

TSV Community Connections Dave Norden

## **Taos Ski Valley CEO spells out Rio Hondo restoration work**

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As Taosemos, residents of the Village of Taos Ski Valley and visitors know, the R'o Hondo and the surrounding mountains are among the most treasured natural resources in Northern New Mexico.

The stream and its tributaries appeal to outdoor enthusiasts: fishermen, campers, hikers, picnickers, birders and many others. The resort center at Taos Ski Valley is fortunate to be situated at the confluence of the two streams, Lake Fork and North Fork, that flow together to form the Rio Hondo. The importance of these streams and the history of the development of Taos Ski Valley around them make the protection of these aquatic resources especially important.

Taos Ski Valley Inc. has identified these streams as essential components of the natural setting that residents and visitors seek out when visiting the area. The resort is excited to have embarked on a carefully thought out program of stream restoration as part of its multiyear development plan.

The focus of this plan is to upgrade all the facilities that serve visitors and the local community, including those that live and migrate in our streams. Taos Ski Valley Inc. has engaged the nation's finest professionals in the field of environmental restoration including hydrologists, engineers, landscape architects, environmental planners, stream biologists, stream restoration design-builders, all with decades of experience in this field. These professionals have provided the design and expertise for implementation of an ambitious restoration plan for the upper Rio Hondo within the resort center.

The stream restoration projects have been reviewed and authorized under Federal Clean Water Act permits issued the by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Village of Taos Ski Valley, New Mexico Environment Department, the New Mexico Game and Fish, the U.S. Forest Service and adjacent private landowners were included in the review process.

The Ski Valley has worked collaboratively with these agencies and local stakeholders to ensure its work protects state water quality standards, increases the public benefit of the streams and their environs and wisely manages the natural and cultural resources for which the Ski Valley is responsible. The overall goals of these stream restoration efforts include improving public safety at stream crossings, enhancing biologic function and fish habitat, restoring riparian vegetation, and improving stream hydraulics and conveyance.

An important public safety objective involves upgrading the stream crossings to accommodate large runoff events that may originate upstream. This includes upgrading bridges and utilities that cross the streams to ensure communications and key infrastructure components are modernized and can support village emergency services. Three of these crossings have already been upgraded in the last two years. During this time the Ski Valley has restored the degraded stream channels between and through the crossings, attempting to balance conveyance with more suitable dimensions for the stream channel.

In addition to stabilizing the banks and channel for flood control, you can see that pools, riffles and small falls have been constructed to bring the stream to a more natural and healthy condition. These

stream features are important for improving aeration, enhancing the quality of aquatic habitat for fish and leaving a stable rocky substrate important to invertebrate organisms upon which resident trout feed.

The rehabilitated stream features also benefit downstream users by improving water quality throughout the Rio Hondo watershed. In years to come, as our new riparian plantings mature, the stream will represent a bright green and blue ribbon tied around one of the cherished prizes of Northern New Mexico: Taos Ski Valley.

Taos Ski Valley invites you to the preview center where one can learn about the progress made in these stream restoration efforts, including the three new stream crossings.

*Dave Norden is CEO of Taos Ski Valley Inc.*



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