby, "The Black Prince of Wall Street," *Institutional Investor*, August, 1991.

1993.<sup>26</sup> The addition of Arrowhead not only added needed intermediate terrain to the ski resort but also foreshadowed VA's future. By consolidating the Vail, Beaver Creek and Arrowhead resorts under the umbrella of VA, Black looked to gain greater control over the Colorado ski market, increase profits, and further the development of the Colorado ski country.

In 1996, Black hired former Norwegian Cruise Lines CEO Adam Aron as the new head of VA. Aron replaced Gillette, who had remained the acting CEO for the resort company since its sale five years earlier. By 1995, the former owner of Vail had been busily rebuilding his empire. Using his buyout of VA, he purchased five medium-sized ski resorts in California and New England, later adding Grand Targhee in Wyoming. Today, Gillette's Booth Creek Ski Holdings is the fourth-largest ski resort operator in North America. If Gillette was affable and well liked by many in the Eagle Valley, Aron was the opposite. Described by journalist Daniel Glick as un-athletic and disheveled with a gruff, hurried manner, Aron failed to fit in with Vail's active culture. Making matters worse, during his first season as CEO, Aron was not able to ski at all due to the aggravation of an old injury. In a town where a person's ability to ski rivaled wealth in terms of status, the perception that the forty-one-year-old Aron did not belong running the nation's premier ski resort quickly spread. Gillette may have mired the resort in debt, grumbled locals, but at least he could ski.<sup>27</sup>

While Vail and its neighboring ski resorts had always been controlled by corporate interests, the industry remained under the façade of being run by skiers—a perception of significant cultural importance, for if skiing was nothing more than a business, then it

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Hauk, "Arrowhead Supplement," Ski Areas Chronologies, Paul Hauk Papers. Box 1. Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>27</sup> Glick, *Powder Burn*, 55.

completely lost its allure to many recreationalists, or worse, its authenticity. Clearly, such realities never truly existed, but the perception of the ski industry being something more than a mere profit-making venture remained important to many people who both worked in the industry and visited the numerous ski resorts around the world. Aron had little time or interest in gaining locals' approval. Immediately upon taking control of VA, he revealed that the company would offer \$75 million in the company's stock on the New York Stock Exchange in order to pay off VA's remaining debts and to provide enough capital to purchase other ski resorts in the state. "It gives us flexibility in choosing our future financing mechanisms to fund growth," Vail President Andy Daly told reporters on the announcement of the company's initial share price offer.<sup>28</sup> The offering paved the way for the newly created public company to acquire other ski resorts throughout Colorado and the rest of the country, and to pay for the further expansion of Vail and Beaver Creek.

VA did not wait long to make its next move after going public. In late July, VA, now known as Vail Resorts Inc., announced a merger with St. Louis based Rolcorp Holdings Inc., owners of Breckenridge, Keystone, and Arapahoe Basin ski resorts. The deal would make Vail Resorts the largest ski resort owner in Colorado and one of the largest in North America. The second most popular ski resort in the state, Breckenridge often rivaled Vail in skier visits, while Keystone ranked third in total skier days, attracting nearly 1 million skier visits per year. Arapahoe Basin, on the other hand, accounted for only 241,435 skiers and snowboarders, a meager 2.1 percent of the market, during the 1995–96 season.<sup>29</sup> Critics immediately noted that not only would the deal would give the new

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<sup>28</sup> Alex Berenson, "Vail Resorts to Sell \$75 Million in Stock," *The Denver Post*, June 7, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Penny Parker, "Merger Announcement Stirs Blizzard of Questions," *The Denver Post*, July 28, 1996.

corporation control of nearly 38 percent of the Colorado ski market, but that all five resorts involved in the deal lay within a few hours' drive of the Front Range, effectively cornering both the state's local and destination skier markets. Concerns over the merger stemmed from two seemingly contradictory fears. The first was the worry that the merger would lead to price gouging by Vail Resorts. The second was that Vail Resorts would enjoy an unequal competitive advantage over other ski resorts in the region by giving the corporate giant a virtual monopoly.

Concerns over the consolidation of North America's ski resorts stemmed from the fear that the creation of megaresorts would squeeze out smaller market resorts. Operators of smaller ski areas such as the diminutive Silver Creek, located just outside the mountain community of Granby, came to believe that the merger would threaten their ability to remain competitive. Silver Creek's CEO Steve Bromberg feared that if Vail absorbed all three Ralcorp resorts and was able to sell a five-mountain ticket or season pass, it would cripple the small ski resort. Other resorts, including Silver Creek's neighbor Winter Park, also feared the merger would change the industry's economics. By controlling more than one-third of the market and undercutting season ticket prices, the new megaresort could cause the collapse of several ski areas throughout the state. This not only led to fears of economic collapses in rural counties reliant on tourist dollars, but also the abandonment of ski resorts on public lands. The merger, opponents argued, was effectively the monopolization of the industry.

In the summer of 1996, The U.S. Justice Department and Colorado State Attorney General's office began a several-month-long investigation into the merger, paying critical attention to the market share issue. Fearing a Justice Department rejection of the merger,

Vail Resorts offered to donate Arapahoe Basin to the state. Justice Department officials refused the deal, believing it would set the bad precedent of allowing companies to give large holdings as charity to the state and then write off the offering as a tax-exempt gift.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, both the Justice Department and the state objected to the merger itself, citing that it violated antitrust laws. With the merger in doubt, Vail Resorts sought to sell Arapahoe Basin to make the deal more palatable for the Justice Department. The diminutive ski area quickly became the center of a contentious battle over the future of the Colorado ski industry, revealing the many concerns over the industry's consolidation and its impacts on the state's economy, politics, and environment.

After reviewing the specifics of the merger, Justice Department officials approved the deal, but only if Vail Resorts divested itself of Arapahoe Basin by June. This stipulation satisfied Justice Department concerns that consumers would have adequate options when choosing where to ski, while at the same time allowing the market to determine costs. Critics from both sides blasted the decision. Operators of small ski areas reliant on Front Range skiers for their survival argued that the merger would threaten their very survival. Others, including American Ski Company Chief Executive Les Otten, who had recently lost a battle with the Justice Department over his company's attempt to acquire four ski resorts in New England, argued that the federal government had no role in regulating the ski industry at all. "I believe it's wrong for our government to spend taxpayer money trying to regulate industries that are totally discretionary and deal with recreation that can

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<sup>30</sup> Penny Parker, "Vail Resorts Offered State A-Basin, Justice Department Nixed Proposal Deal," *The Denver Post*, August 23, 1996.

be replaced with other recreation,” Otten told reporters following the announcement of the Vail Resorts-Rolcorp merger.<sup>31</sup>

Despite such protests, the Justice Department maintained their decision. Denver officials immediately decried the decision. “These people must be smoking something,” Denver City Attorney Daniel Muse told reporters. “They're suggesting that A-Basin is competitive, in terms of the type of skiing and amenities—with Beaver Creek, Vail, Breckenridge and Keystone. Arapahoe Basin is a spartan, macho skiing environment, the access is terrible and it has no amenities.”<sup>32</sup> Muse had a point. Located on Loveland Pass, Arapahoe Basin was the smallest of the three Rolcorp ski areas, and also had the fewest amenities beyond a small ski lodge and a handful of ski lifts. On the other hand, Keystone and Breckenridge lay near the towns of Frisco and Dillon and offered the potential for significant real estate development at their base. In fact, Vail Resorts had already made a deal with ski giant Intrawest to build a resort village at the base of Keystone. Real estate, not ski numbers, seemed to be the true heart of the deal.

The merger stirred a blizzard of questions by Front Range skiers who wanted to know what the merger would mean to their wallet. Vail president Daily allayed Front Range skiers' fears over lift ticket price increases by announcing that the company would offer a discount card that allowed skiers to save on the cost of day lift tickets to all five of the company's mountains, and with the continuation of the popular Summit Pass season ticket, which allowed its holders to ski at the four resorts in Summit County. Such a plan was nothing new. Several ski resorts along the Interstate 70 corridor had long used such discounts to attract Front Range skiers, who historically made up 30 percent of the state's

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<sup>31</sup> Penny Parker, “Inside Vail's Merger Market Share Fed's Concern,” *The Denver Post*, January 12, 1997.

<sup>32</sup> Penny Parker, “Vail Deal Challenged Again Denver Now Hopes to Convince Judge,” *The Denver Post*, July 26, 1997.

ski market. Resorts along the Interstate 70 corridor, especially those in Summit and Grand counties, enjoyed a much larger percentage of Front Range business. An internal marketing survey in 1986 reported that more than half of all Winter Park's visitors lived in Colorado, the majority along Front Range.<sup>33</sup> Resorts farther from the Denver metropolitan area, such as Steamboat, received far fewer day visitors but still marketed to Front Range skiers and snowboarders in hopes of boosting sales. The industry primarily targeted destination visitors who spent more money on lodging, food, rentals, and entertainment than day visitors. Even without Arapahoe Basin, Vail Resorts would control 35 percent of the Colorado ski market. Vail allayed Front Range skiers' concerns that the new mega-ski company would raise lift ticket prices by announcing the creation of a new season pass which would allow its holders access to all five of Vail Resort's mountains.

In protest of the merger and its potential effects on the ski industry within the state, the City and County of Denver, owner of Winter Park Ski Resort, filed a thirteen-page opposition letter with the U.S. Department of Justice. City officials pressed the Justice Department to nullify the deal citing their forecast that the merger would cost the city the roughly \$2 million in annual payments it received from the nonprofit Winter Park Recreation Association (WPRA) that had managed Winter Park Ski Resort for the city since 1950. The \$2 million came from a deal struck between the city and the ski resort in 1994, when then Denver Mayor Wellington Webb sought to solve a shortfall within the city's budget by brokering a deal in which the would make annual payments to the city

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<sup>33</sup> Colorado Ski Country USA, in conjunction with the Colorado Association of Ski Towns and Public Service Company of Colorado, *The Colorado Ski Industry, 1991* (Denver: Browne, Bortz and Coddington Inc., 1991), 3; Winter Park Marketing Survey, 1985–1986. Winter Park Resort Marketing Department, Winter Park Resort, Colorado. Colorado Ski Country USA reported that of the 9.8 millions skier days during 1991, 30 percent were made by “day visitors,” or local and regional skiers.

based on a formula of skier days, overall sales, and capital improvements. As a city park run by a nonprofit organization, Winter Park had long been embroiled in battles over its revenues. In 1987, the ski resort won a lawsuit brought by Grand County, home to the resort, over its tax-free status. Grand County officials had argued that the ski resort had drifted so far from the city of Denver that it could no longer be considered a part of the city. The county had hoped to gain \$90,000 in annual taxes it estimated the ski resort did not pay due to its status as a Denver city park.<sup>34</sup> Failing in court, many both within the county and elsewhere in the state pressed for the sale of the ski resort to a private owner, but following the painful public debacle over the delayed opening of the newly constructed Denver International Airport, Webb refused to sell, citing that he did not want to be remembered as the mayor who lost Winter Park.<sup>35</sup> Besides this political hurdle, any potential sale of Winter Park would have involved the Alberg Club, which still owned a large property between the Mary Jane and Winter Park base areas, making any sale of the ski resort a “shotgun wedding from hell.”<sup>36</sup> For these reasons, Denver refused to sell the ski area, and so faced the problem of competing with a corporate giant. While the Justice Department sympathized with the city’s plight, the agency refused to block the merger.

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<sup>34</sup> “WP Not Taxable: County Appeal of District Court Decide Uncertain,” *Winter Park Manifest*, January 29, 1987; “Winter Park Ski Area Estimated Actual Value,” Grand County Assayer’s Office. Thanks to Stew Findley for providing this number.

<sup>35</sup> Though begun by former Denver Mayor Federico Pena, who later became Secretary of the Department of Transportation under President William Clinton, Denver International Airport opened under Wellington Webb’s term as mayor. Cost overruns of Denver’s new airport ballooned to more than \$5.3 billion by its opening in 1991. The city’s headaches continued when the new airport did not open on time due to the failure of the airport’s automated baggage handling system, causing Denver officials to temporarily reopen Stapleton International Airport after all the furniture had been moved to the new airport. See Paul Stephen Dempsey, Andrew Goetz, and Joseph Szyliowicz, *Denver International Airport: Lessons Learned* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Penny Parker, “Filing by Denver Opposes Vail Resort Merger,” *The Denver Post*, April 8, 1997; Medill Barnes to Bruce Alexander and Cathy Reynolds, co-chairs Winter Park Advisory Committee, January 18, 1994, transcript of memo in author’s possession.



In response to Denver's failure to stop the merger, Winter Park drastically cut the price of its season pass to \$200 for the following season. The cut began a price war among Colorado resorts. To many, even the most unenthusiastic skiers, the deal was too good to pass up. Season pass sales skyrocketed, soaring 68 percent over the prior winter. The heavily discounted season passes came at a moment of mounting criticism over the affordability of skiing. Lift ticket prices had risen from an average of \$32.78 per day throughout the Rocky Mountain region in 1994 to \$47.89 in 1998—a 46 percent increase in just four years.<sup>37</sup> While consumers grumbled about the price hike, ski industry insiders pointed out that actual profit dropped a net 10 percent during the same period.<sup>38</sup> But such arguments failed to convince consumers. As the authors of the 1999 National Ski Areas Association's End of Season Survey explained, "[T]he ski industry has a reputation for being expensive based in large part on advertised ticket prices, yet actual prices paid by the consumer are considerably lower than retail window prices."<sup>39</sup> While many skiers and snowboarders purchased regular lift tickets through discount distributors or in package deals, the fact remained that consumers viewed skiing as too expensive based largely upon lift ticket prices. Other costs such as meals, rentals, lodging, and transportation also skyrocketed. Two-dollar Cokes and five-dollar hamburgers quickly became the standard in many ski resort cafeterias. Ski rentals for a family of four for a week could be as expensive as five hundred dollars. Price increases reflected ski resort's

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<sup>37</sup> *Kottke National End of Season Survey 1998/1999* (Lakewood, CO: National Ski Areas Association, 1999), 27; *Kottke National End of Season Survey 1994/1995* (Lakewood, CO: National Ski Areas Association, 1995), 18. The National Ski Areas Association defines the Rocky Mountain region as the states of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico. The region included only ninety-three of the nation's 520 ski resorts but represents roughly 35 percent of the total number of ski days nationwide.

<sup>38</sup> To measure profits ski resorts rely on a formula dividing total revenues by total skier visits to measure yield: the greater the yield, the greater the profit.

<sup>39</sup> *Kottke National End of Season Survey 1998/1999*, 31.

mounting operation costs, as ski resorts spent millions on capital improvements to compete in an increasingly tight market where every dollar counted in maximizing shareholders' profits.

Even with increased revenues from improved season pass sales, Winter Park and other resorts faced a tough battle in attracting the more lucrative destination visitors. By 1999, it was very apparent that Winter Park would not be able to remain competitive with megaresort conglomerates such as Vail Resorts. A decision needed to be made. Would Winter Park remain small and cater to a more weekend-orientated clientele? Or would it swing for the fences and build a base village to compete with the Vails in the industry? After months of hearings and closed-door meetings, the decision was made to develop a village at the base of Winter Park. By this time, two massive buildings had already been constructed at the resort's base area. But the City of Denver was not in an economic position or political mood to manage a resort. After failing to meet its yearly payments to the city for a second time the Winter Park needed help. Denver began looking for a partner to manage the ski resort. After a yearlong search, city officials selected resort developer giant Intrawest to manage and develop a village at the base of Winter Park.<sup>40</sup>

The deal between the City of Denver and the Canadian resort developer was one of the many acquisitions by Intrawest during the 1980s and 1990s. Begun as a real estate development firm in 1976, Intrawest purchased British Columbian Blackcomb Ski Resort in 1984. By 1993, Intrawest was the largest ski resort owner in Canada, having purchased the Tremblant Ski Resort in Quebec and Panorama Mountain in British Columbia. The resort giant began looking outside of Canada and in 1996, when it purchased Copper

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<sup>40</sup> Jason Blevins, "Intrawest Gains Leverage at Denver Area Ski Resort, *Denver Post* September 2, 2002; Kristi Arellano, "Denver Signs Deal for Intrawest to Operate Winter Park Ski Area," *Denver Post* December 24, 2002.

Mountain in Colorado. The same year, Intrawest merged Blackcomb with neighboring Whistler Ski Resort, creating the largest ski resort in North America—spanning 8,100 acres over two mountains. Along with Vail Resorts Inc., and the New England-based American Ski Company, Intrawest became one of the “Big Three” ski resort conglomerates in North America. The dominance of the Big Three demonstrated the increasingly competitive nature of the ski industry in North America and the need for greater capital to build new facilities to attract visitors and ensure future profits.

Using Vail as a model, growing numbers of North American ski resorts like Winter Park began developing multi-million-dollar base villages. With hundreds of condominiums, ski and snowboard rental shops, bars, and restaurants all within walking distance of ski lifts, these postmodern visions of alpine villages offered everything visitors could want and more. While weekend condo and ski rentals provided millions in revenue, the condominium sales also produced mountains of cash for resorts. Buyers spent as much as \$579,000 for 878-square-foot, two-bedroom slopeside condominiums in Winter Park’s new village.<sup>41</sup> Resorts quickly realized that selling slopeside condos for \$500,000 each was much more lucrative than selling lift tickets, even at \$48 apiece. By 2000, it was difficult to find any ski resort in North America that did not already have, or was not in the process of developing, a base village complete with condominiums, coffee shops, boutique restaurants, bars, spas, and ski rental shops. While such development increased ski resorts’ revenues, it was still drawing visitors to the mountain where they made their money. To attract more business, ski resorts needed to offer visitors more on-mountain facilities and especially more terrain.

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<sup>41</sup> “Zephyr Mountain Lodge Availability of Condominiums,” Sales Pamphlet. Intrawest Playground Destinations Properties, Inc., December 11, 2006.

## The Fight over Category III

In February 1994, Vail Ski Resort submitted a request to the Forest Service requesting approval to develop the Two Elks Roadless Area as originally outlined in its 1985 Master Plan. Lying south of Vail's China Bowl, the rolling Two Elks area included mellow north-facing slopes covered in lodgepole pine and aspen trees. Its topography and northern exposure made it ideal for intermediate-level skiing, a fact that had not been overlooked by the resort's founders during the early 1960s. Much of the area had been included in the ski resort's original 1962 permit, with the rest added after the 1986 environmental review of the Vail Master Plan. Vail's 1994 request began a two-and-a-half-year study by the Forest Service that resulted in the release of a Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS). Contained in two volumes, the Vail Category III Development DEIS was an exhaustive study of the potential environmental, economic, and social impacts of the proposed Category III development. The Category III DEIS proposed four options, labeled Alternative A, B, C, and D. Alternative A proposed not developing the Two Elks area at all. Alternative B offered the development of only the Center Ridge section of the area in order to protect wildlife habitat. The Forest Service's preferred choice, known as Alternative C, was the development of all 885 acres of skiable terrain, 63 percent of which would be left "naturally open." Only one road would be allowed into the area to provide maintenance access for the top terminal of a high-speed ski lift. Alternative C also included the construction of two picnic decks, and two warming huts, three bridges crossing the Two Elk Creek, and a fourth over a tributary. And lastly,

Alternate D proposed development of the area as outlined in the 1985 Master Development Plan.<sup>42</sup>

Released for public comment in November 1995, the DEIS immediately came under attack by environmental groups, local municipalities, and even the Colorado Division of Wildlife. The Forest Service held three public meetings pertaining to the draft statement and extended the comment period an extra thirty days to accommodate the hundreds of interested parties who wanted to voice their opinion on the proposed expansion. The vast majority of comments submitted to the Forest Service came from individuals rather than environmental organizations or government agencies. Of these, the majority came from those voicing their opposition to the expansion. But, in the words of White River National Forest Supervisor Martha Kettele, such comments often failed to provide specific and practical concerns that fell within the scope of the DEIS. “This is unfortunate, because the comments that were the most useful were those which raise substantive concerns or questions about the contents of the Draft Supplement,” she wrote in the Category III Record of Decision.<sup>43</sup>

Public comments are an often-misunderstood component of the EIS process. Many who voice their opinion on the management of public lands expect that their concerns will be taken seriously, and expect that if popular opinion opposes a proposed action by the government then it will be abandoned or at least modified to meet the majority’s concerns. This is not the case. Rather, environmental impact statements merely ensure compliance with the law. Mike Dombeck, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service under

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Forest Service, Final Environmental Impact Statement Vail Category III Ski Area Development: White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, Volume I, U. S. Department of Agriculture, August 1996, 2-15–2-17.

<sup>43</sup> Record of Decision: Vail Category III Ski Area Development, August 1997, White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 12.

President William Clinton and professor of Global Conservation at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, points out that because of the way the environmental review process works agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service are not required to alter or cancel proposals based on the majority view. Often organizations that oppose an agency's decision will mobilize their members in a letter-writing campaign to send in comments that fall outside the scope of the review, and typically fail to offer substantive concerns or questions regarding the draft EIS. However, many environmentalists argue in deciding the management of public lands the entire public should be heard, regardless of where they live or their knowledge of the specific technical and scientific issues considered by the Forest Service and its fellow land management agencies. Land management agencies argue that though allowing popular sentiment to decide land policy is democratic, it is also unrealistic and would cause what is already a cumbersome and highly contested process to become even more mired in political fighting. "That is why we go to court so much," stated Sierra Club legal director Pat Gallagher. In fact, the courts offer the true means by which individuals and organizations to oppose, and even stop, proposed projects on public lands. While public comments often reflect the divergent views on public land development, they are not meant to empower citizens to affect public land management policy but rather are compliance with federal law. Such was the case with the Forest Service's decision on Category III.<sup>44</sup>

Though the Forest Service viewed the vast majority of comments as outside the scope of the study, comments from the Colorado Department of Wildlife (CDOW), which

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<sup>44</sup> Jennifer Anderson, "Is The Public Being Heard?" *Wilderness Magazine*, 2007–2008. <http://www.wilderness.org/library/magazine/2007/comments.cfm>. Also see Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 281; Todd Wilkinson, *Science Under Siege: The Politicians' War on Science and the Truth* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1998), 196; Lynton Keith Caldwell, *The National Environmental Policy Act: An Agenda for the Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 1–22.

denounced the proposed expansion, carried more weight. The state agency attacked the Forest Service's scientific evidence, arguing that the Category III expansion would have wide-ranging negative environmental impacts, particularly on the elusive Canadian lynx. In its forty-page review of the DEIS, CDOW biologists blasted the Forest Service, stating the draft lacked "citation of technical literature and supporting documentation for contentions relating to impacts." They also contended that the preparers of the document "not only failed to obtain past and ongoing studies but failed to contact wildlife professionals that have years of field work" in the area.<sup>45</sup> CDOW officials argued that the DEIS contained conclusions which ignored years of observation and wildlife studies and that the conclusions in the DEIS could not be accepted unless these were re-addressed in a scientifically credible manner. Among these conclusions were the impact of human development on wildlife habitat, specifically those of the area's lynx and elk populations.

Relations between the Forest Service and the CDOW over Vail had long been strained. The Forest Service had failed to include CDOW in making the 1985 Master Development Plan for Vail Ski Resort and the subsequent mitigation agreement with the ski resort regarding future expansion projects. Prior the 1991 sale of VA, the two agencies signed a memorandum of understanding in which they agreed to include each other in decisions of mutual concern. The CDOW argued that the Forest Service ignored the memorandum when, before the release of the Category III DEIS, the federal agency

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<sup>45</sup> Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Colorado Division of Wildlife Detailed Comments Vail Category III Ski Area Development Draft EIS, January 26, 1996, 1. In United States Forest Service, Final Environmental Impact Statement Vail Category III Ski Area Development: White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, Volume II, U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 1996, 3-11.

informed the CDOW that no such study would be completed.<sup>46</sup> The Forest Service responded that the DEIS provided “an adequate foundation upon which to make an informed decision regarding the Cat III proposal.”<sup>47</sup> But CDOW had grave concerns over the status of the lynx.



Photograph 13. Canadian Lynx. Colorado Division of Wildlife

Roughly twice the size of a housecat, with large paws and heavy coats making them well suited for cold, mountainous climates, the Canadian lynx became the symbol of the fight over the Category III expansion. Historically, the lynx’s range stretched throughout much of North America, dipping as far south as the southern Colorado Rockies. That was until 1973, when hunters trapped the last known lynx in Colorado near Vail. “This puts the lynx as considerably more rare [*sic*] than, say, UFOs,” wrote *Denver Post* columnist

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<sup>46</sup> CDOW Response, Vail Category III Ski Area Expansion Response to Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Statement, August 1996. White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Record of Decision: Vail Category III Ski Area Development, August 1996. White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 10.



Al Knight in a December 1997 op-ed.<sup>48</sup> CDOW district managers found lynx tracks in the area in 1989, but no confirmed sightings of the enigmatic predator had occurred in more than three decades when the Forest Service signed off on the Category III expansion. However, two government biologists had independently sighted a cat in the Vail area the year before.<sup>49</sup> The DEIS severely rankled many within the CDOW, which had already listed the lynx as an endangered species within the state.

Forest Service and CDOW differed on whether the cat qualified as an endangered species as outlined by the Endangered Species Act. After declining to place the lynx on the endangered species list in 1994 due to a lack of sufficient information on the cat, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) reversed its decision two years later and listed the lynx as a Species of Concern.<sup>50</sup> While not the status many Category III opponents had hoped for, the FWS's decision gave environmentalists hope that the Forest Service would change its mind on allowing the Category III to proceed. It did not. Arguing that few lynx existed in Colorado, Forest Service officials declared that the area was a questionable habitat for the cat and that the ski resort's development would cause no significant impact.<sup>51</sup> The decision enraged environmental groups, which sued the agency over its decision. Although the courts sided with the environmentalists and placed the lynx on the endangered species list in 1997, the listing did not stop Vail's planned expansion.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Al Knight, "Missing Lynx: Vail Plan Eases Way for Species," *The Denver Post*, December 14, 1997.

<sup>49</sup> *Colorado Environmental Coalition, et al v. Dombeck*, 185 F.3d 1162, 1166 (10th Cir. 1999).

<sup>50</sup> Robert Stewart, Regional Environmental Officer to Loren Kroenke, January 11, 1996. In U.S. Forest Service, *Final Environmental Impact Statement Vail Category III Ski Area Development: White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, Volume II*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 1996.

<sup>51</sup> Record of Decision: Vail Category III Ski Area Development, August 1996, White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 33.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Derr, "Starvation Intrudes in a Bid to Save the Lynx," *New York Times* April 27, 1997, F3; Keith Kloor, "Lynx and Biologists try and Recover After Disastrous Start," *Science*, vol. 282, July 16, 1999, 320-

Fearing federal government intervention, as well as the possibility of placing of the lynx on the endangered species list, Colorado had reintroduced several lynx in the southwestern corner of the state in 1997. Despite facing criticism over the starvation of many of the initially reintroduced 255 cats, CDOW officials pressed forward with the \$1.4 million project, and by 2006, approximately two hundred lynx called Colorado home.

Lynx were not the only wildlife impacted by the expansion. In 1995, wildlife biologists James Morrison, William de Vergie, William Alldredge, Eugene Byrne, and William Andree released the findings of their seven-year study of two elk herds on the Vail and Beaver Creek ski resorts. Beginning in 1988, Vail undertook the largest ski resort expansion to date with the development of its back bowls. Adding 1,902 acres of skiable terrain, the Tea Cup, China, and Siberia bowls more than doubled the resort's size. At the same time, Beaver Creek built the Trapper's Cabin lodge and a picnic area overlooking Mud Springs. The study compared the number of elk on both resorts before and after each development. Elk activity overall decreased 70 percent on Vail following the development of the back bowls, China Bowl, the most heavily impacted of the area, saw elk use decrease 96 percent. And while elk use rebounded to 76 percent to predevelopment numbers by 1992, it rebounded by only 44 percent in the China Bowl. "Although our data indicate a linear increase in use after development," warned the authors, "this increase in elk use may level off and never approach pre-development conditions."<sup>53</sup>

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321; Colorado Division of Wildlife, "Lynx Overview,"

<http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies/SpeciesOfConcern/Mammals/Lynx/LynxOverview.htm>

<sup>53</sup> James Morrison, et al., "The Effects of Ski Area Expansion on Elk," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 23 (1995): 481-89, 487.

Elk migration and migration out of the back bowls began a ripple effect. Unable to compete with the larger elk for food, deer moved farther down the mountains into the valleys, which were being developed into condominiums, strip malls, and second homes. Both deer and elk lost in this conflict between wildlife and development, often starving to death during the long winter months due to a lack adequate habitat. Making matters worse, Interstate 70 bisected the Eagle River Valley, essentially corralling wildlife on one side or the other of the high-speed four-lane highway. Deer and elk that attempted to cross the highway created immense dangers for both themselves and drivers. Biologists estimated that in 1991, a heavy snow year, more than seven thousand deer were killed on Colorado highways. That number has only increased as more automobiles traveled on the nation's rural highways and interstates.<sup>54</sup>

The segmentation of elk and deer habitat by highways and other development created another major dilemma. With less land to migrate through and forage on, both species of ungulates experienced significant decreases in population. This issue of population reduction became a major point of contention between the Forest Service and CDOW over the federal agency's interpretation of the Morrison report, which examined the potential impact of the Category III expansion on the area's elk population. Citing the Morrison report, the Forest Service stated that "elk use returned to 76 percent of it pre-

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<sup>54</sup> Laura A. Romin and John A. Bissonette, "Deer: Vehicle Collisions: Status of State Monitoring Activities and Mitigation Efforts," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 276–83, 278; M. P. Huijser, P. McGowen, J. Fuller, A. Hardy, A. Kociolek, A. P. Clevenger, D. Smith, and R. Ament, "Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Study," Report to Congress. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Washington, D.C., August 2007; Howard Pankratz, "Helping Wildlife Cross Road Plans for Under- and Overpasses are Response to Surge in Animal-Vehicle Accidents," *Denver Post*, February 2, 2008. A study conducted by Montana State University for the Federal Highway Administration showed that accidents between automobiles and wildlife doubled between 1990 and 2004. Costs in vehicle damage, injury (of both human and animal), and property exceeds \$15 million per year. The majority of fatal accidents in Colorado involved deer and elk. To mitigate this problem, the Colorado Department of Transportation recently announced plans to construct a wildlife bridge, that when completed will allow elk, deer, moose, mountain lion, and lynx to cross Interstate 70 safely.

development means within the 4 years following implementation of the China Bowl development,” and thus elk activity in the Category III area “should not be extrapolated to expect full recovery.”<sup>55</sup> In their comments on the draft EIS, CDOW biologists strongly disagreed with the Forest Service’s conclusion, pointing out that the elk population in China Bowl returned to only 44 percent of predevelopment levels. “We believe that the elk studies completed on-site in the last ten years show that elk use has remained less than 50 percent of pre-disturbance levels since short-term human precedence that included habitat alternation.” The Forest Service responded that it had incorporated the Morrison report into its final EIS and believed that certain design modification to the plan would minimize impacts on elk activity in the area.<sup>56</sup> The two agencies continued to differ in opinion on the impact of the development on the local elk herds.

Prior to the Forest Service’s final decision, an article in the November 1996 issue of *Denver Westword News* drew attention to the difficulties between the two agencies over the Category III expansion. When asked about the length of the state agency’s exhaustive forty-page critique of the DEIS, Bill Andree, Vail district wildlife manager for CDOW, dryly answered, “That would indicate that we had some problems with it.” The magazine cited internal Division of Wildlife e-mails which questioned the science within the Forest Service’s draft. In one particular case, CDOW wildlife management supervisor Rick Kahn wrote that the state agency believed that the Forest Service was “using some

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<sup>55</sup> Final Environmental Impact Statement Vail Category III Ski Area Development, August 1996, Volume 1, White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 4–73.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Forest Service, Final Environmental Impact Statement Vail Category III Ski Area Development: White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, Volume II, U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 1996, 3–56.

‘contrived logic’ in their biological evaluation.”<sup>57</sup> The CDOW submitted two alternative plans that differed significantly from the Forest Service’s Proposed Action by drastically lowering the level of development through changing the alignment of trails, reducing or eliminating development along both sides of Two Elks Creek, and reducing the size of the ski area permit boundary to fit the only developed area.<sup>58</sup>

On August 16, 1996, White River Forest Supervisor Veto J. LaSalle signed off on the Category III expansion, justifying his decision by arguing that the expansion would “provide a great variety of terrain for various levels, and make more efficient use of both on-mountain and Town of Vail infrastructure during non-peak portions of the ski season.”<sup>59</sup> Critics of the Forest Service’s decision on Category III, such as former Colorado Environmental Coalition director Rocky Smith, argued that the Record of Decision (ROD) demonstrated the incestuous relationship between the Forest Service and the ski industry.<sup>60</sup> Not unlike criticisms of the agency’s collusion with the timber industry by environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and EarthFirst!, many of the same organizations pointed to the favorable Category III decision as proof that the Forest Service was working hand-in-hand with the ski industry to develop public lands for commercial use. Why should the Forest Service, an agency that protected public lands, help develop them? The answer was simple. In order to follow the multiple-use policy mandated by the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the Forest Service often

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<sup>57</sup> Tony Perez-Giese, “The Missing Lynx,” *Denver Westword News*, November 6, 1996.

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Forest Service, Final Environmental Impact Statement Vail Category III Ski Area Development: White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, Volume II, U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 1996, 3–11.

<sup>59</sup> Record of Decision: Vail Category III Ski Area Development, August 1996, White River National Forest, Holy Cross Ranger District, Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Rocky Smith, April 8, 2008.

supported the development of ski resorts, often pointing to the more than 50 million visitors to the nation's ski resorts located on national forest lands as proof that it was providing the greatest good to the greatest number. Many in the Forest Service argued that ski resorts provided an essential recreational use and impacted less than one-tenth of one percent of all national forest lands.

While such arguments hold some truth, the relationship between the Forest Service and the ski industry has been troublesome. As historian Paul Hirt noted, “[W]here public lands and resources are concerned, the federal government has joined in partnership with private corporations to convert forests into capital to sustain the accumulation of wealth for organized business interests under the assumption that national greatness is thereby preserved and the public welfare advanced.”<sup>61</sup> Though Hirt speaks of the timber industry, the Forest Service has long cooperated with other industries including grazing, mining, and recreation to develop public lands for private gain. Forest Service officials often see it as their job to ensure that ski resorts remain open to serve public demands—demands the Forest Service is required to meet under its multiple use philosophy. However, the Forest Service does not have the money or the manpower to develop and maintain the number of ski areas needed to meet public demand. To solve this problem, the agency relies on private interests to develop and run the hundreds of ski areas on national forests across the country. This public-private relationship appears as a simple and efficient solution to the problem of meeting public demands for recreation. But the consolidation of the ski industry during the 1990s changed this relationship by forcing ski resorts into a continuous state of expansion in order to remain competitive. While the Forest Service

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Hirt, *A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests since World War Two* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), xxxv–xxxvi.

remained true to its mandate, the ski industry changed. By the mid-1990s, the Colorado ski industry had grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Investor demands to maximize revenues forced resorts to invest not only in real estate development in addition to on-mountain facilities in order to attract more customers. The Forest Service promoted such development. Vail Ski Resort's original 1962 permit had included both the Category II and Category III expansions, as had the 1986 Master Plan. The approval of the Category III expansion was wholly consistent with Forest Service's history of promoting outdoor recreation and the development of ski resorts. Environmental groups had often attacked Forest Service policies that promoted the development of recreational facilities on public lands, believing that corporate profits had trumped wildlife protection. To many environmental groups, Category III was just a continuation of the Forest Service kowtowing to the demands of ski resorts to add to resorts' bottom lines.

Believing that the Forest Service had failed to properly analyze the environmental impacts, especially those on the lynx's habitat, of the proposed expansion, a coalition of environmental organizations filed suit in federal court in June 1998. Rocky Smith, spokesman for co-plaintiff Colorado Environmental Coalition, told reporters, "It seems like the Forest Service was just an agent for Vail in this case, and that's really sickening. We're hoping to cause a re-evaluation and eventually convince the Forest Service that this project is not in the public interest."<sup>62</sup> On October 14, the United States 10th Circuit Court denied the injunction, giving Vail the green light to begin construction. Five days later, William Rogers set fire to three buildings and four ski lifts on top of Vail Ski Resort.

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<sup>62</sup> Jim Hughes, "Vail Expansion Challenged Conservation Coalition Files Suit against Forest Service," *The Denver Post*, June 12, 1998.

Following the arsons, Rogers and his accomplice Chelsea Gerlach made their way to Denver. There, Gerlach sent an e-mail taking credit for the fires. The e-mail read:

On behalf of the lynx, five buildings and four ski lifts at Vail were reduced to ashes on the night of Sunday, October 18th. Vail, Inc. is already the largest ski operation in the North America and now wants to expand even further. The 12 miles of roads and 885 acres of clearcuts will ruin the last, best lynx habitat in the state. Putting profits ahead of Colorado's wildlife will not be tolerated. This action is just a warning. We will be back if this greedy corporation continues to trespass into wild and unroaded areas. For your safety and convenience we strongly advise skiers to choose other destinations until Vail cancels its inexcusable plans for expansion.

- Earth Liberation Front (ELF)<sup>63</sup>

After sending the e-mail and attending to Rogers's injured Achilles tendon, the two quickly disappeared. Authorities spent the next six years investigating the Vail Arsons, as well as a series of fires and other acts claimed by an ELF cell known as "The Family." Finally, in 2004, Gerlach and Rogers were arrested. Their arrest, along with those of other ELF and sister organization Animal Liberation Front members, marked the end of one of the most notorious groups of "eco-terrorists" in American history. The Vail Arsons brought national attention to the controversy surrounding Vail's proposed expansion, and reignited a larger debate over radical environmentalism and the use of direct action to halt development. Prior to the rise of the Earth Liberation Front in the early 1990s, groups such as Earth First! promoted the use of "monkeywrenching," or civil disobedience. Always highly controversial, the use of such tactics raised the profile, and thus the issues, of those who used it, but also made them targets of law enforcement.

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<sup>63</sup> Leslie James Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front, 1997-2002* (Portland: Arissa Media Group, 2007), 13.



Two days after the news of the Vail Arsons broke, the ELF's unofficial spokesman Craig Rosebraugh received Gerlach's anonymous e-mail claiming responsibility for the fires. "When I opened it, my jaw dropped," recalled Rosebraugh. He had heard about the fires a few days earlier, but had not believed that they were in any way connected with the ELF. "Without any further hesitation I began writing a press release and prepared to send out the message across the United States."<sup>64</sup> The Vail Arsons, and the nation's reaction to them, would shape both Rosebraugh's life and the ELF for the next four years. As the spokesman for the radical group, the young Portland environmental activist and vegan bakery owner became, in the words of *New York Times Magazine*, the face of eco-terrorism.<sup>65</sup>

Rosebraugh denied being a member of either the ELF or the ALF, but argued in countless newspapers and magazines interviews, including *Time* and *60 Minutes*, and even twice before Congress, that faced with unbridled destruction of the environment by economic forces there was little choice other than such radical actions. In the case of Vail, "[t]he sheer size and power of the Vail Corporation seemed to render every method ineffectual; a 'by any means necessary' approach appeared to be the last option."<sup>66</sup> Such an extremist position came from a sense of disenchantment within environmental groups of the slow pace of environmental progress and a belief that change must occur immediately in order to save the planet. To radicals such as Williams and Gerlach, the expansion of Vail provided a perfect example of the failure of mainstream efforts to halt the commercial exploitation of nature. Having concluded that there was no other

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<sup>64</sup> Craig Rosebraugh, *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet: Speaking for the Earth Liberation Front* (New York: Lantern Books, 2004), 60.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Sullivan, "The Face of Eco-Terrorism," *The New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 1998, 46-49.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

alternative, Rogers and Gerlach decided to burn down as much of the resort as they could.<sup>67</sup>



Photograph 14. Blue Sky Basin. Photograph courtesy of Vail Resorts Inc.

### Radical Environmentalism and the Vail Arsons

The use of vandalism and sabotage to draw attention to environmental issues began in the late 1960s with small groups of individuals sawing down billboards, filling sewage outlets with concrete, and destroying heavy equipment. These were the actions of Jim Phillips, a.k.a. The Fox, who for thirty years fought the polluting of the Fox River in Illinois by cementing sewage drains and other acts of vandalism; the Black Mesa Defense Fund, whose vandalism of equipment helped draw attention to the mining on the Black Mesa in southern Utah; and the mysterious Phantom, who inspired Edward Abbey's 1975

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<sup>67</sup> Funk, "Firestarter," 105.

novel, *The Monkeywrench Gang*. In Abbey's novel a small band of saboteurs led by ex-special forces demolitions expert George Washington Hayduke traveled throughout the American Southwest wreaking havoc on billboards, coal trains, and bulldozers, before their capture by Utah law enforcement. Abbey's novel introduced the term monkeywrenching, or the use of sabotage to stop development, into the popular vernacular. Advocates of tactics such as pulling up survey stakes or spiking trees with nails to stop their harvest, argued that monkeywrenching, or ecodefense, was nothing more than a form of civil disobedience necessary to halt what they deem the continued destruction of the environment. In the introduction of *Ecodefence: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, co-editor David Foreman explained that monkeywrenching was nonviolent. "It is never directed at human beings or other forms of life. It is aimed at inanimate machines and tools that are destroying life."<sup>68</sup> Critics contended that by sabotaging the machines and tools, monkeywrenchers targeted the very livelihood of those who ran the machines, an emotional point in rural regions where such jobs provided the best pay and was the traditional basis of the local economy. For a number of environmental activists who feel increasingly disenfranchised and powerless to stop what they saw as the creeping environmental destruction of the planet, monkeywrenching was a justifiable means to an end. The more notorious (or most famous, depending on your point of view) group to embrace the use of sabotage was the highly controversial radical environmental group Earth First!<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Forman and Haywood, *Ecodefence*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Much has been written on radical environmentalism, and whether it deserves the title "eco-terrorism." Federal authorities contend that groups such as the Earth Liberation Front posse the single greatest domestic terrorist threat in the United States. Many environmentalists condemn the use of violence, but argue that the government's labeling such groups as terrorists stretch the bounds of creditability. On the discussion on eco-terror and radical environmentalism, see: Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical*

In January 1979, David Foreman sat down in his Washington, D.C. office to reflect on the environmental movement's latest defeat. That morning, the U.S. Forest Service released its findings of the second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation, more commonly known by its acronym RARE II. After conducting a two-year study, the agency recommended 15 million acres of roadless and undeveloped land within national forests for wilderness designation, far less acreage than conservation groups such as the Wilderness Society, for whom Foreman was the issues coordinator, had argued as reasonable. Mainstream conservation groups such as the Wilderness Society and Sierra Club sought the consideration of roughly 80 million of the 190 million acres of national forest. Instead, the Forest Service had considered only 62 million acres. Political pressures from western states, as well as ranching, mining, timber, and private property advocates had won the day. Pressured by timber and grazing interests, the Forest Service agreed to assess only the roadless areas that ranked high on the Forest Service's wilderness attribute ratings system which ranked the wilderness potential of lands based on an ambiguous set of attributes weighted heavily in favor of commodity interests. Disillusioned, Foreman wondered what had gone wrong. "We had been factual, rational. We had provided more—and better—serious public comment. But we had lost, and now we were worried that some local wilderness group might go off the reservation and sue

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*Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1990); David Foreman, *Confessions of a Eco-Warrior* (New York: Harmony Books, 1991); Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Martin W. Lewis, *Green Delusions: An Environmentalist Critique of Radical Environmentalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); Derek Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Craig Rosebraugh, *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet: Speaking for the Earth Liberation Front* (New York: Lantern Books, 2004); Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Walnut Creek: CA: Left Coast Press Inc., 2006); Donald R. Liddick, *Eco-Terrorism: Radical Environmental and Animal Liberation Movements* (Westport: Praeger, 2006).

the Forest Service under the clearly inadequate environmental impact statement for RARE II.”<sup>70</sup> Many environmental organizations feared such a lawsuit would increase the already significant political backlash against wilderness. Foreman’s fellow environmental activist Howie Wolke was more succinct in his feelings about the RARE II decision. “We played the game, played by the rules. We were moderate, reasonable, professional. We had data, statistics, maps, graphs. And we got fucked.”<sup>71</sup> Disillusioned by the Forest Service’s release of its RARE II report and the ineffectiveness of mainstream environmental organizations Foreman, Wolke, and a handful of fellow activists decided that a more aggressive organization was needed to oppose the continued development of public lands throughout the American West.

In the summer of 1980, a group of activists, including Foreman, symbolically cracked the Glen Canyon Dam by rolling an enormous swath of black plastic sheeting down the face of the dam while Edward Abbey addressed an audience from the back of a pickup truck in the visitors’ center parking lot. Earth First! was born. Using guerrilla theater and vandalism, the group quickly became known for its radical rhetoric and controversial tactics, including filling crank cases of heavy equipment with sand, pulling survey stakes, spiking trees, and blocking roads in order to stop logging equipment. Such tactics led to members being labeled as terrorists by rightist thinkers, and greatly expanded Earth First!’s popularity. By the end of the 1980s, there were Earth First! chapters in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, much of Europe, and several African and Asian countries. Earth First!’s annual rendezvous attracted thousands of environmental activists, concerned citizens, ranchers, and federal employees. In 1990, Earth First!’s growing

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<sup>70</sup> David Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (New York: Harmony Books, 1991), 13.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Howie Wolke, in Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 24.

notoriety finally gained the attention of the federal government. After a several-month investigation, the FBI arrested Foreman and four other Earth First! members for cutting several support bolts off a ski lift tower at the Snowbowl Ski Resort near Flagstaff, Arizona, and the attempting to down a transmission tower near the Palo Verde Nuclear Generation Station. Although Foreman had not been involved in either action, the government argued that he had been an accomplice in planning the Palo Verde incident. The court later reduced Foreman's charges to a single misdemeanor and fined him \$250. The arrest of Foreman and the other members of Earth First!, along with the attempted murder of Earth First! activists Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney, led to a change in Earth First!'s radical tactics. The organization began to question its use of monkeywrenching and slowly became mainstream. Foreman eventually cut his ties with the group and founded the Rewilding Institute, an organization that calls for the reintroduction of predators into the wild.<sup>72</sup>

Disgruntled with Earth First!'s move toward the mainstream and away from the use of monkeywrenching, a small band split off from the British arm of Earth First! in 1993. Calling itself the Earth Liberation Front, an allusion to its relationship with the radical animal rights group the Animal Liberation Front, the ELF made its way to the United States sometime in the late 1990s. Instead of focusing on wilderness as Earth First! had during the 1980s, members of the ELF became more concerned with the impacts of

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<sup>72</sup> The story of Earth First! is chronicled in several works, most notably: Susan Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs: Earth First! and the Environmental Movement* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993); Derek Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Martha Lee, *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*. In 1990, prominent Earth First! activist Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney survived a pipe bomb exploding under the car traveling into a rally. The FBI arrested both for transporting the bomb for use in a terrorist act, a charge later thrown out of court after Bari's death in 1997. On the life and controversial arrest of Judi Bari, see Judi Bari, *Timber Wars* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994).

global capitalism on the environment, and called for more aggressive action. An article announcing the emergence of the ELF published in the *Earth First! Journal* proclaimed the clandestine group's new creed: "There's a philosophical jump between seeing violence as the last step to what we see should be the first. It is the only option, the first option." Members were going to use violent, aggressive, and direct action to stop what they considered the raping of the planet.<sup>73</sup>

"When I saw that political and economic systems themselves were the problem, working within these systems began to feel not only ineffective but almost unethical," explained Gerlach about her reasons for joining first *Earth First!* and later the ELF.<sup>74</sup> In many ways both the ELF and *Earth First!* reflected the changing landscape of environmental politics at the end of the twentieth century. Wilderness had long been the principal goal of environmental organizations such as the Wilderness Society and Sierra Club as early as the 1920s and 1930s. The passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964 began a decades-long struggle over the designation of any public lands as wilderness. But the growing disillusionment over the effects of globalization along with an embrace of green consumerism and concerns over global climate change during the 1990s marked an important generational shift within the environmental movement. Wilderness remained an important concern of environmentalists, but so too were issues such as global warming and environmental justice. Members of the ELF identified the commercial exploitation of nature as the root of the world's environmental problems. Faced with an increasingly

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<sup>73</sup> "E.L.F. Earth Liberation Front Ignites Britain," *Earth First! The Radical Environmental Journal* (Mabon, 1993); Los Angeles Office to Counterterrorism, "Terrorism Enterprise Investigation," Federal Bureau of Investigation, December 4, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> Funk, "Firestarter," 104.



homogenized global economy, many environmental activists called for a change in politics that would be more inclusive of both poorer nations and the environment. Groups such as the ELF were part of a larger protest against the global market and its ill effects on people, the environment, and the planet.<sup>75</sup>

After six years, the FBI had made little headway on the Vail Arson case. During that period, ELF members claimed responsibility for a string of arsons across the West. Frustrated by its inability to capture the culprits of these crimes, as well as the increasing brazenness of the arsons, in 2004 the FBI merged seven separate investigations into alleged actions by the ELF. Designated Operation Backfire, the wide-ranging investigation targeted a group known as "The Family." With no centralized leadership, the ELF is organized into autonomous cells composed of individuals in order to reduce the risk of infiltration by law enforcement and ensure the survival of the entire organization if any member or cell was captured. According to an ELF press release, anyone could join the ELF by simply creating his or her own cell and taking action. The FBI charged that members of The Family, the ELF cell that Williams and Gerlach were members, were responsible for \$40 million in damages over a five-year span, including

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<sup>75</sup> Beginning in the mid-1990s, increasing numbers of environmental thinkers began to link globalization with environmental degradation. In the introduction of the 1996 anthology *The Case Against the Global Economy and For a Turn Toward the Local* editor and environmental activist Jerry Mander argued that globalization has led to the near break down of the natural world, "as evidenced by such symptoms as global climate change, ozone depletion, massive species loss, and near maximum levels of air, soil, and water pollution." Journalist and globalization cheerleader Thomas Friedman concedes globalization causes such environmental problems, writing "The more I observed the system of globalization at work, the more obvious it was that it had unleashed forest-crushing forces of development and Disney-round-the-clock homogenization, which, if left unchecked, had the potential to destroy the environment and uproot cultures at a pace never before seen in human history." Historians have yet to begin to examine the implications of the globalization at the end of the twentieth century, though global studies such as David Iglar's essay and coming book *Diseased Goods* offers a model for future studies. Jerry Mander, "Facing the Rising Tide," in Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, eds., *The Case Against the Global Economy and For a Turn Toward the Local* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), 3-19; Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 23; David Iglar, "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850," *American Historical Review* (June 2004), 693- 719.



the Vail Arsons. Among the first members of the Family arrested by FBI investigators was William Rogers. Captured on December 16, 2005, Rogers was found dead in his holding cell six days later, an apparent case of suicide. Described as a kind and gentle man who worked tirelessly on environmental and social justice issues, Rogers was the ringleader of The Family, and had actively recruited many of its members. Along with Rogers, the FBI indicted four other members of the ELF cell, including Gerlach and her boyfriend Stanislaus Meyerhoff, Josephine Overaker, and Rebecca Rubin. According to the FBI, all seven had conspired in the planning of the Vail Arson, and Meyerhoff and Rubin had helped Rogers and Gerlach purchase the materials and build the timers for the fire bombs used to set fire to eight buildings at Vail Ski Resort. The five split up prior to the arson when Overaker, Rubin, and Meyerhoff disagreed that the fires were possible, leaving Gerlach and Rogers to complete the crime by themselves. After months of refusing to cooperate with authorities, Gerlach finally began to talk and agreed to a plea bargain. Meyerhoff was convicted in the conspiracy to set the Vail Arsons and was sentenced to thirteen years in prison. Overaker and Rubin remain at large and the FBI believes both live somewhere outside the United States.<sup>76</sup>

*Eco-terrorism* is a highly problematic term. Coined in the 1980s by Wise Use Movement founder Ron Arnold, eco-terrorism originally meant to portray the actions of all environmental activists as subversive. By the late 1990s, the term took on a more sinister definition as ELF and ALF activists began using arson as a tactic. In his testimony before a congressional hearing committee on terrorism, FBI Domestic Terrorism Chief James Jarboe defined environmental terrorism as “the use or threatened

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<sup>76</sup> Valerie Richardson, “Four Indicted in Vail Ecoterrorism,” *Washington Times*, May 5, 2006; Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Four People Indicted by Federal Grand Jury in Denver for 1998 Vail Arson Fires,” Press Release, May 19, 2006.

use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally-oriented, subnational group for environmental-political reasons, or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature.”<sup>77</sup> To the FBI and other law enforcement agencies, the meteoric rise of environmental sabotage during the 1990s posed a clear and present danger. With the escalation in attacks, it is just a matter of time until the first causality occurs. “Terrorism is terrorism, no matter what the motive,” stated FBI director Robert Mueller in a 2006 press conference announcing the indictment of eleven people for conspiracy involving seventeen attacks, including the Vail Arsons.<sup>78</sup>

Proponents of the ELF’s tactics, disagree. In *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet*, Craig Rosebraugh writes, “This label (terrorism) was not used within the environmental movement itself, but rather by mainstream media, law enforcement, and politicians, who were acting deliberately to reduce public support and increase public condemnation of such acts.”<sup>79</sup> Those accused of eco-terrorism have long refuted the labeling of their actions as terrorism. One of those indicted in 2006, Gerlach contended that labeling her actions as terrorism “is stretching the bounds of creditability.”<sup>80</sup> Preferring the term *economic sabotage*, ELF proponents contended that their actions were justified and that both the ELF and ALF go to tremendous lengths to ensure that no lives are put into harm’s way. Not one of the arsons claimed by the ELF or ALF has caused the loss of

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<sup>77</sup> Testimony of James F. Jarboe, Domestic Terrorism Section Chief, Counterterrorism Division, FBI, before the House Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health. “The Threat of Eco-Terrorism,” February 12, 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Matt Rasmussen, “Green Rage,” *Orion Magazine*, January/February, 2007  
<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/articles/6/>, accessed May 19, 2007.

<sup>79</sup> Rosebraugh, *A Burning Rage*, 236.

<sup>80</sup> Funk, “Firestarter,” 104.

human life. In contrast, the FBI fails to label crimes such as the bombing of abortion clinics by anti-abortion extremists, which have left at least six people dead since 1993, as terrorism. Such disparity led many environmentalists and others observers to question the terrorism label ascribed to the ELF.<sup>81</sup>

Labeling groups such as the ELF as terrorist organizations has been wholly consistent with law enforcement efforts of the past half-century. In 1956, the FBI began targeting groups the federal government considered politically, socially, and economically subversive. Codenamed COINTELPRO, the fifteen-year FBI investigation looked at groups as diverse as the Weather Underground, Ku Klux Klan, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The federal investigation continued until 1971, when documents related to the program were leaked to the public after their theft from an FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania by a group calling itself the Commission to Investigate the FBI. Public outcry led to a congressional investigation of the FBI and the closing down of the program. The specter of COINTELPRO arose again in the late 1980s when the FBI's two-year investigation of Earth First! led to the arrest of several members of the organization. Dave Foreman still contends that the investigation and his arrest were part of a massive suppression effort of environmental groups by a government allied with business interests that wish to continue to exploit the nation's natural resources at the cost of ecological diversity. Rosebraugh and others make similar arguments about the targeting of the ELF and ALF. In a 2002 interview, Leslie James Pickering argued that the ELF and equivalent groups were part of a larger social justice movement. "We've seen throughout history several examples of successful social justice movements, and every one I've been able to study had an element of radical direct action, economic

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<sup>81</sup> Hal Bernton, "Is Ecosabotage Terrorism?" *Seattle Times*, May 7, 2006.

sabotage and property destruction to it.”<sup>82</sup> Pickering drew similarities between the Boston Tea Party and the Vail Arsons, and stated the suppression of the environmental movement was little more than the self-protection of an inherently flawed system.

### Conclusion

The Vail Arsons intensified the debate among environmentalists, politicians, land managers, and law enforcement regarding the use of direct action to halt development detrimental to the environment. But in the case of Vail, it was the arsons which proved to be detrimental in halting the construction of Category III expansion. The sprawling ski resort transformed from greedy corporation to tragic victim overnight. Environmental organizations quickly tried to distance themselves from the ELF, but the damage was done. Interviewed immediately following the arsons, executive director of the Colorado Wildlife Federation Diane Gansauer forecast that the fires would “make it harder ultimately to protect endangered wildlife, because people begin to associate protecting wildlife with extremism.”<sup>83</sup> Rocky Smith agreed, stating that the ELF’s actions hurt the local environmental organizations’ fight against the Category III expansion by making the ski resort a victim rather than a culprit in the destruction of critical habitat. By using violence, the ELF lost the moral higher ground in the debate over the protection of the environment. But advocates of direct action contended that moral arguments often failed to halt environmentally destructive behaviors and that the use of tactics such as arson is justified in stopping the destruction of the environment.

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<sup>82</sup> Leslie James Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 215.

<sup>83</sup> Allen Best, “Vail Fire Outrages Community,” *High Country News*, November 9, 1998.

Such absolutist views came from a growing disillusionment over the progress of mainstream environmental organizations and the perceived failure of government agencies to protect the environment. “I believe that when it has been shown that more traditional means of social change are not being successful, in the sense of following laws and legislation, then it is time to take things step further, and the Earth Liberation Front is taking things a step further,” Rosebraugh explained to CBS correspondent Steve Kroft during an interview for the television news program *60 Minutes*.<sup>84</sup> Lost in the din caused by the arsons and their aftermath, the appeal of the Category III decision slowly made its way to the United States 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. In August 1999, nearly a year after the arsons, the court rejected the appeal, ending any hopes environmentalists had of stopping Vail’s expansion. A brief civil disobedience protest stopped heavy equipment from entering the Two Elks area, but even that failed to attract the level of attention environmentalists needed to stop Category III.<sup>85</sup> Rosebraugh pointed to a quote by local Sierra Club representative Kevin Knappmiller in *Outside Magazine* following the 1998 10th Circuit Court’s decision allowing the Category III expansion to go forward as proof of the ineffectiveness of mainstream environmental organizations: “I guess that I am a fundamentally legalistic kind of person who believes in the country and the laws it is based on. For whatever reason Vail won this one. They went through the process, jumped the hurdles, and won. That’s that. You play the game, and if you lose, you have to accept it, I guess all we can do is hope that the skiing will be good.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Steve Kroft, “Look at Domestic Terrorist Threat, the Earth Liberation Front,” *60 Minutes*, January 14, 2001.

<sup>85</sup> *Colorado Environmental Coalition, et al v. Dombeck*, 185 F.3d 1162, 1166 (10th Cir. 1999); Allen Best, “Protests Proceed at Vail,” *High Country News*, August 2, 1999.

<sup>86</sup> Robert S. Boynton, “Powder Burn,” *Outside Magazine*, January 1999.

That same year Vail Resorts' board of directors decided not to exercise its 50 percent option on the 5,000 acre Gilman tract that lay adjacent to the proposed Cat III expansion which the resort giant had sought to develop with condominiums in a bid to recoup some of its losses. Turkey Creek, LLC, Vail's partner in the prepossessed development of the land, filed suit claiming that Vail's failure to aggressively pursue the development was a breach of their 1992 contract. The court agreed, and in 2003 found in favor of Turkey Creek, forcing Vail Resorts to forfeit its \$4.5 million investment in the property. Two years later the Ginn Company, a golf resort and real estate development company, bought the land for \$32.75 million, and announced its plans to build up to 1,700 homes and a gondola connecting the area to the backside of Vail Resort. Several hurdles remained in the way of the Gillman tract's development, the most significant being the listing of five hundred acres within the area on the Superfund National Priority List.<sup>87</sup>

In December 2000, Vail opened Pete's Express Lift, completing the construction of Blue Sky Basin and putting the years of controversy and protest to rest. The new lift opened access to Pete's Bowl, named after the resort's co-founder Pete Seibert. Blue Sky Basin's trails, which meandered through glades of aspen and lodge pole pine, gave skiers and snowboarders the feeling of backcountry skiing without the inherent risk of skiing out of bounds, a popular concept in an industry looking to attract a growing number of skiers drawn to the less restrictive backcountry. The same winter that Vail opened Pete's Bowl, *Ski Magazine's* readers' survey ranked Vail as the best in North America, a direct outcome of the opening of Blue Sky Basin. Vail Resorts Inc. reported a \$77.3 million

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<sup>87</sup> Alex Markel, "From Superfund Town to Pristine Ski Resort," *New York Times*, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2005/12/11/realestate/11nati.html>. Accessed May 24, 2009. Environmental Protection Agency, Superfund Site Progress Profile: Eagle Mine. <http://cfpub.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csitinfo.cfm?id=0800159#CleanupImpact>. Accessed May 24, 2009.

increase in revenues and Vail remained among the most popular ski resorts in North America, enjoying a 2.5 percent increase in ski visits during the 1999–2000 season.<sup>88</sup>

Criticisms over Vail's expansion and the ski industry's poor environmental record as a whole, continued to dog the resort. It was soon embroiled in another debate—this time over the White River National Forest Management Plan. First released to the public in 1999, the Management Plan looked to restrict future ski resort expansions to lands already within each area's existing lease. Vail joined other resorts, including Breckenridge, in arguing that such restrictions would not allow them to meet growing public demand. Environmental groups once again pointed to the fallacies of such an argument, but in the end the Forest Service following its historic pattern of compliance removed its restrictions on future expansions by Vail and its neighboring resorts. The controversy over Vail's Category III has never really ended. The need to maximize profits will continue to drive ski resorts to grow, leading to further controversies over the environmental costs of skiing.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Jason Blevins, "Revenues Up 16 Percent at Vail, Colo. Ski Resort," *The Denver Post*, September 14, 2000; Jason Blevins, "Resort Gives Blue Sky Basin a Huge Lift," *The Denver Post*, December 16, 2000.

<sup>89</sup> David J. Tenenbaum, "The Slippery Slope of Ski Expansion," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 109, no. 3 (March 2001): A112. For the most recent scorecard, see <http://www.skiareacitizens.com>.

## EPILOGUE

Located just an hour's drive from Colorado's booming Front Range, the White River National Forest (WRNF) has been the very model of a modern forest. Established in 1891 as the White Plateau Timber Reserve, the Forest's 2.3 million acres stretches over nine different Colorado counties, includes 800,000 acres of wilderness, and contains the nation's largest elk herd. Home to half of Colorado's two dozen ski resorts, including Vail, Aspen, and Breckenridge, it is the geographic heart of Colorado's ski country.<sup>1</sup> Linked to the Front Range metro area by Interstate 70, these ski resorts provide the economic base for the thriving tourist economies of Summit, Eagle, and Pitkin Counties. According to a study conducted by the research firm Lloyd Levy Consulting in 2002, winter tourism supported roughly 27 percent of all employment in these three counties, with second home construction and spending, economic activities closely related to the ski industry, provided an additional 38 percent. In all, tourism and home construction, the economic outgrowths of Colorado's ski industry, produced \$5.3 billion in revenues in 2002 throughout all three counties.<sup>2</sup> These numbers underline the reality that skiing and the real estate sales it helps drive are big business in the White River National Forest.

It for these reasons, that the release of the Draft White River National Forest Plan to the public in 1999 immediately launched a widespread controversy over the future management of the national forest. Meant to revise the WRNF's 1984 Forest Plan, the draft offered six alternatives, from no action to a comprehensive overhaul of recreational

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<sup>1</sup>C.R. Goeldner, et. al., *The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998-99 Season* (Boulder: University of Colorado Business Research Division, Graduate School of Business Administration, 1999), 17. The National Ski Areas Association defines a skier day as one person visiting a ski area for all or any part of a day or night for the purpose of skiing. Rather than total number of visitors, the number designates total number of days skied by all visitors.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd Levy Consulting, *Job Generation in the Colorado Mountain Resort Economy: Second Homes and Other Economic Drivers in Eagle, Grand, Pitkin and Summit Counties Executive Summary*. (Denver: Levy, Hammer, Siler, George Associates, 2002), 14.



and extractive use within the forest. Seeking to reflect the Clinton Administration's desire to strike a greater balance between human use and the conservation of physical and biological resources, the Forest Service preferred plan, Alternative D, emphasized wildlife habitat protection and conservation over both extraction and recreation by greatly limiting future recreational development throughout the Forest.<sup>3</sup> Environmental groups applauded the Forest Service's efforts in addressing what many saw as recreation's immense impacts on the nation's public lands. Recreational groups, politicians, and ski resort managers countered that the Forest Service's plan ran counter to the agency's multiple-use mandate and would cripple the local economies of Summit, Eagle, Pitkin, and Gunnison counties by restricting recreational use of national forest lands within those counties, striking at the very heart of their tourism economies.

White River National Forest Supervisor Martha Kettle responded to such critics during an interview on the PBS television news program *News Hour with Jim Lehrer* by stating, "In 1984, we had five million visitor days on the forest. In 1999, we had twelve million visitor days. And when we look at that [in] 2020 and we look at the population increases projected in Colorado, our counties in the Front Range, we can project twenty million visitors. So the question we have to ask is: Can we accommodate twenty million visits in 2020, or do we need to find a way to limit the visits that are being made?"<sup>4</sup> Kettle's rhetorical question struck at the heart of the decades-long struggle over the Forest Service's management of recreation, especially downhill skiing, on national forests in Colorado and the larger American West. This struggle pit the region's emerging

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<sup>3</sup> United States of Department of Agriculture, Summary of the Final Environmental Impact Statement to Accompany the Land and Resource Management Plan – 2002 Revision, (United States Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 2002), 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Online Newshour, "Managing the White River National Forest," [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/environment/jan-june00/white\\_river\\_4-18.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/environment/jan-june00/white_river_4-18.html). Access January 9, 2009.

postindustrial economy reliant on tourism against an environmental ethos that questioned the impact of ski resorts on fragile mountain ecosystems, and the growth of rural communities caused by these resorts throughout the Intermountain West.

The most vocal opposition to WRNF's plan came from Vail Resorts. Owners of four of the largest ski resorts in the Forest, the corporate giant argued the Forest Service's plan was too restrictive and would lead to future financial hardships for the ski industry.

Under the existing management plan, written in 1985, ski resorts retained the ability to expand beyond their permit boundaries in order to meet any potential future demand. A decade later, the Forest Service sought to emphasize biodiversity over recreational use by revoking this ability and confining resorts to their current permit boundaries. Vail Resort's spokesman Paul Witt summed up ski resort's criticisms of the proposed restrictions by stating, "It's puzzling. You know, the Forest Service acknowledges that there is going to be growth in the use of the forest. There'll be growth in the number of skiers coming to use the forest, and yet with Alternative D, they're not going to be planning for that future growth and they'll be to a great extent handcuffing us in ways that we'll be able to deal with that growth."<sup>5</sup> Without the flexibility to meet future growth, argued ski industry insiders, ski resorts would soon be overcrowded, pushing skiers and their pocket books to other resorts.

Environmental groups applauded the Forest Service's attempts to emphasize conservation over recreation and extractive industry. "It's a giant step forward. You've got to compliment the Forest Service. I didn't think they had it in them," said Jasper

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<sup>5</sup> Bob Edwards, "Profile: White River National Forest in Colorado Considering limiting recreational activities in order to protect its ecosystem and the wildlife," *Morning Edition*, NPR, February 23, 2000.

Carlton, executive director of the Biodiversity Legal Foundation.<sup>6</sup> Vera Smith, public land director for the Colorado Mountain Club agreed, “They’re [The Forest Service] playing catch up. They’re not doing anything radical. They’re doing what they should have been doing all along.”<sup>7</sup> Groups like the Colorado Mountain Club and Biodiversity Legal Foundation pointed to the increase in wilderness in each of the plan’s four alternatives as a positive step, and fully supported the restriction of recreational access for ATV users, mountain bikers, and even back country skiers in order to protect wildlife habitat. Environmentalists particularly liked the Forest Service’s attempts to limit future ski resort expansions. Such expansions many conservationists argued were more about real estate sales than skier days. “It’s the real estate market for second homes that is really driving the ski industry,” Kevin Knapmiller, president of the Blue River chapter of the Sierra Club, told the *High Country News*. “Why should the Forest Service be a partner in jacking up the price of adjacent private land?” he asked, echoing conservation groups long running complaint on the relationship between the Forest Service and the ski industry.<sup>8</sup>

Following the release of the draft plan, the White River National Forest’s administrative offices in Glenwood Springs were deluged with letters. The majority of letters writers opposed closure of their favorite playgrounds. Recreational advocacy organizations such as the International Mountain Biking Association, the Blue Ribbon Coalition, and the Colorado Snowmobile Association attacked the Forest Service’s proposed restrictions to recreational access as excessive and without any scientific

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<sup>6</sup> Allen Best, “STOP – A National Forest Tries to Rein in Recreation,” *High Country News* (January 17, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

backing. In an interview on the controversy surrounding the management plan Jerry Abboud, executive director of Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, told *High Country News* reporter Allen Best, “We believe that the plan is overly restrictive, is based upon inadequate site-specific analysis, and potentially is going to have a severe economic impact on not only the White River itself, but statewide.” Colorado’s 3<sup>rd</sup> District Congressional Representative and chair of the House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health Scott McInnis argued that the Forest Service’s plan would turn the White River National Forest into “a museum without visitors.”<sup>9</sup> Calling for a compromise, McInnis released his own plan, which sought to relax the restrictions on future ski resort expansions. White River Supervisor Martha Ketelle agreed the plan was open to compromise, but maintained that curb recreation’s impact on the environment was crucial.

In the end, no one was completely satisfied with the plan. As environmental groups feared, many of the restrictions on ski resort growth were removed from the plan’s final version. Rather than restrict ski resort growth, WRNF officials chose a “blended alternative” that permitted much of the recreational development Alternative D had sought to restrict.<sup>10</sup> The new plan did add an additional 62,000 acres of wilderness, but it also increased summer motorized and winter non-motorized access. It also opened 400,000 of the 600,000 roadless acres within the forest to logging and eliminated a measure to assure minimum stream flows in ten percent of the WRNF streams and rivers. Perhaps most galling to supporters of the now dead Alternative D, the new plan allowed

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<sup>9</sup> Allen Best, “In Their Own Words,” *High Country News* (January 17, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> United States of Department of Agriculture, *Record of Decision for the Land and Resource Management Plan – 2002 Revision* (United States Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 2002) 13.

ski resorts in Summit and Eagle Counties to expand beyond their permit boundaries.<sup>11</sup> Environmentalists criticized the Forest Service's continued yielding to recreational interests, while ski resorts complained that the plan failed to provide the flexibility they needed in meeting future demand. "The fact that nobody thinks they got everything they wanted usually says we struck a good balance," concluded Kettle on the release of the plan.<sup>12</sup> Neither side agreed with her assessment, each claiming that the Forest Service had once again caved to political pressures.

The fight over the role of ski resorts on public lands remains much the same at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as it was three decades earlier. Ski industry critics continue to point at the tremendous impacts of ski resorts on environment, while ski resorts counter that they are much more environmentally sensitive. In response to growing criticisms over the ski industry's failure to confront mounting environmental concerns, the National Ski Areas Association, to which the majority of Colorado Resorts belonged, launched its Sustainable Slopes Program (SSP) in 2000. "As an industry, we need to apply the same vision and pioneering spirit of our founders," wrote NSAA president Michael Barry in the SSP Charter. "It is not enough to simply provide opportunities for fun and recreation; we must also be a part of the solution."<sup>13</sup> A voluntary program, SSP set out to change the industry's increasingly tarnished environmental image by creating a framework of environmental principles including sustainable planning, optimize water use, and reduced greenhouse gasses.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2-31.

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Clarren, "White River Forest Plan Friend to All – and to None," *High Country News* (July 8, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Berry, "Introduction," in *Sustainable Slopes: The Environmental Charter for Ski Areas*, (Lakewood, CO: National Ski Areas Association, 2000), 1.

Environmental groups attacked the program as little more than “green washing,” pointing to the SSP’s lack of enforcement and failure to address issues such as continued resort expansion, growth, and habitat fragmentation. Dissatisfied with the SSP, a coalition of western environmental organizations including Colorado Wild, the Colorado Environmental Coalition, and the Utah-based Save Our Canyons, formed the Ski Area Citizens’ Coalition (SACC) in order to draw greater attention to the environmental issues surrounding the ski industry. The coalition began releasing an annual environmental score card it graded ski resorts in eleven western states and Canada on criteria such as real estate development and snowmaking. Vail Resorts often receives a score of 50 percent, or a C grade under the coalition’s rubric, while fellow White River National Forest resort Aspen Mountain scores well into the 90th percentile.<sup>14</sup>

In 2004, George Washington University professor Jorge Rivera and University of Denver professor Peter de Leon investigated the effectiveness of the Sustainable Slopes Program. Publishing their result in *The Policy Studies Journal*, the two concluded the voluntary nature of the SSP proved problematic in that there were no consequences for ski resorts if they failed to meet the standards set by the program. In addition, those ski areas more involved in the SSP were more likely to have lower third party environmental performance ratings.<sup>15</sup> The National Ski Areas associated attacked criticisms of its SSP by both the Ski Area Citizen’s Coalition and the Rivera and Peter de Leon study as flawed and unwarranted. By Rivera and de Leon’s own admittance, the original study of the SSP held three flaws— its was preliminary in nature, lacked clear causality between

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<sup>14</sup> Ben Doon, e-mail to author, January 19, 2007. For more on the Ski Area Environmental Score Card see: Ski Area Citizens’ Coalition, <http://www.skiareacitizens.com/index.php>. Accessed December 8, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Jorge E. Rivera and Peter De Leon, “Is Greener Whiter? The Sustainable Slopes Program and the Voluntary Environmental Performance of Western Ski Areas,” *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2004), 417-437.

hypothesis and conclusion, and used a subjective method for measuring the environmental performance of ski resorts. It was this last point that the NSAA most forcefully attacked. The Rivera and de Leon study relied upon the SACC's scorecard, which measured a different set parameters than promoted by the SPP. "As and example, the SACC Scorecard barely accounts for energy efficiency programs, a cornerstone of the Sustainable Slopes program," wrote Judy Dorset, founder and Principal of the environment consulting firm The Brendle Group, in defense of the SPP in the NSAA's trade journal.<sup>16</sup> The "green washing" debate, argued Dorset, distracted from the importance of the SSP's actual goals of raising the collective environmental performance of the ski industry.

Two years after publishing their initial appraisal of the Sustainable Slopes Program, Rivera and de Leon along with PhD student Charles Koerber, repeated their study. The three reached much the same conclusions as two years before. Writing that, "Facing SSP's weak institutional mechanisms for prevent opportunistic behavior, it appears that once enrolled, ski areas may predominantly adopt natural resources conservation practices that are known to be easier and more visible for their customers (such as recycling) or those that offer immediate short-term benefits with relatively small investment such as energy and water conservation."<sup>17</sup> Such conclusions reinforced environmentalists' arguments that the SSP was little more than a marketing gambit by the ski industry to attract customers concerned over the environmental impacts of their activities. Other extractive industries have used similar tactics, including the natural gas and coal industries, in attempting to sell their industry to an American populace

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<sup>16</sup> Judy Dorset, "Debunking the SACC Scorecard," *NSAA Journal* (October/November 2004), 11.

<sup>17</sup> Jorge E. Rivera, Peter De Leon, and Charles Koerber, "Is Greener Whiter Yet? The Sustainable Slopes Program after Five Years," *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2006), 216.

increasingly concerned over environmental issues. For ski resorts, appearing environmentally friendly was of particular importance in maintaining, and ideally increasing, skier and snowboarder numbers.

But by the 1999-2000 winter season, skier/snowboarders numbers nationwide flattened to an average of 52.4 million skier days per season nationally, leading many critics to argue that the expansion of ski resorts like Vail, Breckenridge, and Winter Park were unnecessary and ecologically irresponsible.<sup>18</sup> The number of skiers hitting the slopes had plateaued beginning in the late 1970s, leading in part in to the consolidation of the ski industry during the 1990s, when the overall number of ski resorts shrunk by a third. Snowboarding's arrival in the mid-1980s helped many resorts boost their ticket sales. The sport's rebellious image initially kept many resorts from allowing snowboarders on their mountains, but the promises of increased revenues along the with the sport's mainstream appeal led to the majority of ski resorts allowing snowboarders onto the slopes by the early 1990s.<sup>19</sup>

Snowboarding's acceptance demonstrates the industry's changing demographics. With the aging of the Baby Boomers, the very generation that helped turn skiing and ski resorts into a billion dollar industry, skiing has become older. The average age of skiers and snowboarders by 2000 was 34.8 years old, an increase of nearly three years in age since 1997. While the sport remains largely composed of 18-45 year olds, the portion of skiers and snowboarders over the age of 45 increased by nearly 6 percent between the

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<sup>18</sup> National Ski Areas Association and RRC Associates, Inc., "Kottke National End of Season Survey 1999/00 Final Report," (August 2000), 4-6. The 1990-1991 season proved to be an aberration due in large part to poor snow conditions across the country, particularly in the Rocky Mountain States. Dry years historically equate much lower skier/snowboarder numbers. A drought in 1977, led to the widespread use of snowmaking during the late 1970s. Still, many resorts suffered significant losses during drier winters.

<sup>19</sup> Susanna Howe, *Sick: A Cultural History of Snowboarding* (New York: ST. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 38-41.



1997-1998 season and the 1999-2000 winter season. In addition, men generally outnumbered women by a 3 to 2 margin, and while such numbers seem to indicate a relative equality between the genders, women comprise a majority of first time skiers and snowboarders, roughly 56 percent, but only 24 percent of expert skiers.<sup>20</sup>

Race also remains a concern of many within the ski industry. In its annual national demographic study, the National Ski Areas Association pointed out the fact that 88% of skiers surveyed during the 2004-2005 ski season were white, a number that remained rather static since the organization latently keeping tract of race in 1997.<sup>21</sup> According to a survey conducted by the Outdoor Industry Foundation in 2004, only 15% of Hispanics nationwide either skied or snowboarded.<sup>22</sup> This is despite the fact that Hispanics are the single largest minority group in the Intermountain West. As historian Annie Gilbert-Coleman has pointed out, skiing has long been the province of mainly affluent white consumers, because of the “financial costs involved in taking a ski vacation, and the extent to which skiers are bombarded with images of whiteness.”<sup>23</sup> But arguably, economic, cultural, and geographic factors determine minority participation in skiing rather than practiced exclusion by the industry selling skiing as a “white” sport.<sup>24</sup> Still,

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<sup>20</sup> RRC Associates, National Ski Areas Association: National Demographic Study, (December 2000), 2.

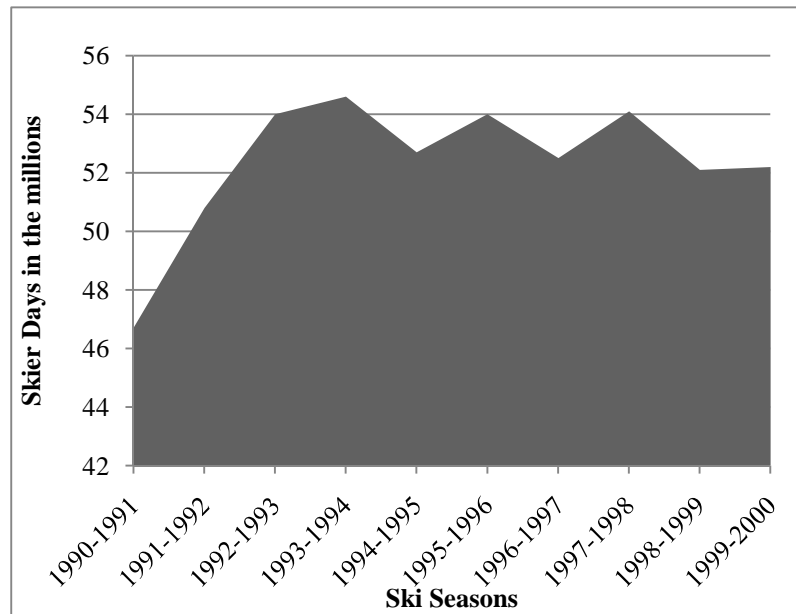
<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Outdoor Industry Foundation, *A Targeted Look at Participants with Potential*, (July 2004), 28.

<sup>23</sup> Annie Gilbert-Coleman, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing,” *The Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 65, no. 4, (November, 1996), 583-614, 606.

<sup>24</sup> Scholars often point to differences in class, age, gender, and race as the main reasons for contrasting uses/views of nature by different groups. Such cultural differences are developed and then reinforced by economic realities rather than purposeful victimization. Race’s role in determining recreational use is a growing concern for both the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service. Both agencies have conducted several studies showing that up to 95 percent of visitors to both national forests and National Park are white. Such disparity begs for a larger historical study. For more on race and outdoor recreation see: Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Wendy Rex-Atzet, “Narratives of Place and Power: Laying Claim to Devil’s Tower,” in *Imagining the Big Open: Nature, Identity, and Play in the New West*, Liza Nicholas, Elaine Bapis, Thomas J. Harvey, eds. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 73-91; Jason Bryne

race remains a concern throughout the ski and outdoor recreation industry both as a potential market and as a growing cultural and economic influence on how public lands are managed.<sup>25</sup>



National Skier Days, 1990-1991 Ski Season to 1999-2000 Ski Season

The issues of sustainability, race, gender, and generation, are all contributing factors to the debate over skier numbers and the industry’s justification for further development. Environmental groups point to skiing’s flattening of numbers as evidence that further ski resort development is unneeded. “In light of these events and the demographics of skiing, why do we hear the constant pleading for, and announcements of, new terrain expansions, new luxurious amenities and new real estate developments? The industry is using our

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and Jennifer Wolch, “Nature Race, and Parks: Past Research and Future Directions for Geographic Research,” *Progress in Human Geography* Vol. 33 (March 2009), 743-765.

<sup>25</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau minorities comprised roughly 32 percent of the nation’s population in 2007. At the same time 13 percent of the population was 65 years old or older. Such numbers will have long-term effects on more than just outdoor recreation and public land management, but on the nation’s culture and economy as a whole. U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Hispanic Population Surpasses 45 Million, Now 15 Percent of Total,” Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, May 1, 2008.

environment, our public lands and our communities to milk every last drop out of the shrinking skiing public.”<sup>26</sup> The results, organizations like the Ski Areas Citizen’s Coalition argue, will be the further destruction of fragile ecosystems and the collapse of local economies. University of Colorado business professor and ski industry expert Charles Goeldner disagrees with such predictions. In 1991, he presented a paper at the Mountain Resort Development conference in Vail in which he argued that while not experiencing the astronomical growth numbers of the 1970s— numbers that reached 15% annually—the North American ski industry saw a healthy annual growth rate of 4.3 percent. “I would argue that this was a fantastic performance. To get a 4.3 percent increase on 9.5 million skier visits means a numerical increase of 406,914. A number that far exceeds the 229,000 skier days recorded in Colorado during the 1958-1959 season,” Goeldner argued.<sup>27</sup> In the two decades since skier days have increased from 11 million to 12.5 million skier days per season in Colorado alone.<sup>28</sup>

In reality, the largest potential threat to the ski industry may not be a flattening market, but global climate change. In 2001, the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its third report on global climate change. The work of over one hundred scientists from around the world, the report concluded, “human activities have increased the atmospheric concentrations of green house gases and aerosols since the pre-industrial era.”<sup>29</sup> The report immediately came under attack by

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<sup>26</sup> “National Ski Industry Demographics and Trends, 2008,” prepared by Colorado Wild and The Ski Area Citizen’s Coalition (September 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Charles Goeldner, “Skiing Trends in North America,” *Mountain Resort Development: Proceedings of the Vail Conference, April 18-21, 1991*, Alison Gill and Rudi Hartman, eds. (Burnaby, British Columbia: Simon Fraser University Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, 1991), 7-20, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Colorado Ski Country USA, 1999/2009 Skier Visit Numbers, <http://media-coloradoski.com/CSCFacts/SkierVisits/>.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: Synthesis Report*, [http://www.grida.no/publications/other/ipcc\\_tar/?src=/climate/IPCC\\_tar/vol4/english/008.htm](http://www.grida.no/publications/other/ipcc_tar/?src=/climate/IPCC_tar/vol4/english/008.htm). Accessed

climate change naysayers. Fred Singer, an emeritus professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia and former director of the U.S. Weather Satellite Service, blasted the new report as “a political statement” based on theoretical models that did not conform to existing scientific data and called into question the viability of report’s data. Contributors to the report refuted Singer’s and others criticisms, arguing that there is a clear link between human activity and the planet’s rising temperatures. The debate over the IPCC report in 2001 signified the political schism over climate change. Fearful that any attempts to control the emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, the main culprit in global warming, business interests and politicians have long questioned man’s actual impact on the Earth’s rising temperatures. Pointing out its inequality, President George W. Bush refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol, which would have set limits on carbon emissions on the United States’ industry while giving other developing nations such as China an exemption. Such an agreement would devastate the American economy, argued the President. Environmental critics pointed out that such inequalities existed in the treaty because the United States produced the greatest amount of greenhouse gases, those gases which contribute to the thickening of the Earth’s atmosphere by blocking out ultraviolet rays from the sun and thereby raising the planet’s temperature. Critics like Singer, who has strong ties to the oil and energy industry, adamantly disagree with such conclusions, and have continued to attack the science of global warming advocates.

The debate over global climate change is not really about science, but rather about economics. In a replay of virtually every debate over the environment, from the wilderness act to the endangered species act, global warming opponents argue that any regulation that seeks to slow or reduce global warming will slow economic growth. But

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rather than opposing regulations that seek to slow, or even lower, greenhouse emissions, the ski industry has embraced a proactive stance on global warming. In 2005, several ski resorts voiced their support of the Lieberman-McCann Climate Stewardship Act, which looked to cap greenhouse emissions of certain industrial sectors at 2000 levels. In its letter of support for the bill, the NSAA noted; “Scientific models suggest that as warming continues, we could experience decreasing snowpack, warmer nights, wetter shoulder seasons, and reduced weather predictability.”<sup>30</sup> All of these shifts would impact ski resorts’ bottom line. The U.S. Senate defeated the bill, but its support by the ski industry demonstrated the growing concerns of the long-term implications of global warming on an industry reliant on annual snowfall.

In a 1994 Pastoral Letter to his parishioners on Colorado’s western slope, Archbishop J. Francis Stafford wrote, “Growth must be prudent, varied and sustainable. It is unfair and unrealistic to “lock up” so much of nature as to prevent the spread of economic activity. But all growth must be calibrated to remain in balance with nature. Human beings must act as stewards of the earth, rather than conquerors and extractors; we must develop a fraternal relationship with the environment . . . Reverence for creation, founded on self-restraint, stands in direct contrast to the past boom-and-bust cycles of Colorado's economy.”<sup>31</sup> Stafford identified of the problematic relationship between the desire both preserve and exploit the natural resources of Colorado’s mountains, whether through mining or through the development of ever larger resorts, as the foremost challenge not only facing the Western Slope but that of the larger American West. From the creation of

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<sup>30</sup> NSAA Member Resorts to Senator John McCain and Senator Joe Lieberman, February 23, 2005. [http://www.nsa.org/nsaa/environment/climate\\_change/](http://www.nsa.org/nsaa/environment/climate_change/). Accessed December 15, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> J. Francis Stafford, “The Heights of he Mountains are His: The Development of God’s Country,” Pastoral Letter to the People of God on Northern Colorado Western Slope Growth (December 23, 1994)

the Denver Mountain Parks during the 1910s, to the state's boom in population and growth in the decades following World War II, the transformation of public lands and the communities that depend upon them into recreational playgrounds helped have driven the region's remarkable growth throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. But as Stafford pointed out, such growth comes with social and environmental costs. From the rejection of the 1976 Denver Winter Olympic Games, to the decade long battle over the development of Beaver Creek, to the Vail Arsons in 1998, the debate over those costs have not only shaped Colorado throughout the latter half of the twentieth century but the American West as a whole. Throughout the region, managing outdoor recreation has grown into one of the most difficult challenges for federal and state land agencies caught in the middle of increasing demands for access and mounting pressures to protect those very lands many wish to ski, hike, off-road, and hike in. Pressure for continued economic growth will continue to collide with concerns over its impacts on the region's environmental health, be that wildlife habitat or air pollution. The need to maximize profits will continue to drive ski resorts to grow, no doubt leading to future controversies over the environmental costs of skiing, and the development of public land for private gain.

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