AFTER SNOW:

THE CASE FOR AN ALPINE PUBLIC

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Landscape Architecture,

Harvard University Graduate School of Design

by

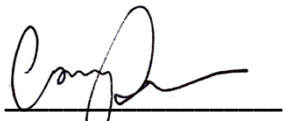
CORY PAGE

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

May 2025

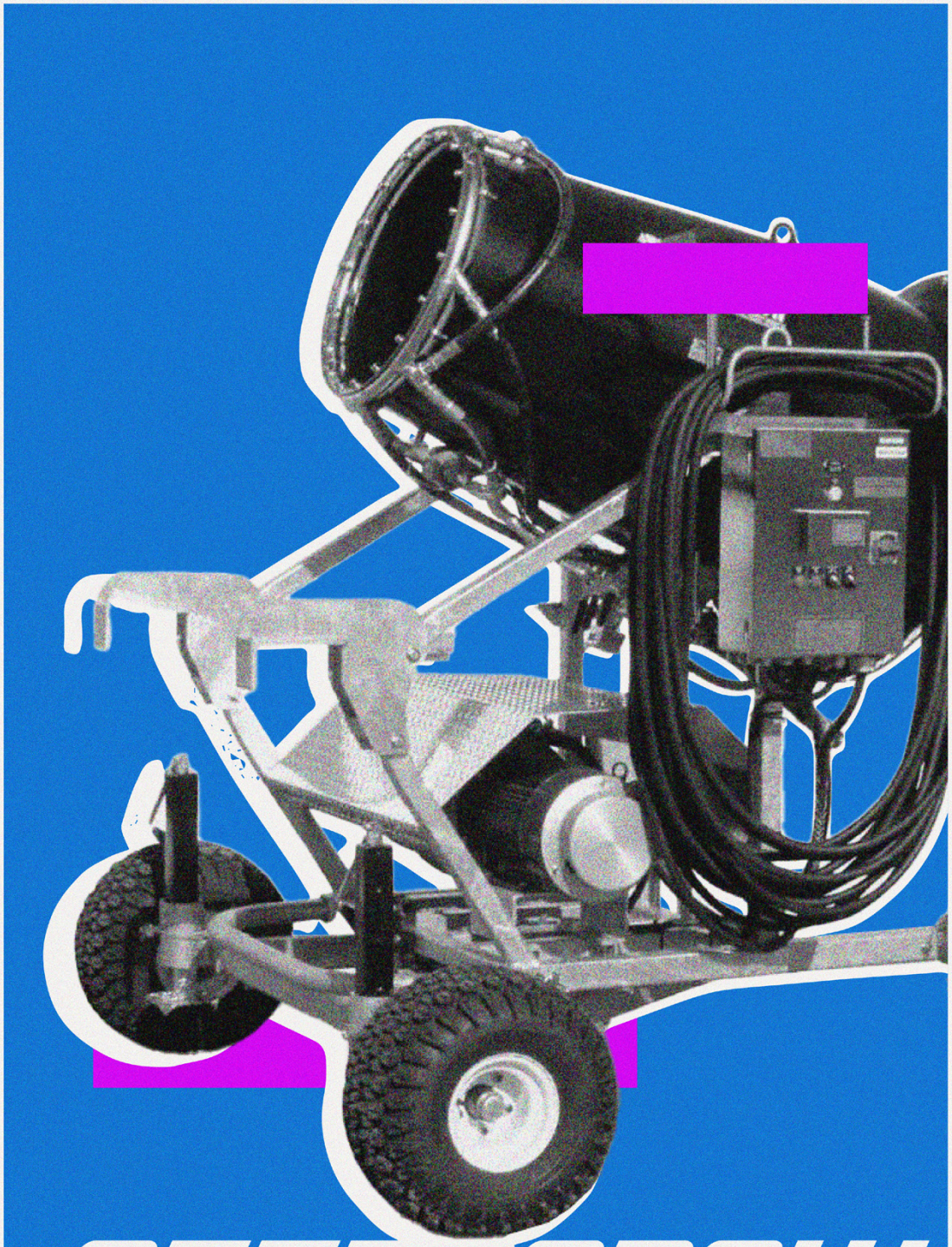
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Student



Thesis Advisor



AFTERSNOW

THE CASE FOR AN ALPINE PUBLIC

A THESIS PRESENTED BY CORY PAGE AND ADVISED BY KIRA CLINGEN
ON THE FUTURE OF ALPINE SKI RESORTS IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

AFTER SNOW

THE CASE FOR AN ALPINE PUBLIC

In an era of climate transition, alpine skiing demands reexamination: What happens after snow? This thesis envisions the ski resort as a public terrain for contested remediation rather than a privatized, extractive enclave. Focused on Telluride, the project examines the ski mountain as a designed landscape—clear-cut, regraded, and reshaped—while tracing the industry's corporate consolidation and shift from natural to artificial snow.

Telluride has taken drastic measures to sustain skiing's illusion in a warming world, expanding its snowmaking network and turning water into frozen infrastructure. To counter this artifice, the thesis proposes new alpine infrastructures: solar screens to shield glare, revegetated clearings to act as windbreaks, and regraded micro-topography to retain natural snow. Through land stewardship, privatized operations are transformed into a public resort. Rather than project skiing's end, After Snow proposes a designed transition—tying the sport's long-term survival to the creation of an alpine public.

Cory Page
Advised by Kira Clingen
May 21, 2025
Harvard University Graduate School of Design



Jonas Walzberg/AP, 2023 [1]



Ben Eng, Telluride Ski Resort[2]

After Snow was only possible thanks to the impeccable guidance of Kira Clingen, the Harvard Graduate School of Design's Daniel Urban Kiley Fellow in Landscape Architecture. Professor Clingen's generosity shaped a rigorous research process and continually pushed for the inclusion of diverse voices in this design.

Of course, it takes a village at the GSD. I'm deeply grateful to everyone who lent a helping hand to make my thesis review a reality:

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THE ENTIRE MLA'25 THESIS COHORT

THE CURIOUS MICE OF THE 4TH TRAY
THE DISCO HORSE

REVIEW PANEL CRITICS
AZZURA COX
MARTIN HOGUE
BEHNAZ ASSADI
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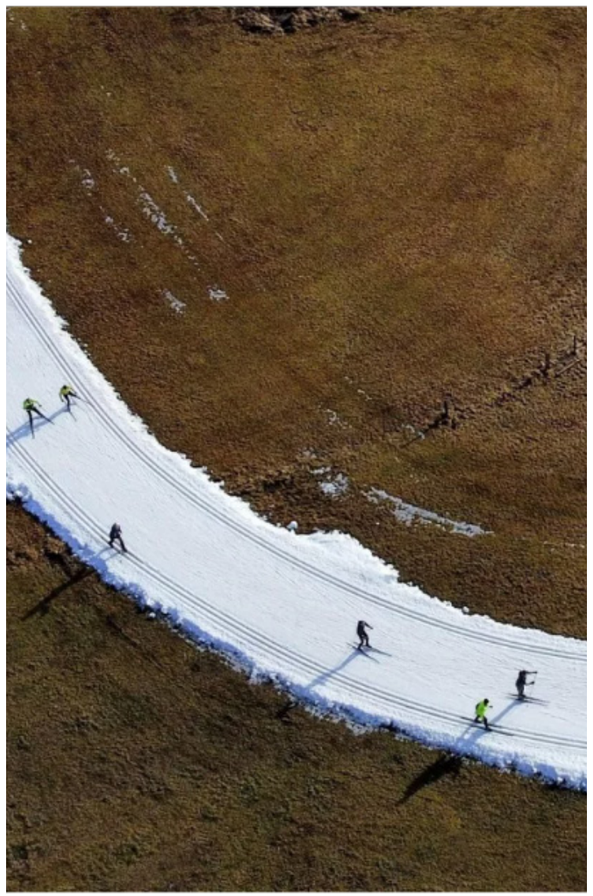
COMMUNITY + RESORT PARTNERS
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LYNN MOORE
LANCE WARING



Leysin, Switzerland, Denis Balibouse/REUTERS, 2023[3]



Films, Switzerland, Gian Ehrenzeller/Keystone, 2022[4]

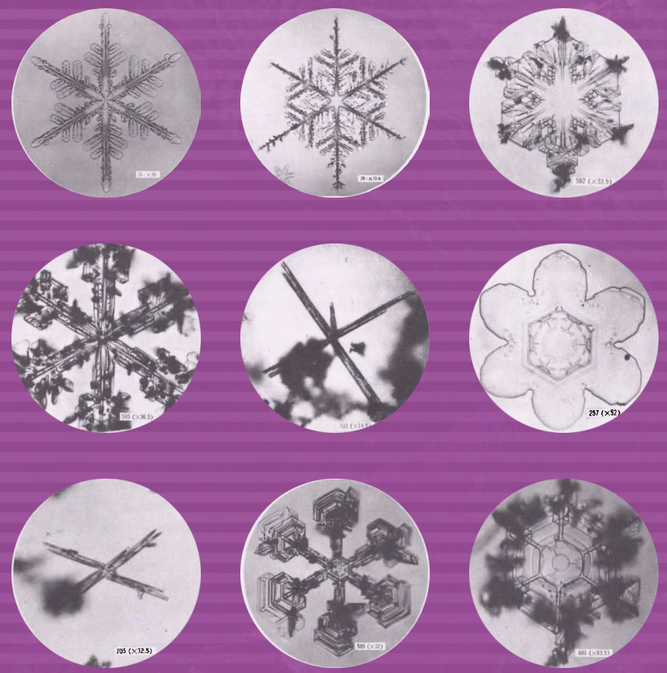


Austria, Matthias Schrader/Associated Press, 2023[5]

It likely comes as no surprise: winter is fading. In places like the Alps (pictured above), the snow-covered winters that once fueled a world-renowned outdoor industry are becoming increasingly rare. Alpine landscapes that historically accumulated six to seven feet of snow each season are now often left bare.



Films, Switzerland, Gian Ehrenzeller/Keystone, 2022[5]



Snow Crystals: Natural and Artificial by Ukichiro Nakaya, 1954.[7]

The landscape conditions that materially define skiing are unraveling: melting and being simultaneously reengineered to simulate what no longer naturally falls: snow.

This thesis positions the ski resort as a designed landscape on the brink—both culturally and ecologically. In the age of the climate collapse, it demands a critical reexamination:

What happens after snow?

Telluride, Colorado by Ben Clarke, 2023[8]

THE ALPINE TECHNICAL LANDSCAPE

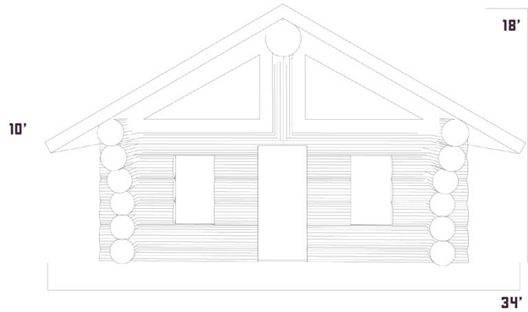
Skiing has long been romanticized as a sport synonymous with escaping to a pristine "natural" world. However, ski resorts like Telluride, Colorado are highly constructed environments—shaped through landforming, grooming, and snowmaking. These interventions produce a controlled version of nature, engineered to appear effortless and enduring. The mountain is carefully maintained to perform wilderness, even as it is sculpted to serve infrastructure, access, and spectacle.

As historian William Cronon notes in The Trouble with Wilderness, what we often perceive as untouched nature is in fact shaped by cultural ideas and labor. Similarly, the ski resort operates as a designed landscape—where technical systems and aesthetic choices work together to sustain the illusion of alpine purity.

HOSPITALITY

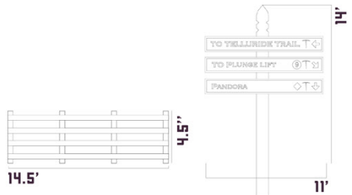


apres ski



ski patrol / mountain host

ADVENTURE

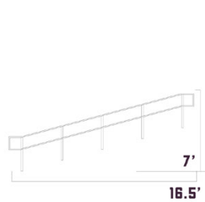


signage

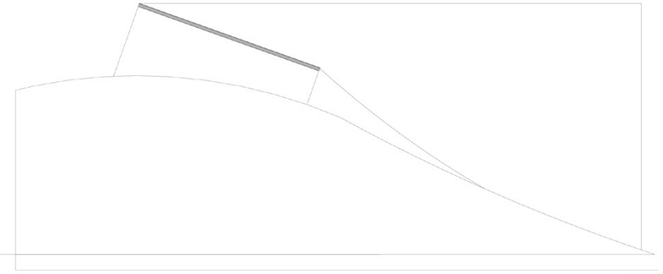
snow fence



XC grooming



park rail



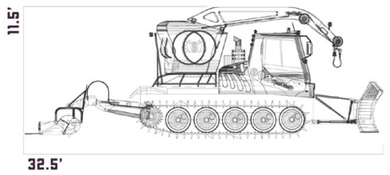
park jump

MAINTENANCE

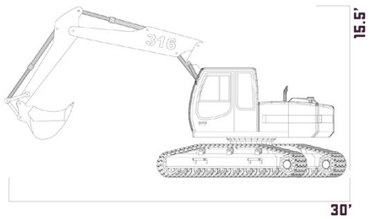




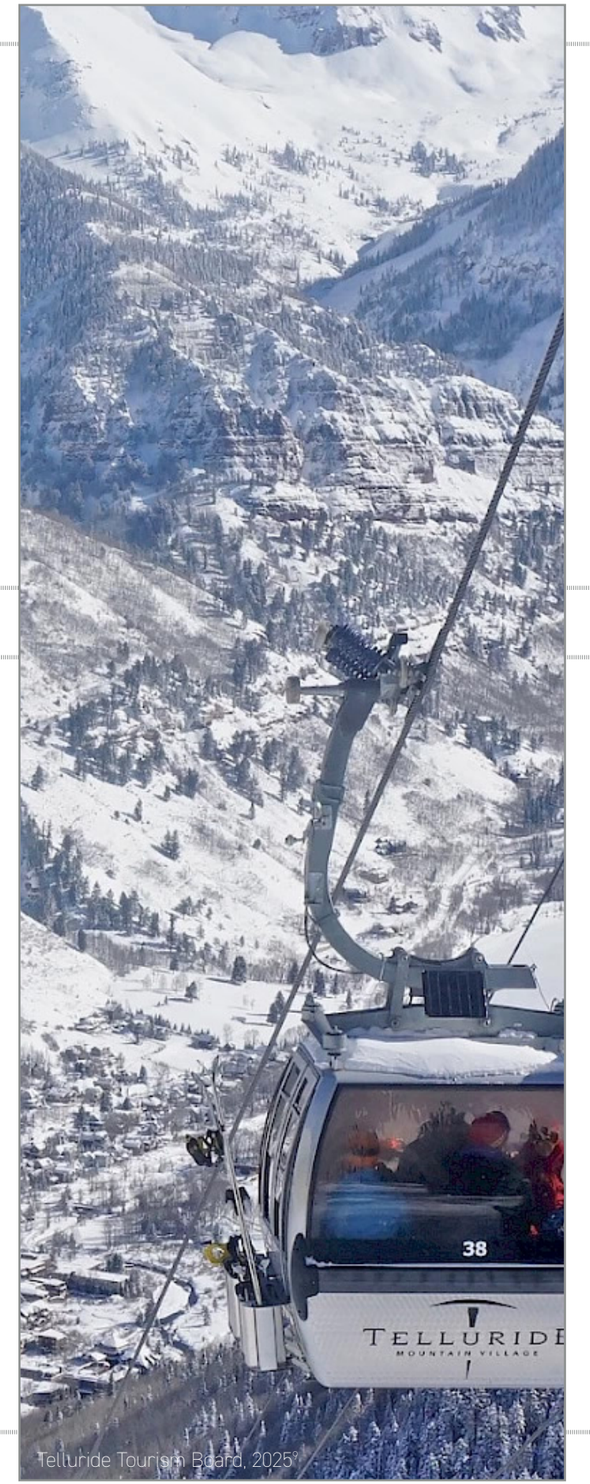
snowmobile



snow groomer

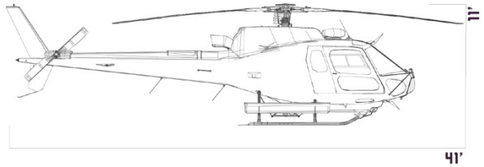


excavator

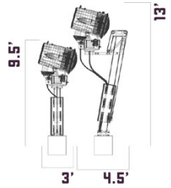


Telluride Tourism Board, 2025

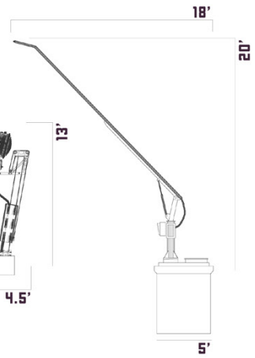
MAINTENANCE



helicopter



snow blower



snow lance



pumps

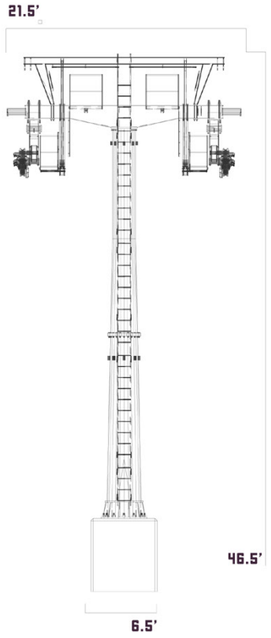


genorators



water tank

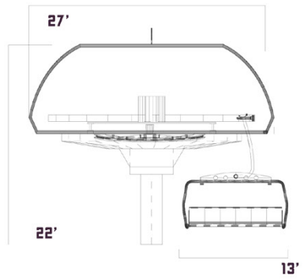
MOVEMENT



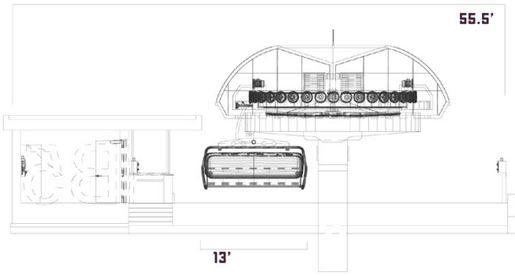
gondola tower



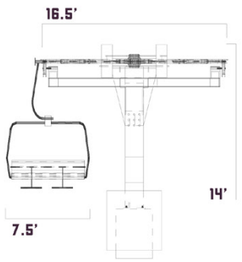
gondola



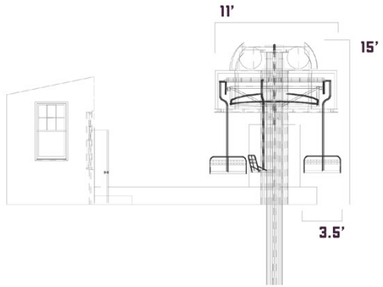
6-seater high speed quad lift



6-seater high speed quad lift



4-seater fixed lift

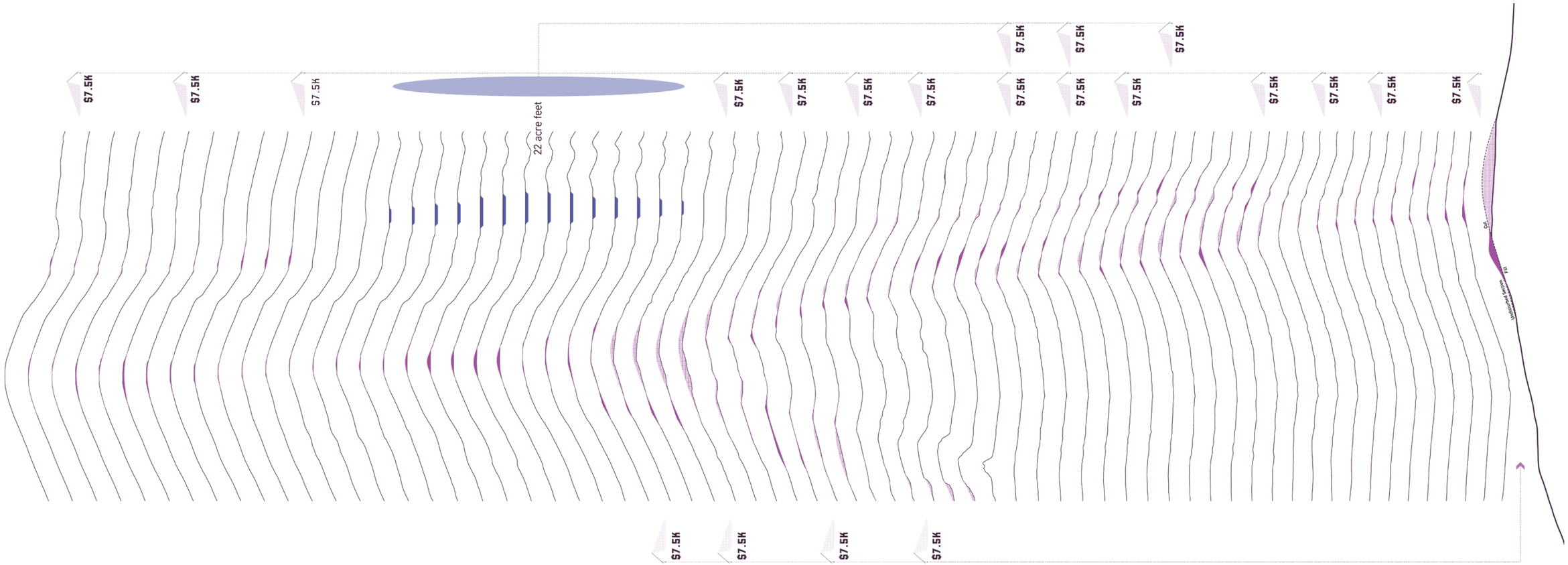


2-seater fixed lift

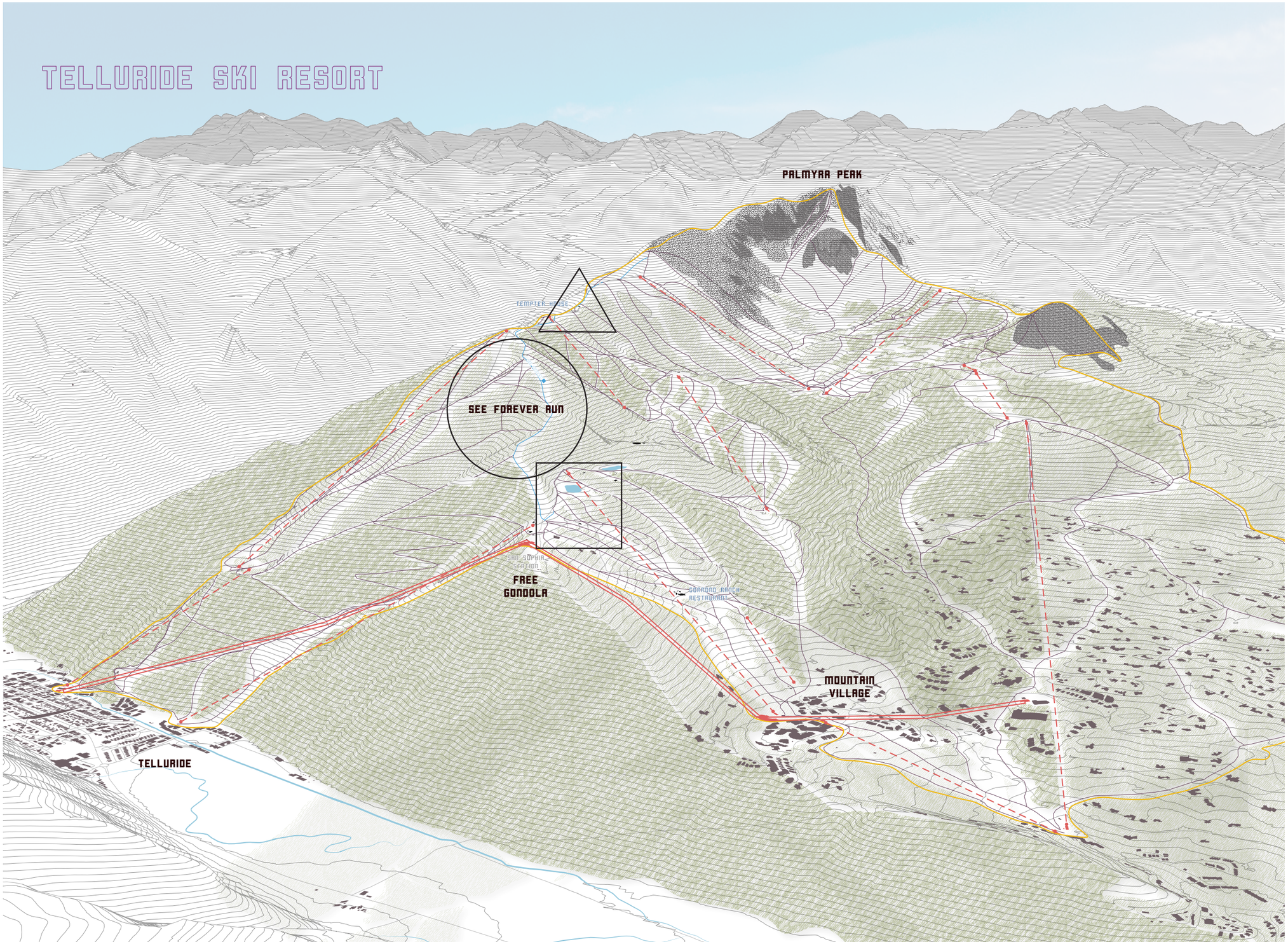


ski bus

SKI RESORTS AS CUT/FILL OPERATIONS



TELLURIDE SKI RESORT



In wake of an unpredictable future climate, today's ski resorts are not neutral grounds.

The commodified terrains they reside on are shaped by the very infrastructures and corporate overtaking's that have prolonged their existence.

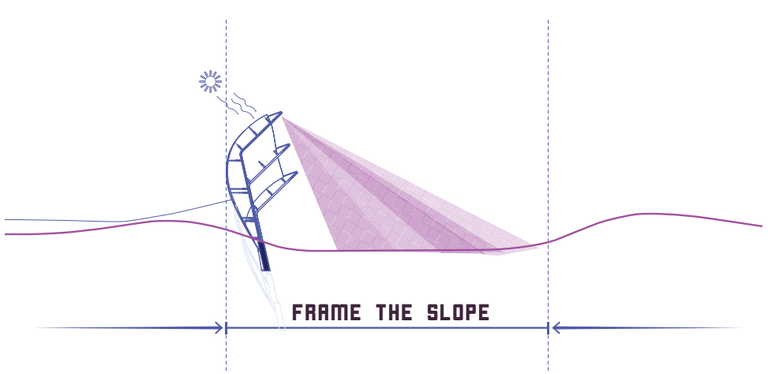
After Snow reclaims the Telluride Ski Resort as a site of public potential—not as a playground for the privileged, but as a zone of cultural refusal and ecological repair. Rather than mourn the end of skiing, this thesis asks what kinds of publics might emerge from its ruins.

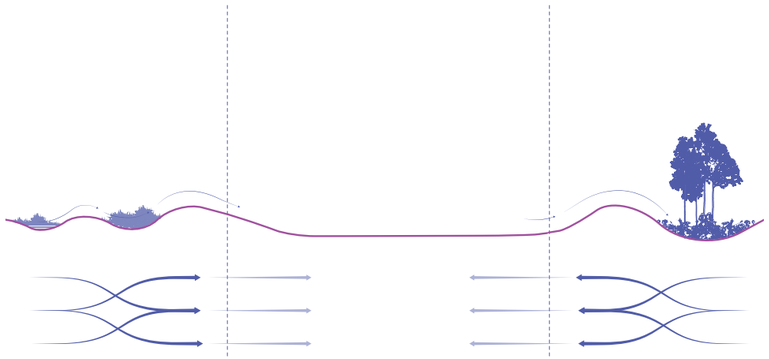
Through a series of three design strategies:

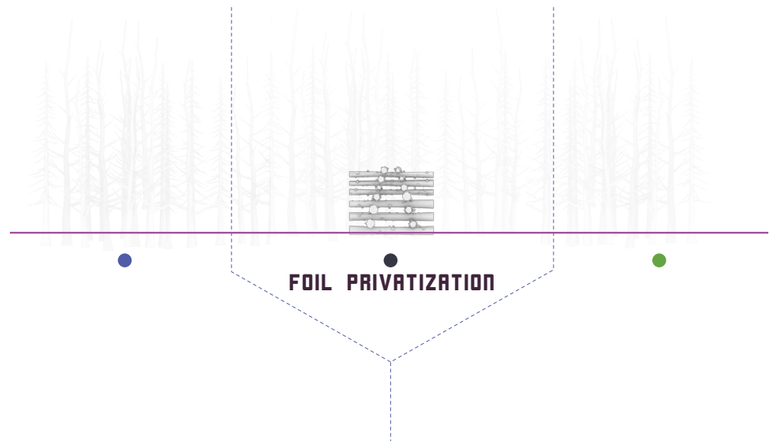
- □ **FRAME**
- ○ **FILTER**
- △ **FOIL**

After Snow undoes the conventional framework of a ski resort to make the case for an alpine public.

DESIGN FRAMEWORK







Design continues on PG #55

Telluride, Colorado is nestled in a high-altitude box canyon in the southwest corner of the state. With just 2,700 permanent residents, its dramatic setting and global destination status often obscure its layered history of mineral extraction. Once a fertile hunting ground stewarded by the Navajo and Ute tribes, it was colonized in 1875 in the name of gold. Even its very name—derived from tellurium, a metalloid found attached to gold—signals Telluride was built on speculative value.



Map of the San Juan Triangle, Minning Claims, circa 1903[10]

TELLURIDE, CO 1878

POPULATION

PRODUCTION

1800

1878 1881 1890 1900 1920 1950 1960 1968 1972: RESORT OPENS 1975 1980 1982 1986 1990 1996 EIS RESORT EXPANSION 2000 2002 1999 EIS APPROVED 2016 2017 MASTER PLAN 2018 2023 REVISED MASTER PLAN 2100

indigenous stewardship

gold rush

Telluride named

Nicola Tesla A.C. power

silver boom

silver market collapse

full shutdown

re-birth

land established for ski area

resort expands

national historic landmark

snowmaking introduced

Mountain Village founded

resort epxands

free gondola

prospect bowl

master plan

Vail partnership starts

lift 9 replaced

PALMYRA PEAK

79 196.96657
Au
[Xe]4f¹⁴5d¹⁰6s¹
gold

47 107.8682
Ag
[Kr]4d¹⁰5s¹
silver

127.6
Te
[Kr]4d¹⁰ 5s²5p⁴
tellurium

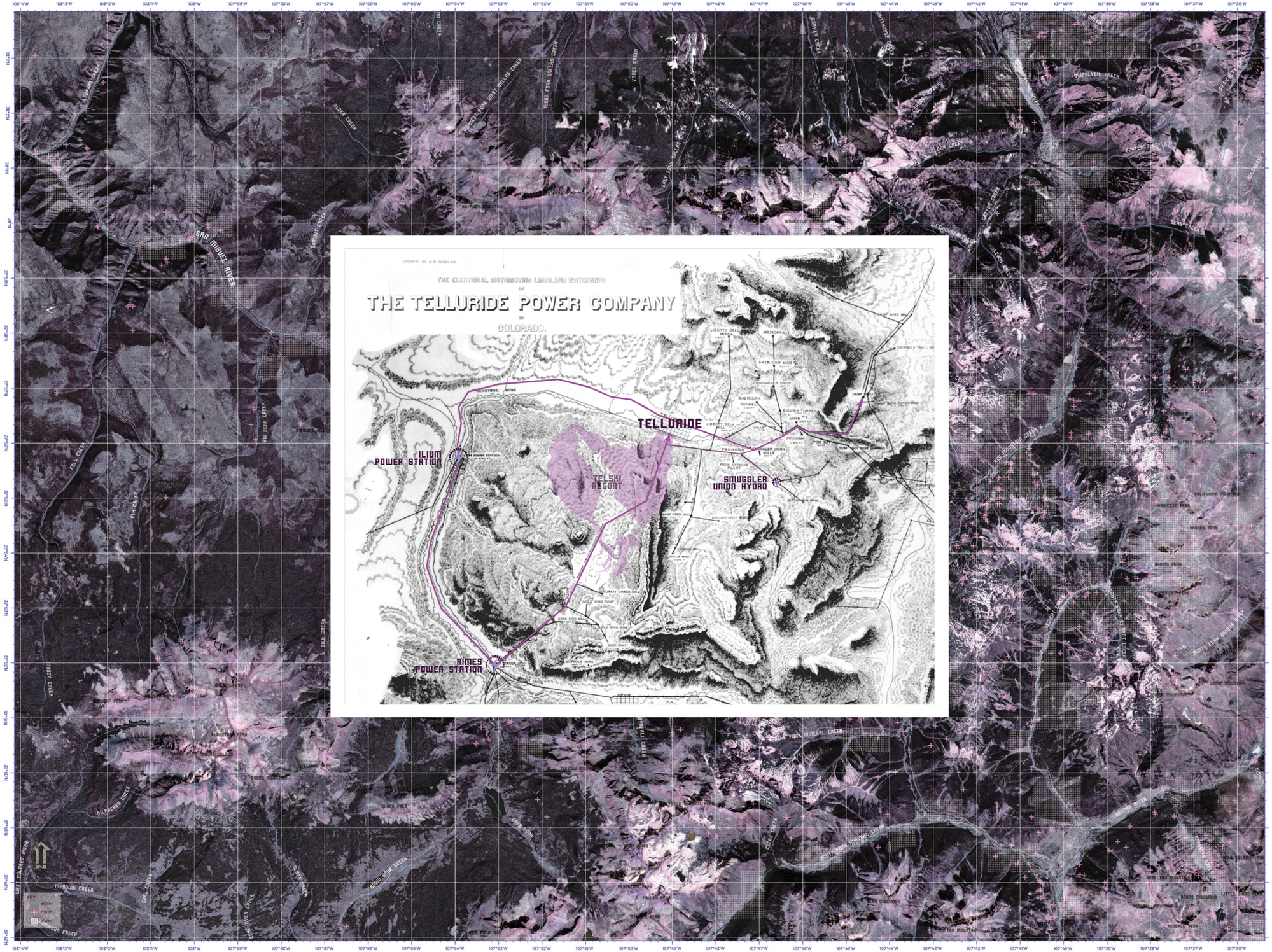
TURKEY CREEK

SOUTH FORK SAN MIGUEL RIVER

WATERFALL CREEK

MIDDLE FORK MINERAL CREEK

MINERAL CREEK

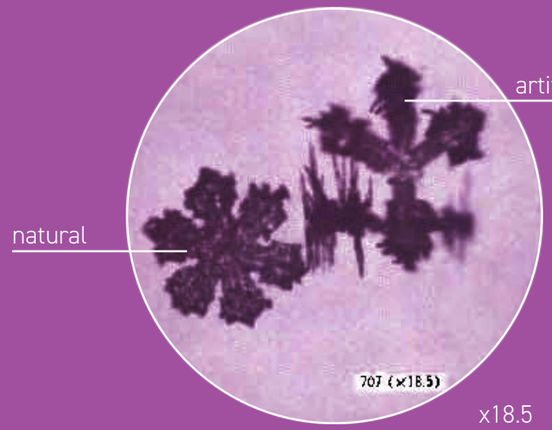


When Telluride's mines closed in the 1960s due to failing markets, supply, and government regulation, snow became the new gold.









snow becomes Telluride's new gold.

Miners turned venture capitalists, converted ranch and forest service land into navigable terrain, initiating Telluride's transformation into a winter destination.

While it was not originally designed for the ultra-wealthy, the unchecked expansion of real estate—now the primary profit model for most ski resorts—slowly reshaped the town into the exclusive and often unlivable enclave it is today.

Telluride is the most expensive city in Colorado[13].

Clarifying that Telluride's transformation from dirt streets to designer stores was only possible by the boom and doom of land practices that came before.

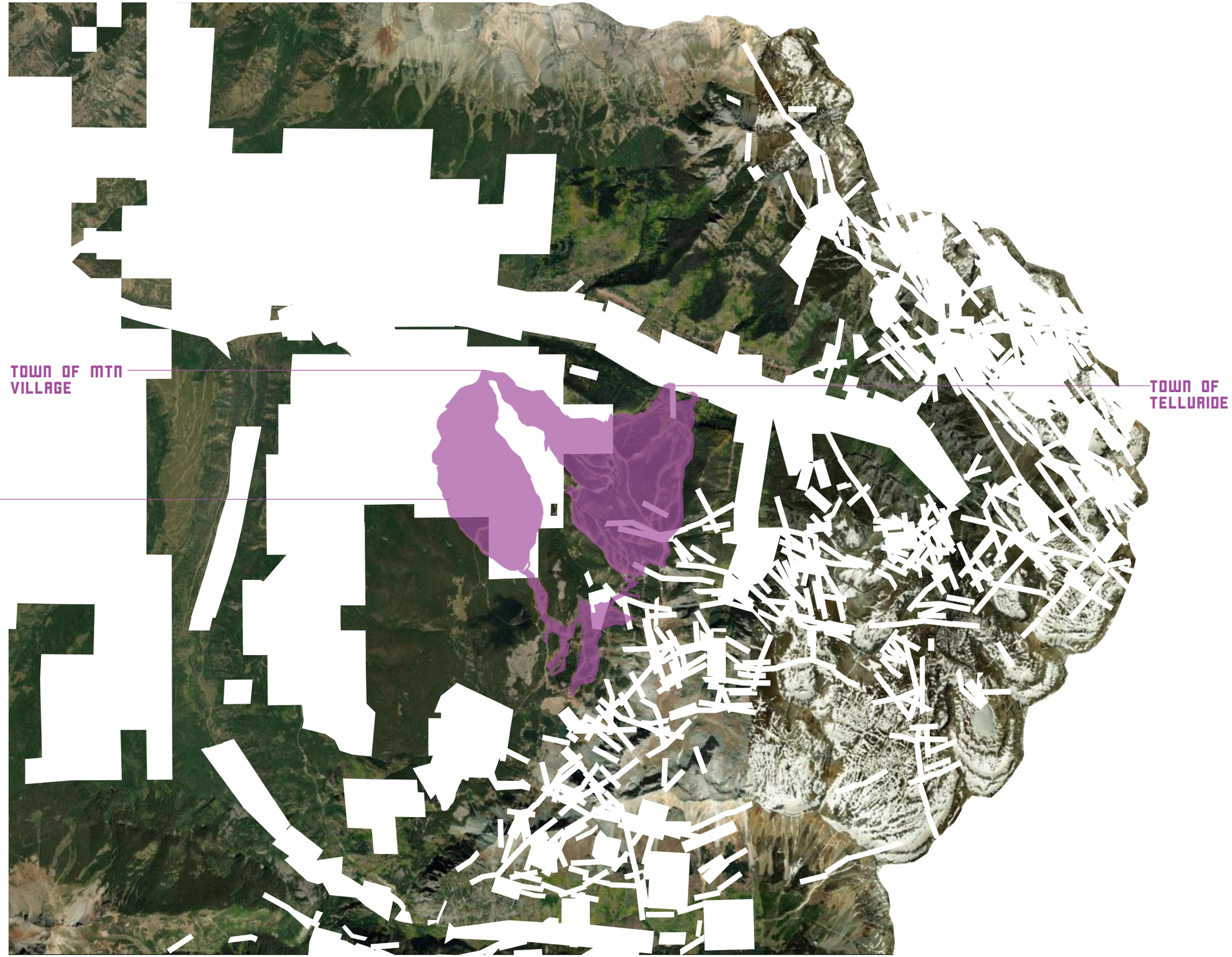


Opening five chairlifts in Telluride, 1972[12]

Though the resort technically operates largely on public land under a 99-year lease from the U.S. Forest Service—its day-to-day experience is defined by intense privatization.

This drawing shows the chaotic boundaries between public and private and the resort overlayed.

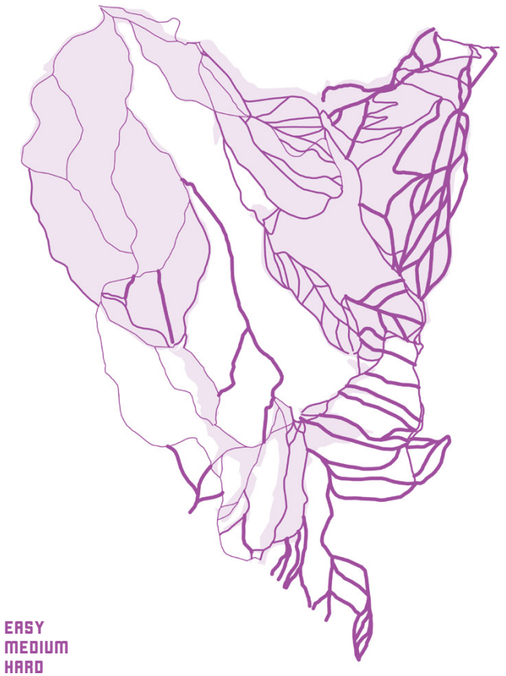
Telluride exemplifies what is describe in *Technical Lands* as a "landscape governed by technical systems rather than ecological processes," where ownership and extraction are prioritized over care and repair.





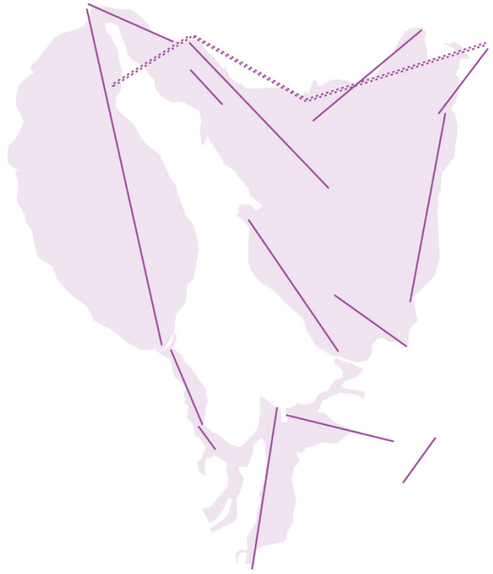
NAMES

Telluride's ski runs reflect its mining heritage, with names like Gold Hill and Silver Cloud nodding to local history and landmarks.



RUNS

Ski run ratings reflect the spatial and engineered conditions that shape winter access and define Telluride's cultural and physical identity.



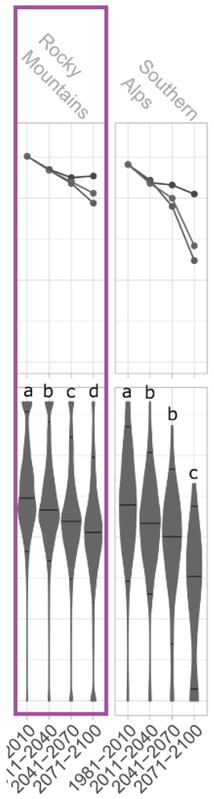
LIFTS

Ski lifts at Telluride shape how visitors navigate the terrain, defining the spatial experience of both winter and summer seasons.

Despite its deep ties to the winter economy, Telluride is facing some of the most severe climate impacts in Colorado.

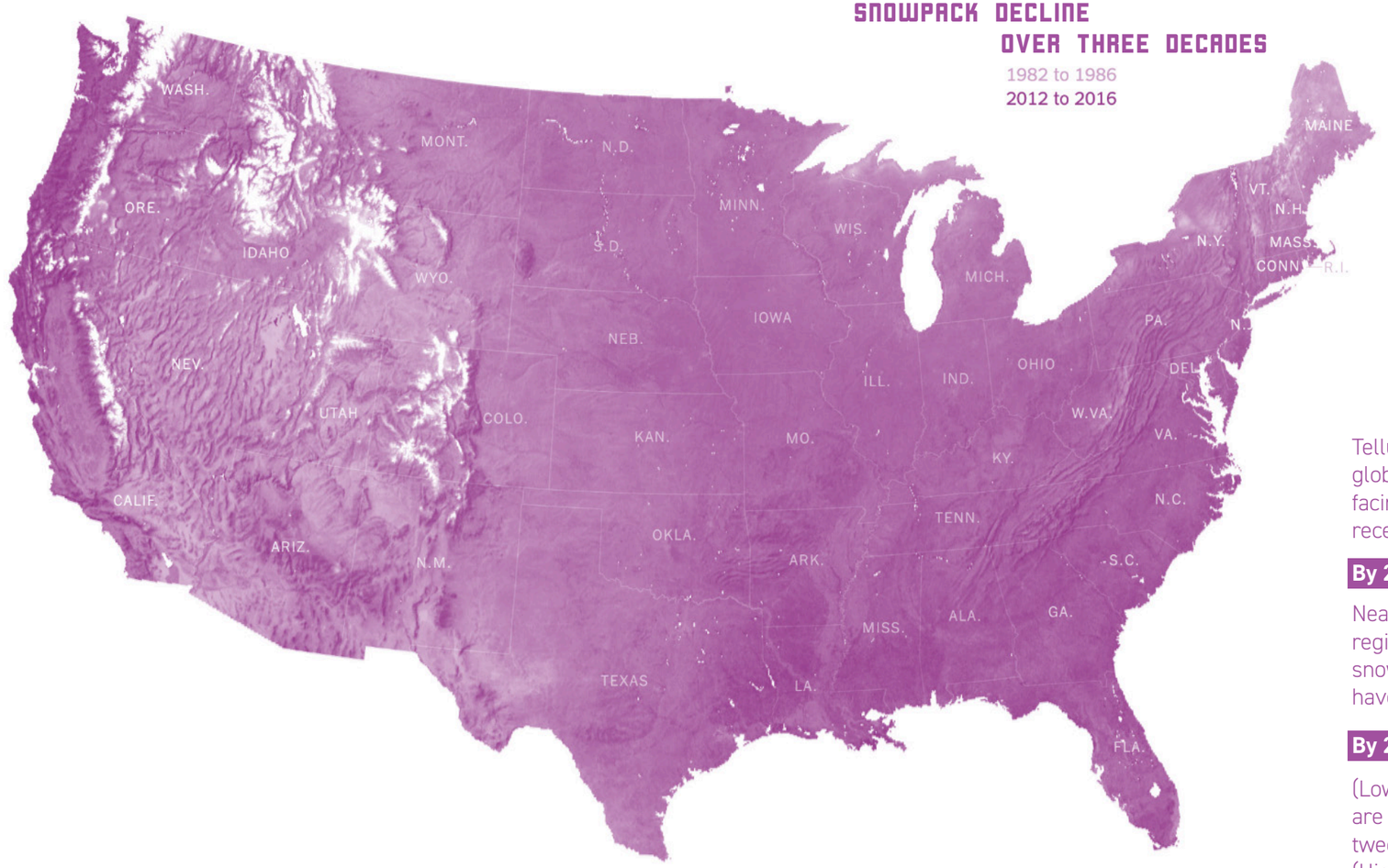
Snow now arrives later, melts sooner, and varies dramatically in both quality and quantity.

PREDICTED SNOW COVER LOSS BY 2100



SNOWPACK DECLINE OVER THREE DECADES

1982 to 1986
2012 to 2016



Telluride is just one node in a global network of ski resorts facing the same collapse. A recent projection shows...

By 2100:

Nearly every major mountain region will lose measurable snowpack—13% of resorts will have no snow at all.

By 2050:

(Low Emissions) Ski seasons are projected to shorten between 14–33 days
(High Emissions) 27–62 days

Economic losses range from US$657 M to $1.35 Billion annually in the U.S.

Mitterwallner, V., et al.[14]

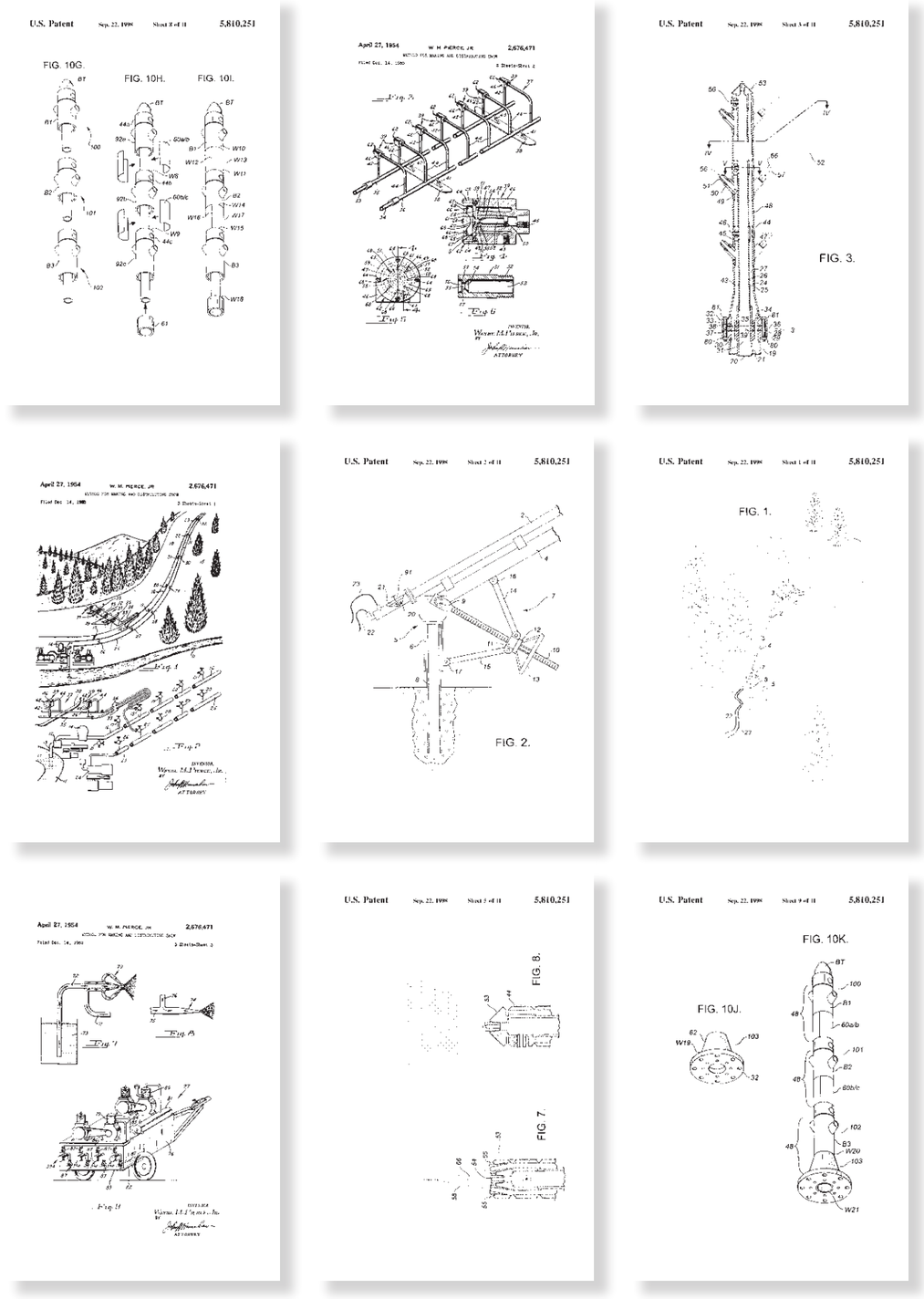
Land-Atmosphere-Ocean Interation Group at University of Arizona[15]





As snow becomes increasingly unreliable, the ski industry has turned to technical infrastructure to maintain operations. Snowmaking—once a temporary fix—has become the norm.

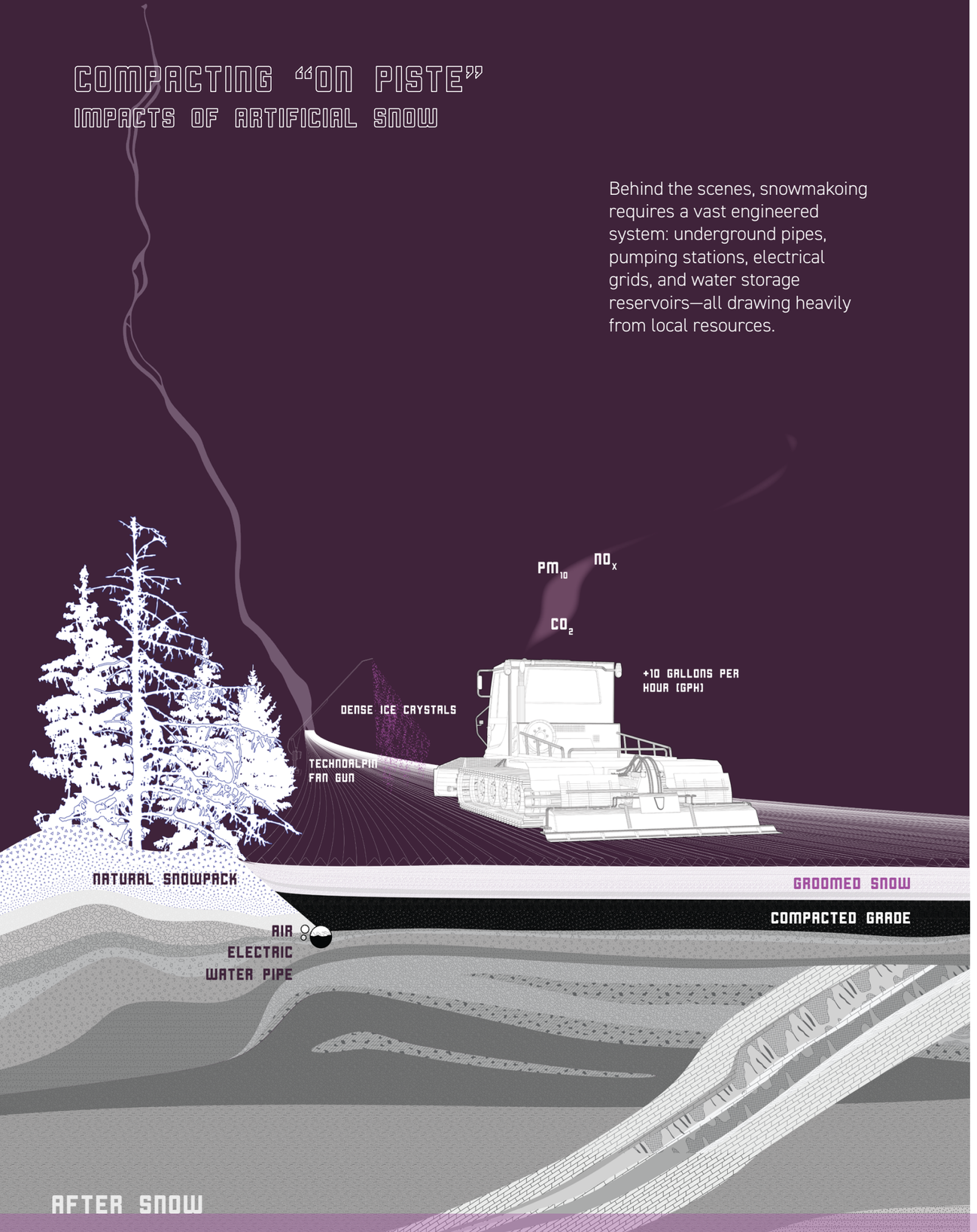
Artificial snow is 5X denser than natural snow. It is slower to melt and is silently shifting fragile alpine soil ecologies from fertile to barren.



U.S. Patent No. 2,676,471, Method for Making and Distributing Snow by Wayne M. Pierce Jr. , 1954[16]

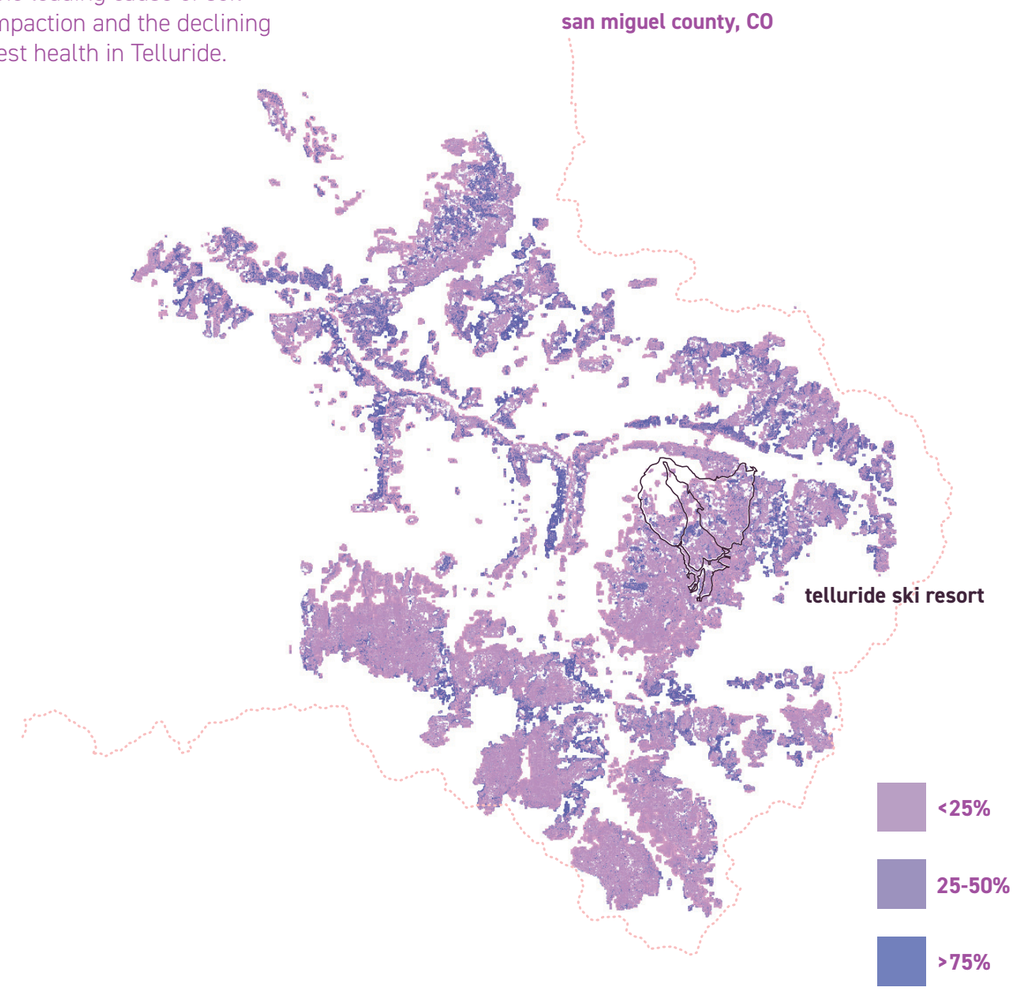
COMPACTING "ON PISTE"
IMPACTS OF ARTIFICIAL SNOW

Behind the scenes, snowmakoing requires a vast engineered system: underground pipes, pumping stations, electrical grids, and water storage reservoirs—all drawing heavily from local resources.



FOREST LOSS 2025

Combined with necessary grooming machinery and thus the need to have an evenly graded slope, artificial snow is the leading cause of soil compaction and the declining forest health in Telluride.



CORY PAGE + ADVISED BY KIRA CLINGEN

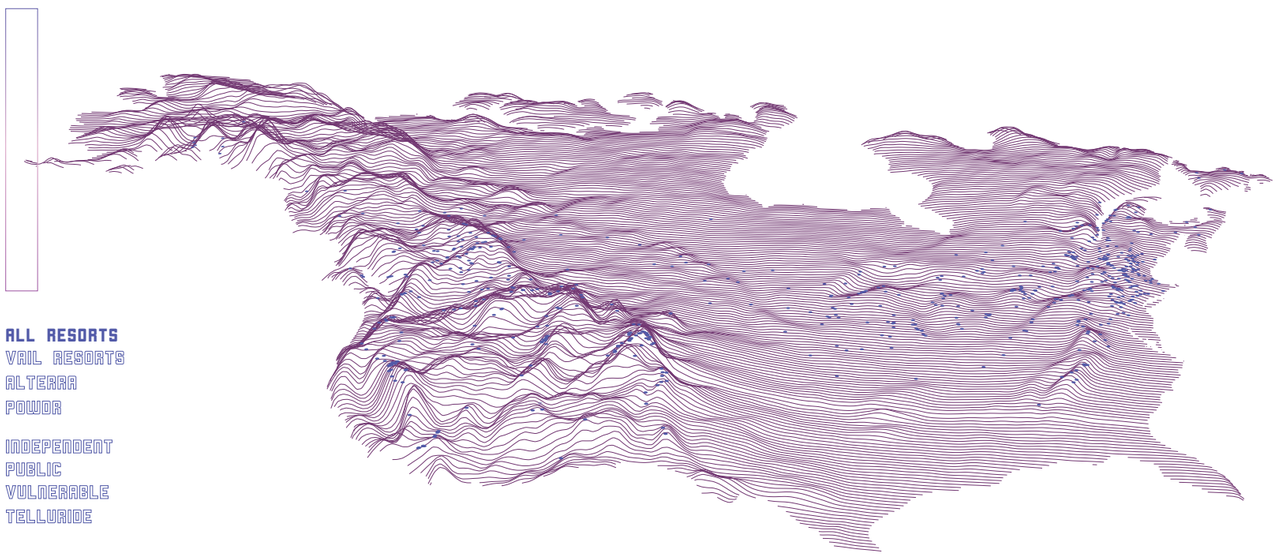


Joe Zoeline (right) Resort Owner/Founder, Telluride Ski Resort, 1973[17]

Making snow in the absence of winter is **not a story of adaptation**, **it's a strategy of dissonance,** echoing the same extractive playbook used by the mining industries who pillaged and vanished on the same land 60 years ago.

NORTH AMERICA'S SKI RESORTS

Mega-resort monopolies like Vail Resorts, POWDR, and Alterra now dominate the global ski market. Their strategy of consolidation protects profits from climate volatility while doubling down on snowmaking infrastructure.



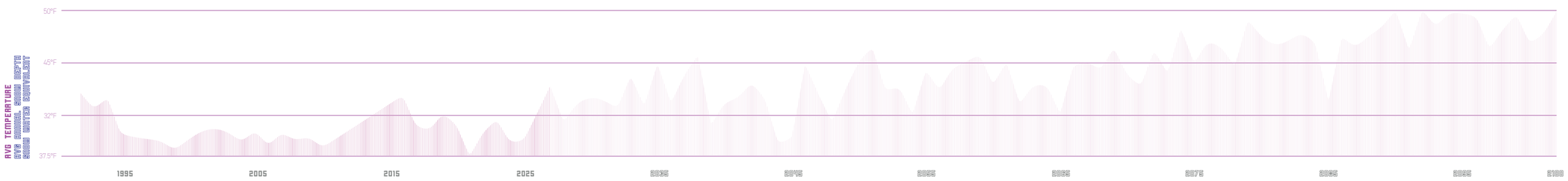
ALL RESORTS
VAIL RESORTS
ALTERRA
POWDR

INDEPENDENT
PUBLIC
VULNERABLE
TELLURIDE

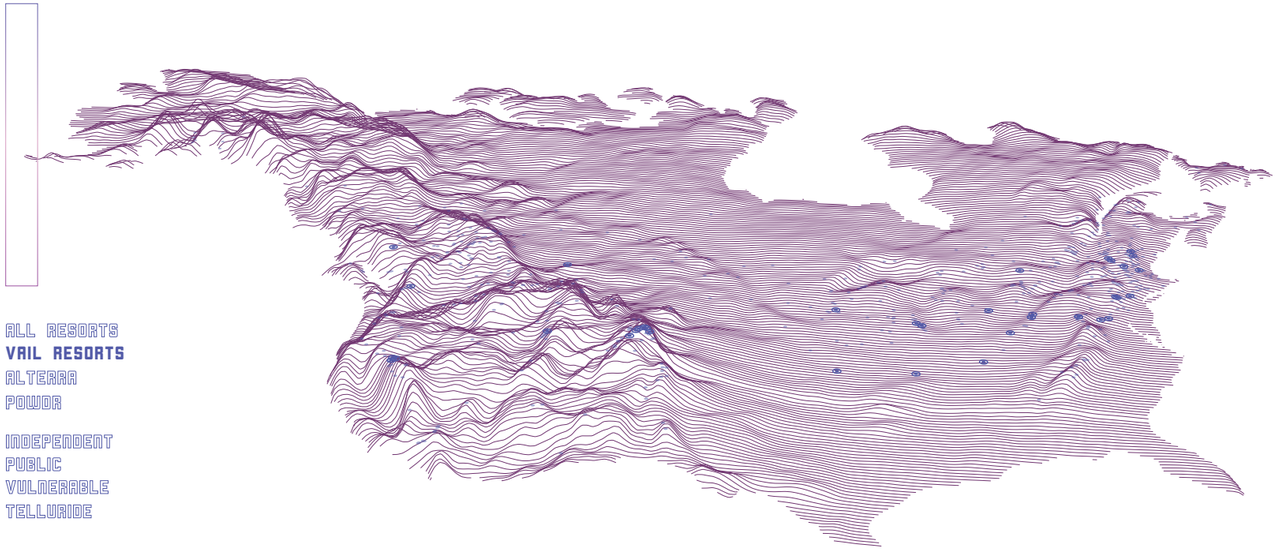


INCREASING TEMPERATURES

Upper Colorado-Dolores Subbasin



RESORTS OWNED BY VAIL RESORTS



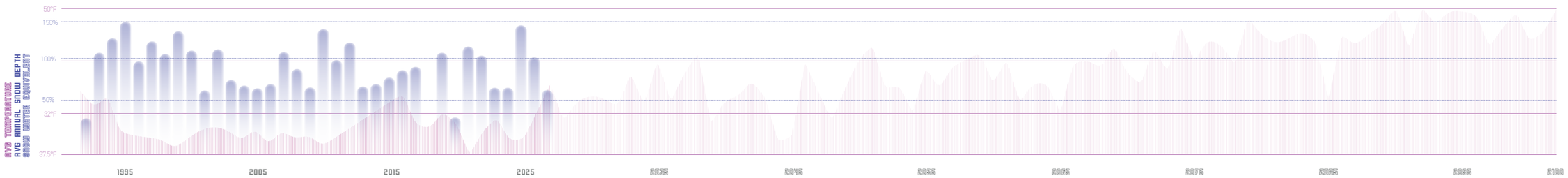
ALL RESORTS
VAIL RESORTS
ALTERRA
POWDR

INDEPENDENT
PUBLIC
VULNERABLE
TELLURIDE

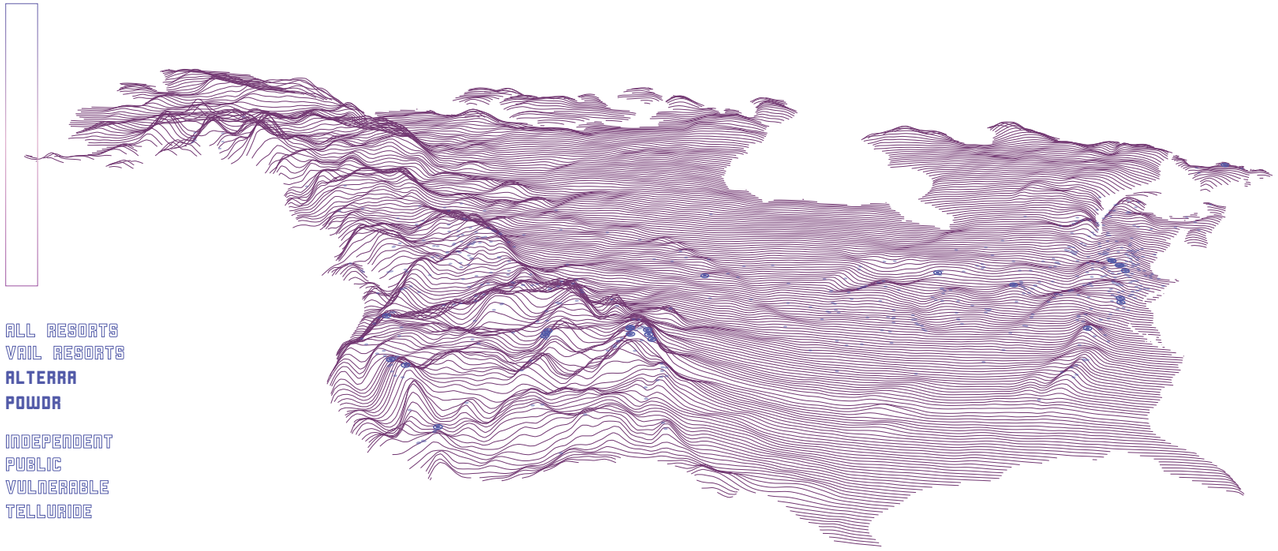


INCREASING TEMPERATURES

Upper Colorado-Dolores Subbasin



RESORTS OWNED BY ALTERRA + POWDR



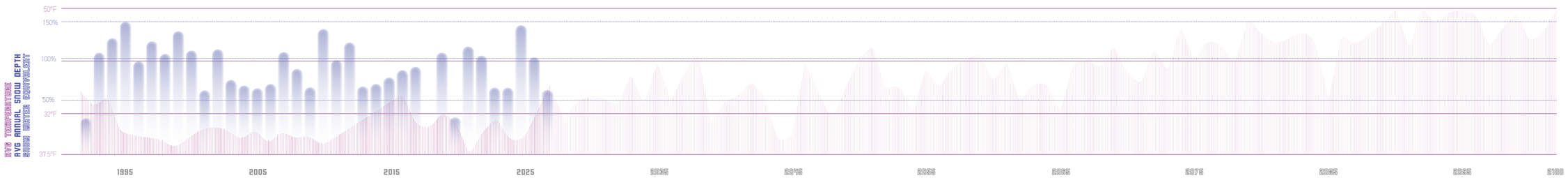
ALL RESORTS
VAIL RESORTS
ALTERRA
POWDR

INDEPENDENT
PUBLIC
VULNERABLE
TELLURIDE



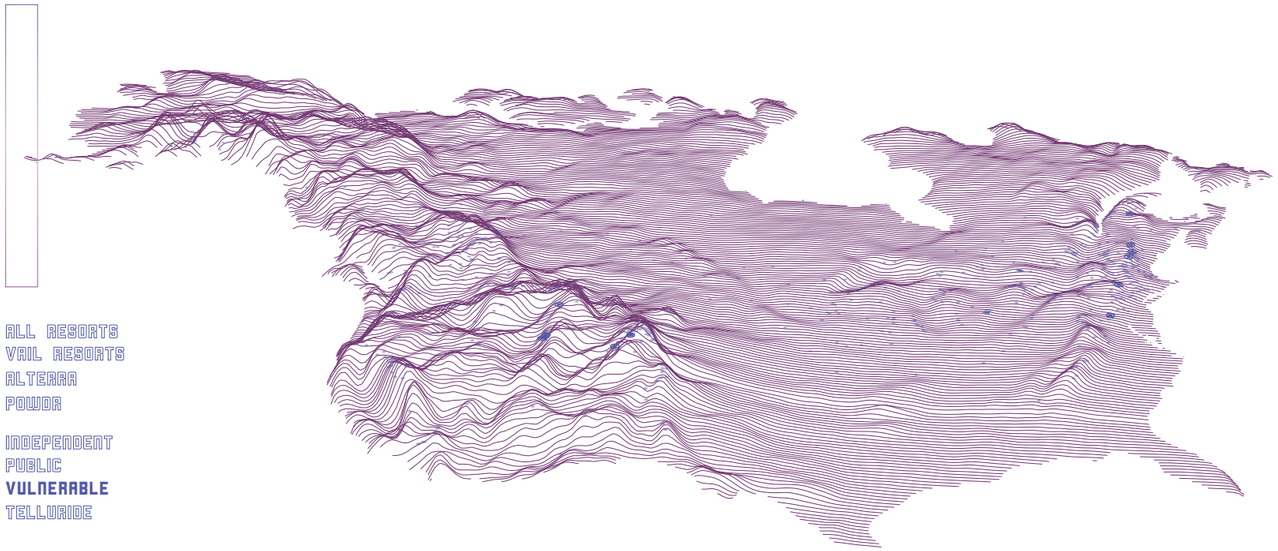
INCREASING TEMPERATURES

Upper Colorado-Dolores Subbasin



IMMEDIATE AQUISITION RISK

Ski resorts that experience several consecutive low-snow years are likely to be bought out by major resort holding companies, further consolidating the ski landscape into fewer owner hands.



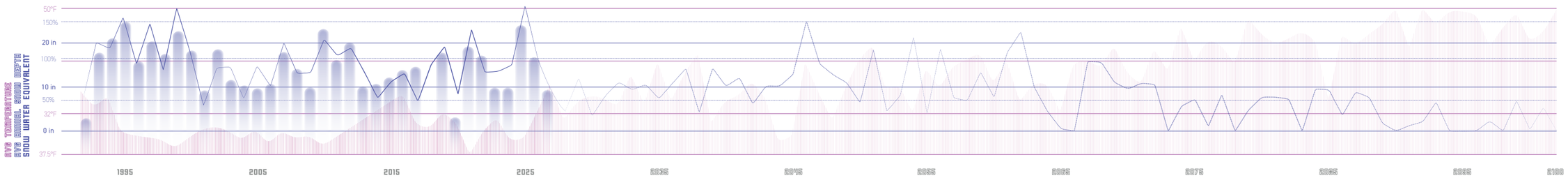
ALL RESORTS
VAIL RESORTS
ALTERRA
POWDR

INDEPENDENT
PUBLIC
VULNERABLE
TELLURIDE



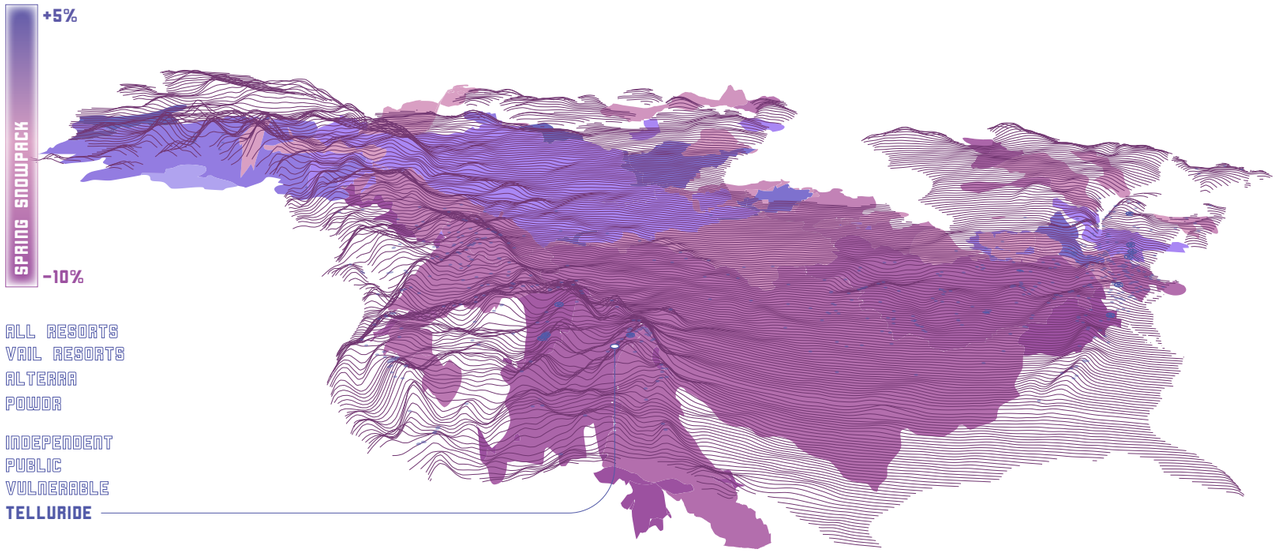
SHIFTING SNOWPACK

Upper Colorado-Dolores Subbasin



TELLURIDE SKI RESORT

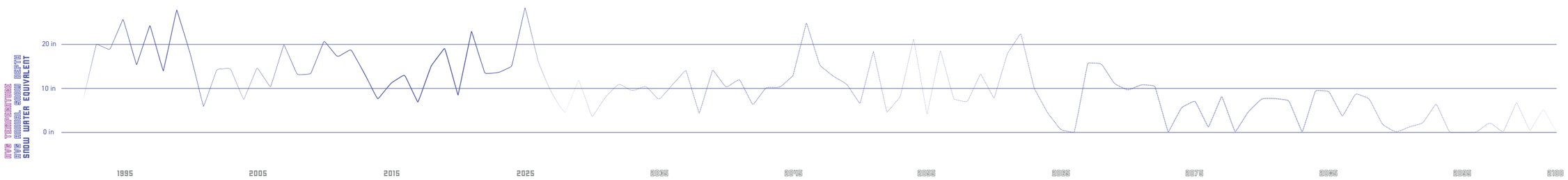
Telluride Ski Resort is among the most vulnerable alpine resorts, facing both climate and economic volatility. Since 2018, it has partnered with Vail Resorts through the Epic Pass, granting limited access to pass holders. However, in March 2025, owner Chuck Horning was publicly criticized by the Towns of Telluride and Mountain Village for alleged mismanagement, including obstructing a long-running summer concert series and delaying infrastructure upgrades.





SHIFTING SNOWPACK

Upper Colorado-Dolores Subbasin



Mountain Village Town Manager Paul Wisor stated, “Chuck is failing us all,” highlighting concerns over Horning’s leadership and commitment to the community[18].

TELLURIDE

ST. SAN SOPHIA

MTN VILLAGE

MARKET PLAZA

3 oak street

9 plunge lift

15 revelation lift

8 apex lift

14 gold hill

4 villlage express

7 lift 7

5 polar queen express

15 prospect express

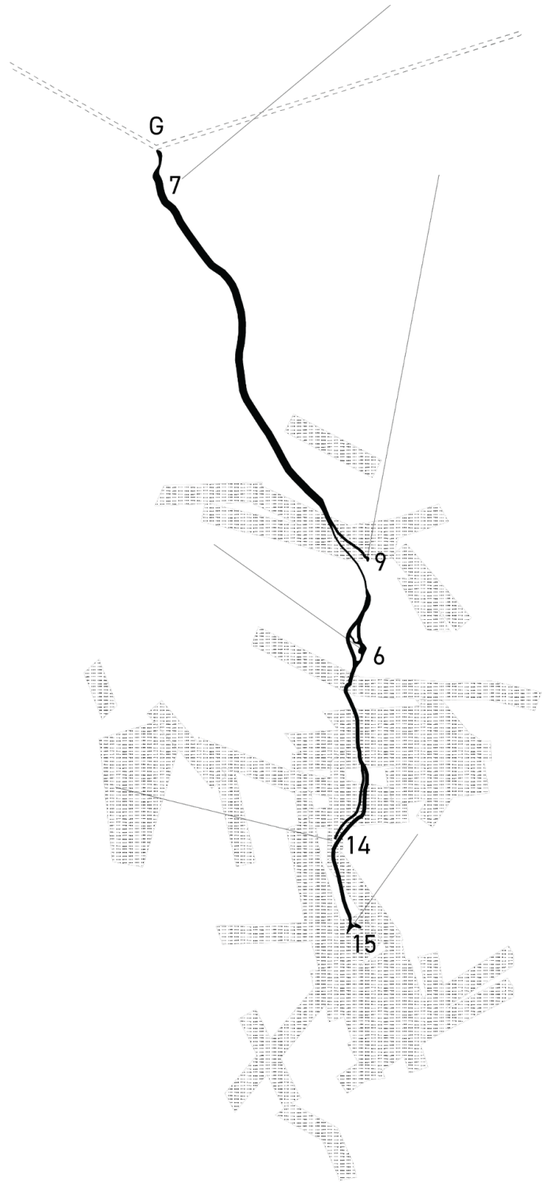
2 comp hill

13 lynx lift

11 ute park

1 chondola

10 sunshine express



See Forever

Blue Ski Run

2.8 miles long

1,710 vertical gain



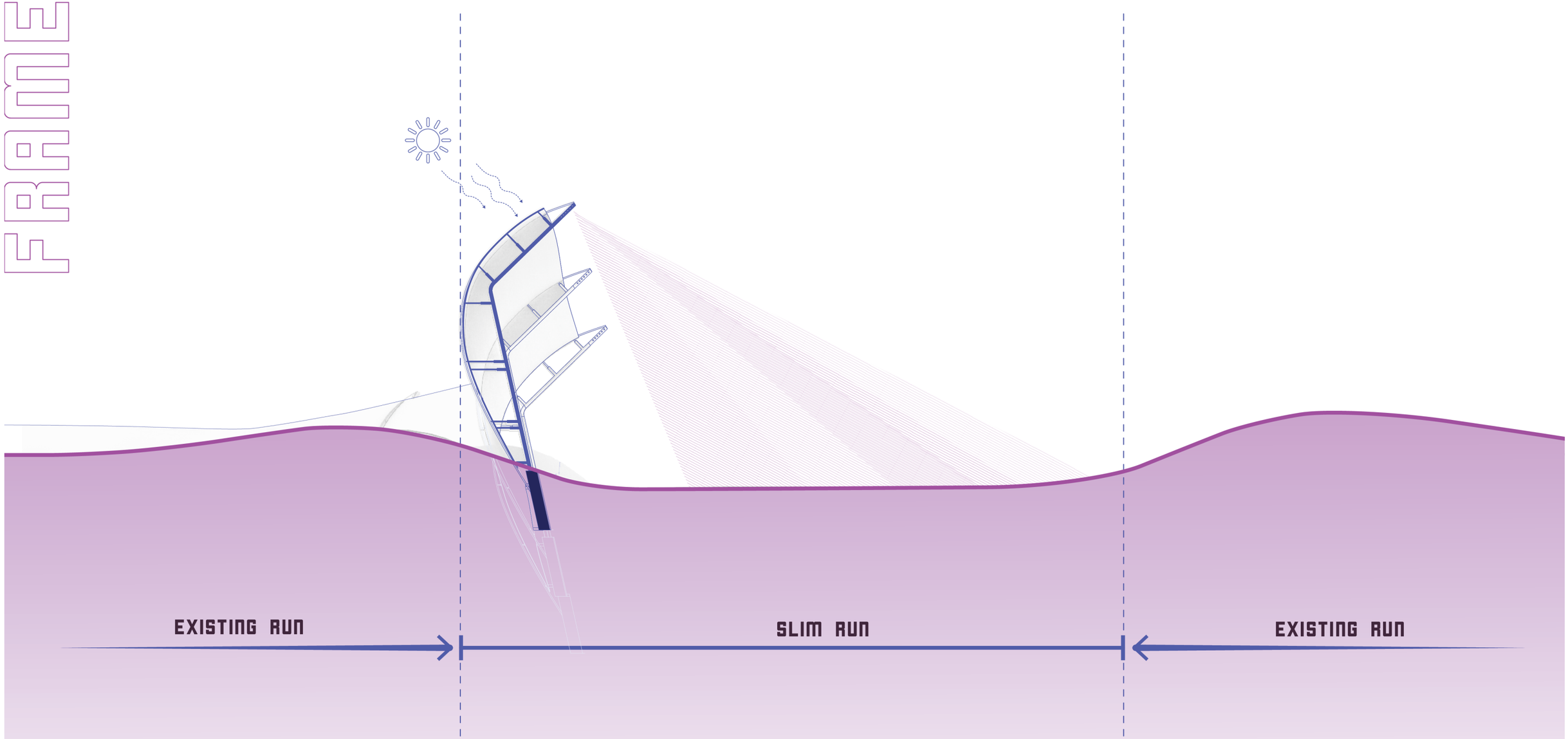






scale 1:500

FRAME



Narrow bounds of the existing regraded ski runs

FRAMING THE SLOPE

9,402 private aircraft landings
= 3,400 t CO_2e per year

12 PM

2 PM

4 PM

snow fence

FILTER

FRAME

180-0'

66-0'

30-0'

Forest die-off

SEE FOREVER
TO TELLURIDE TRAIL
TO GONDOLA

original grade

ski resort re-grade [2001 expansion]

snow load

307-0'

260-0'

x19 Units

1 5 10 15 20

SEE FOREVER

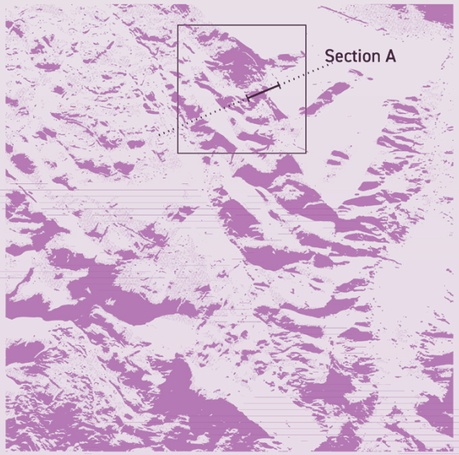
36-0'

T TRAIL

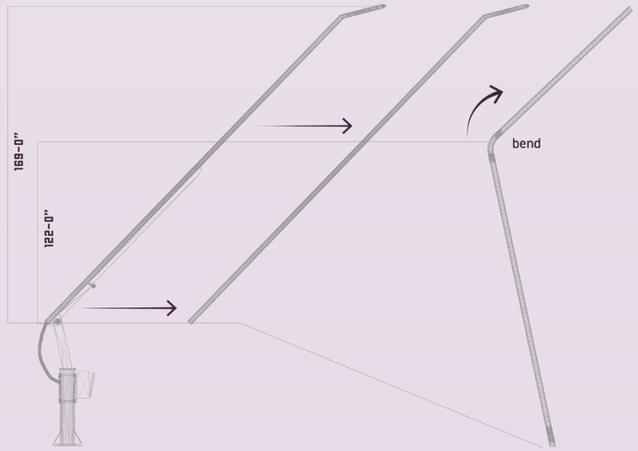
AFTER SNOW

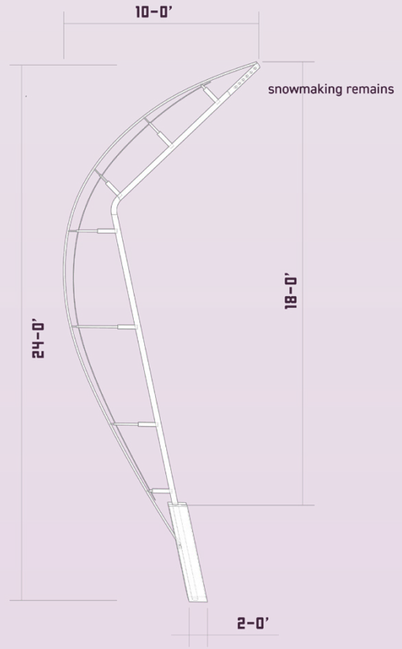
site plan

high solar zones

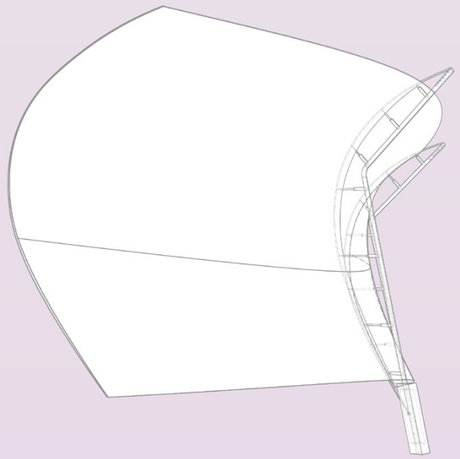


snowmaking lance
permanent infrastructure



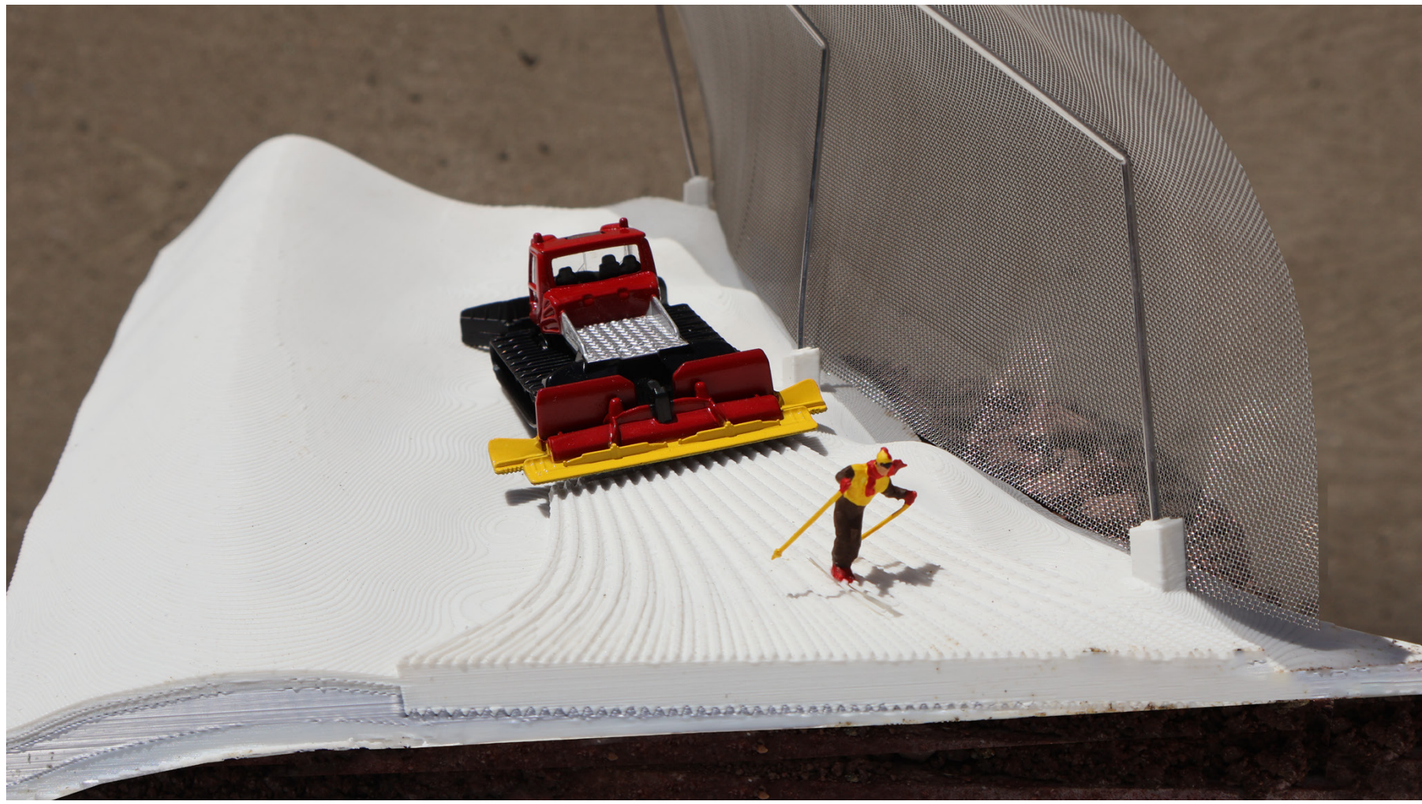


solar sail
wool + resin netting

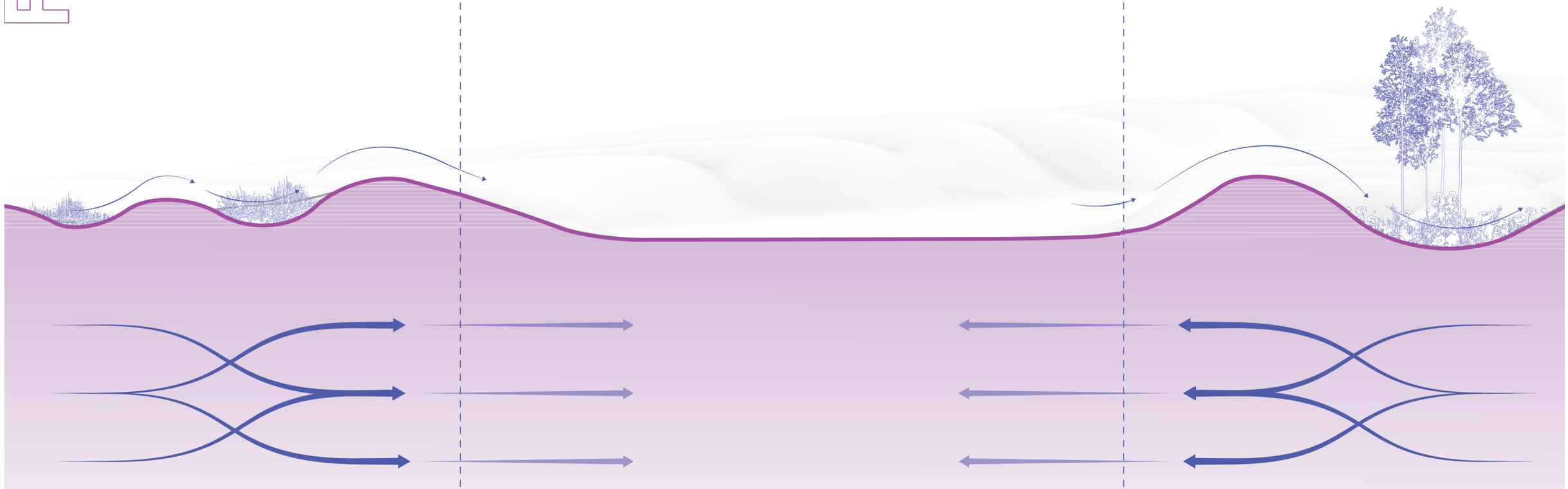




scale 1:87



FILTER



INDIVIDUAL STANDS

ECOLOGICAL FILTER

CLONAL COLONIES

Investigate new landforms that setup conditions for future ecologies

FILTER IN ALPINE ECOLOGIES

55-0'

60-0'

25-0'

proposed
FILTER

SEE FOREVER

FILTER

original grade

year 1

year 50

266-0'

CARVING THE LANDSCAPE

EXPERT 10ft / 36°

INTERMEDIATE 15ft / 39°

BEGINNER 20ft / 45-50°



The ski turn as the landform "unit"

turning downslope

ASPENS

ENGLEMANN SPRUCE

SUBALPINE FIR

condition zones



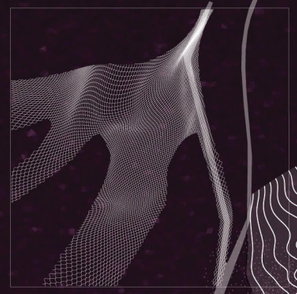




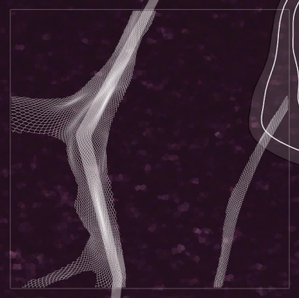
Guided by the precision of the ski turn, the landforms follow ephemeral moguls shaped by skiers during the disappearing winter. Using a grid-based system, these formations are edited to create condition zones tailored to specific plant species—wider intervals for clonal spreaders, tighter ones for solitary species.

CORY PAGE + ADVISED BY KIRA CLINGEN

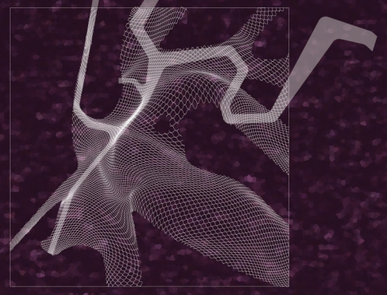
INTERVENTION ZONES



UPPER: 11,890'



MID: 10,950'



LOWER: 10,540'



winter accessible



"Seed Forever"
One initial seeding

Build soil mass

Micro Grading

FILTERING + FORMING

Artificial snowmakers are hacked to disperse seeds during the spring and summer growing seasons.

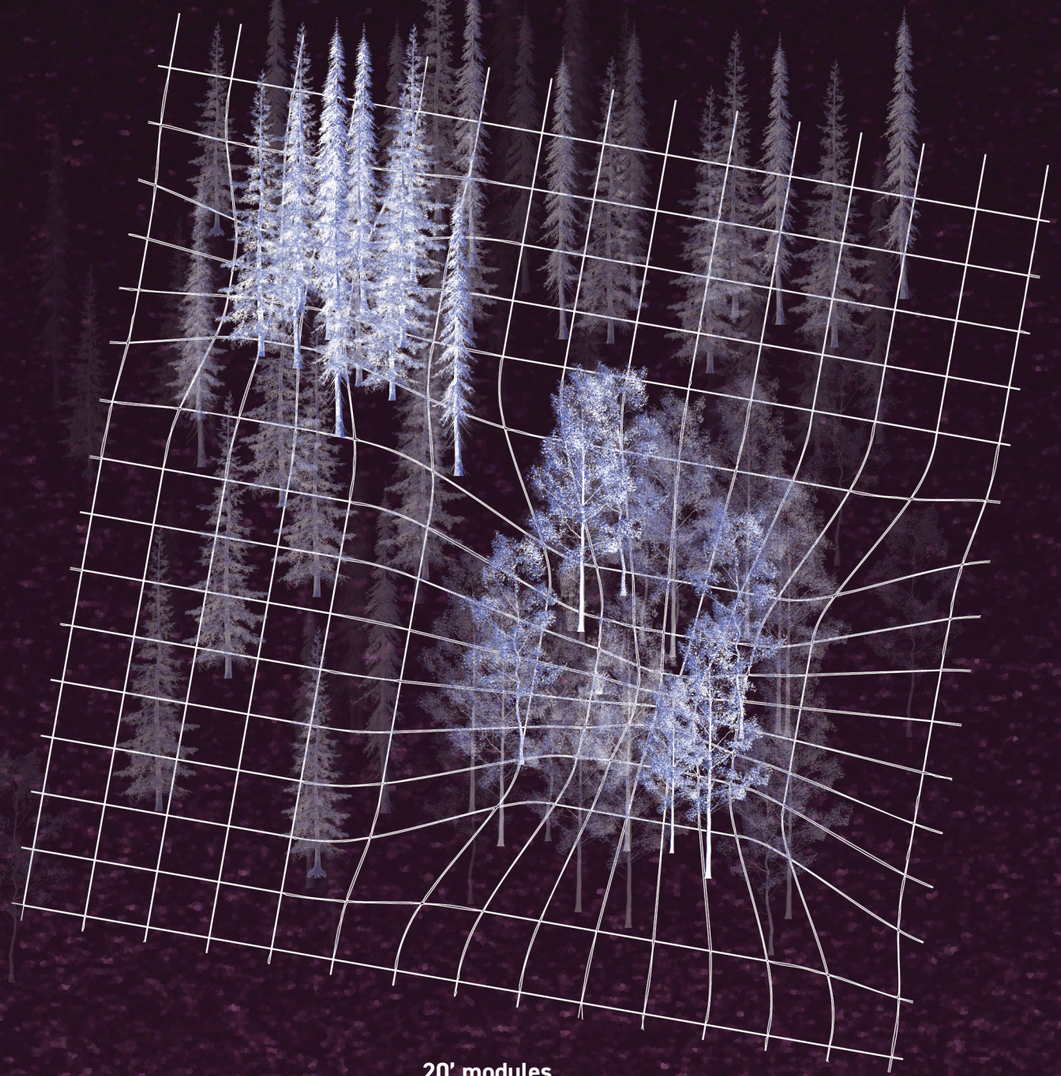
The altered topography is carefully shaped using retrofitted winter machinery—groomers, snowmobiles, and other vehicles once tasked with maintaining snowpack now retooled to sculpt the land for regeneration.

ESTABLISHING CONDITIONS FOR REGROWTH

5’ modules

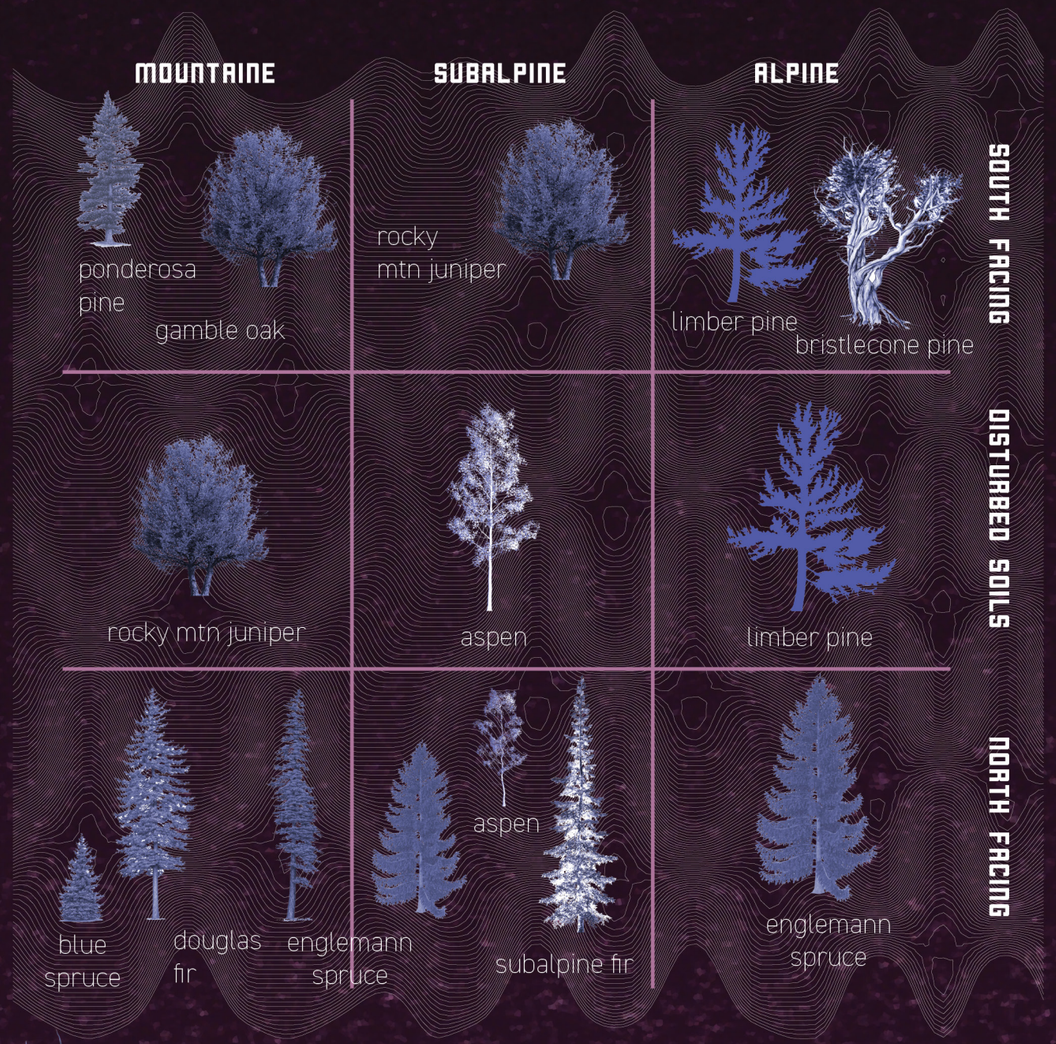
Englemann Spruce
Picea engelmannii

The landorms are designed to align with the desired conditions of different alpine tree species: Aspen, Englemann Spruce, Subalpine Fir.



20’ modules

Quaking Aspen
Populus tremuloides




Blackroot Sedge
(Carex elynoides)

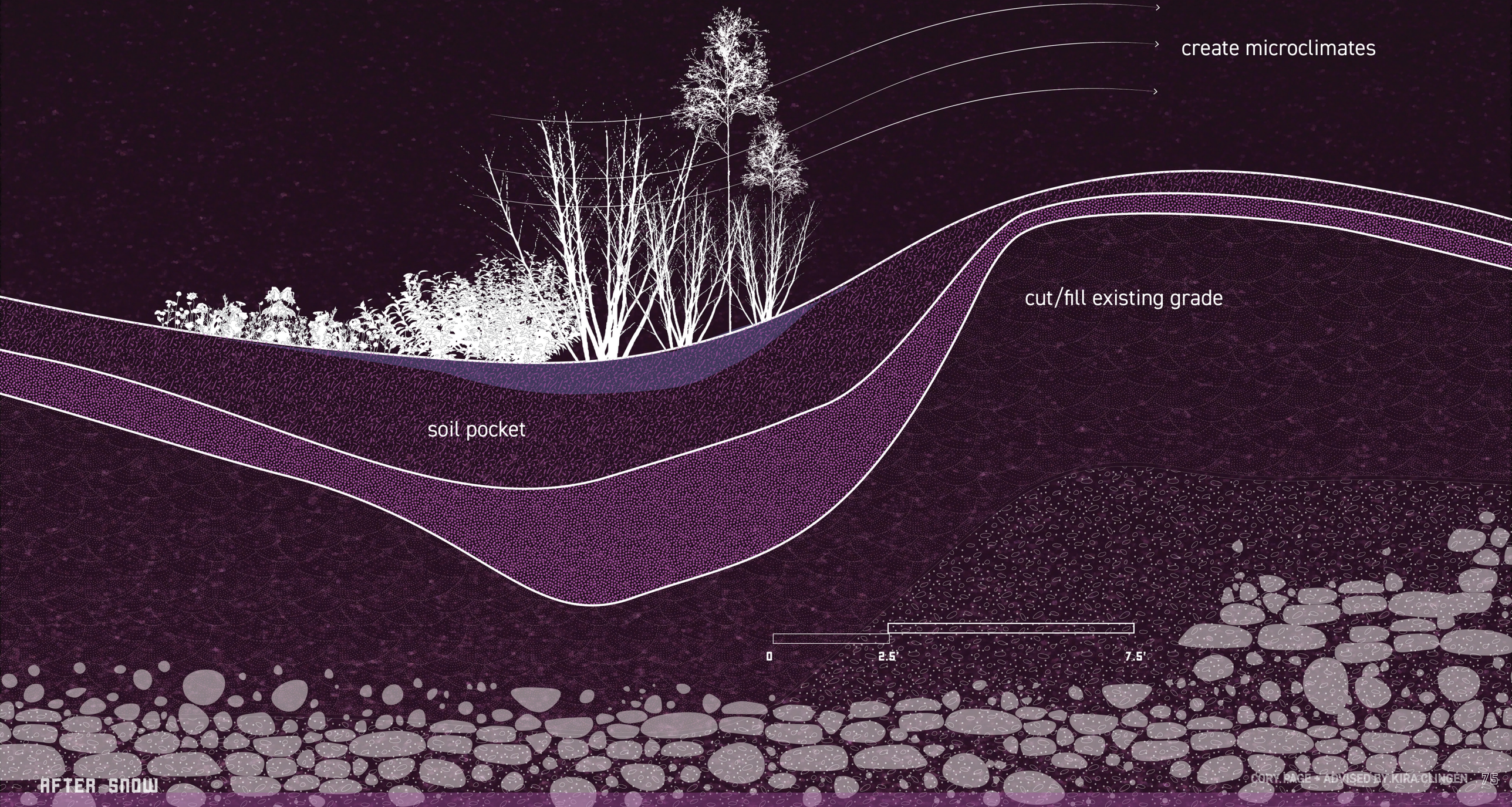

Alpine Poppy
(Papaver radicatum)


Short-fruit Willow
(Salix brachycarpa)


Golden Saxifrage
(Saxifraga chrysantha)


Alpine Clover
(Trifolium dasyphyllum)

REBUILDING SOILS

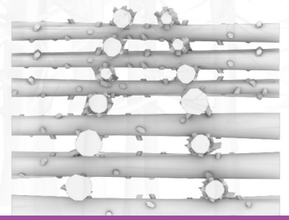




scale 1:87



FOIL



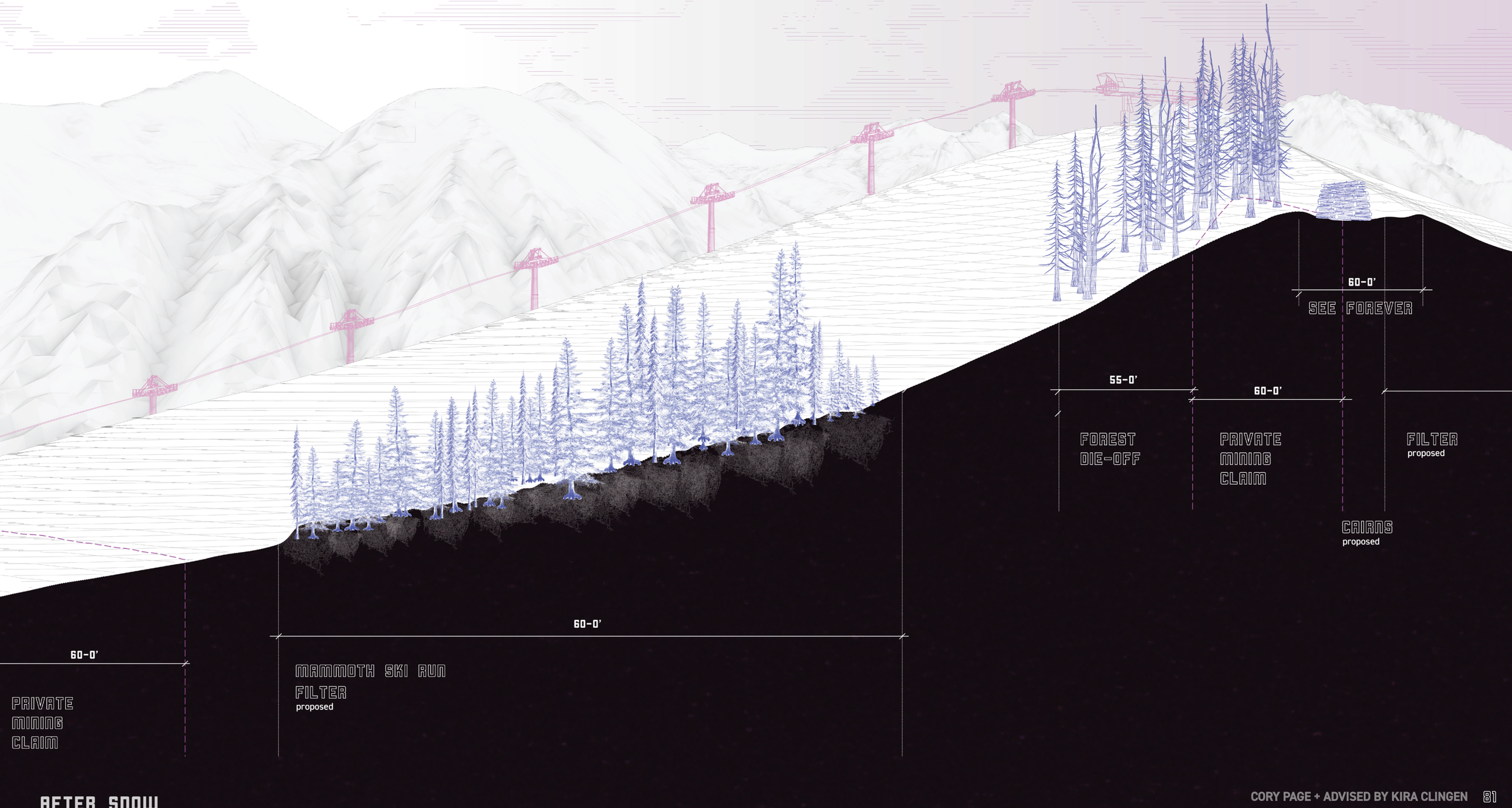
PUBLIC

PRIVATE CLAIMS

FOREST ZONE

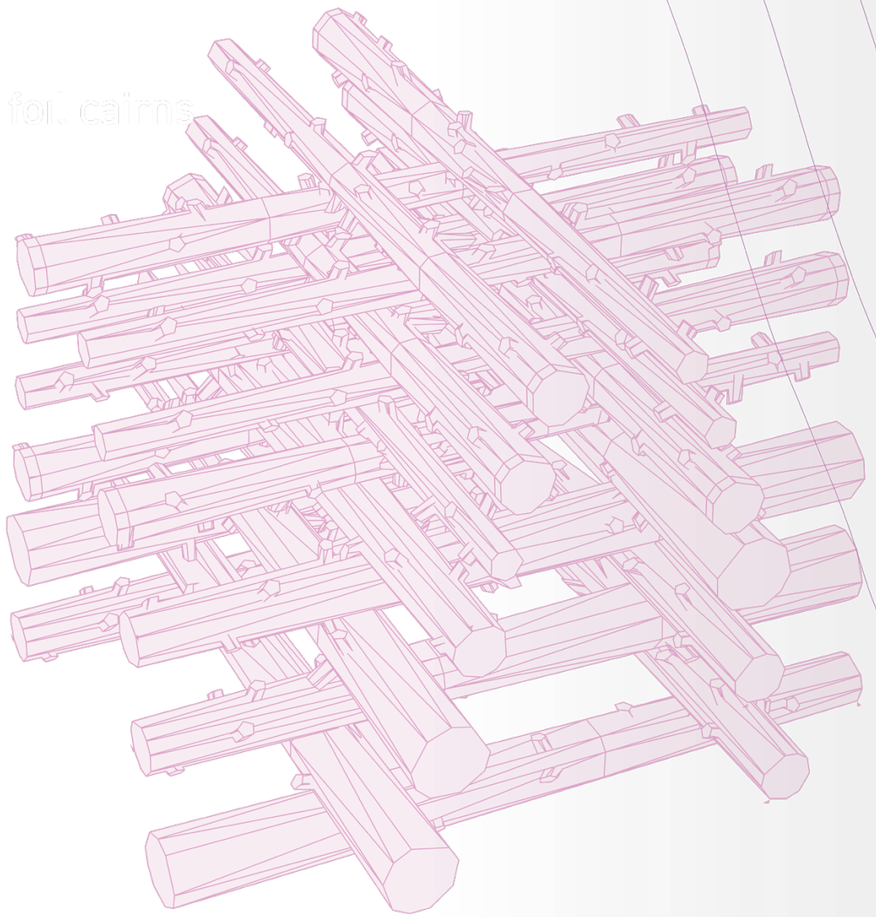
Upend the privatization of skiing by incorporating resort land into a new alpine public

FOILING THE PRIVATE MODEL OF SKI RESORTS



rough cut cairn

for cairns





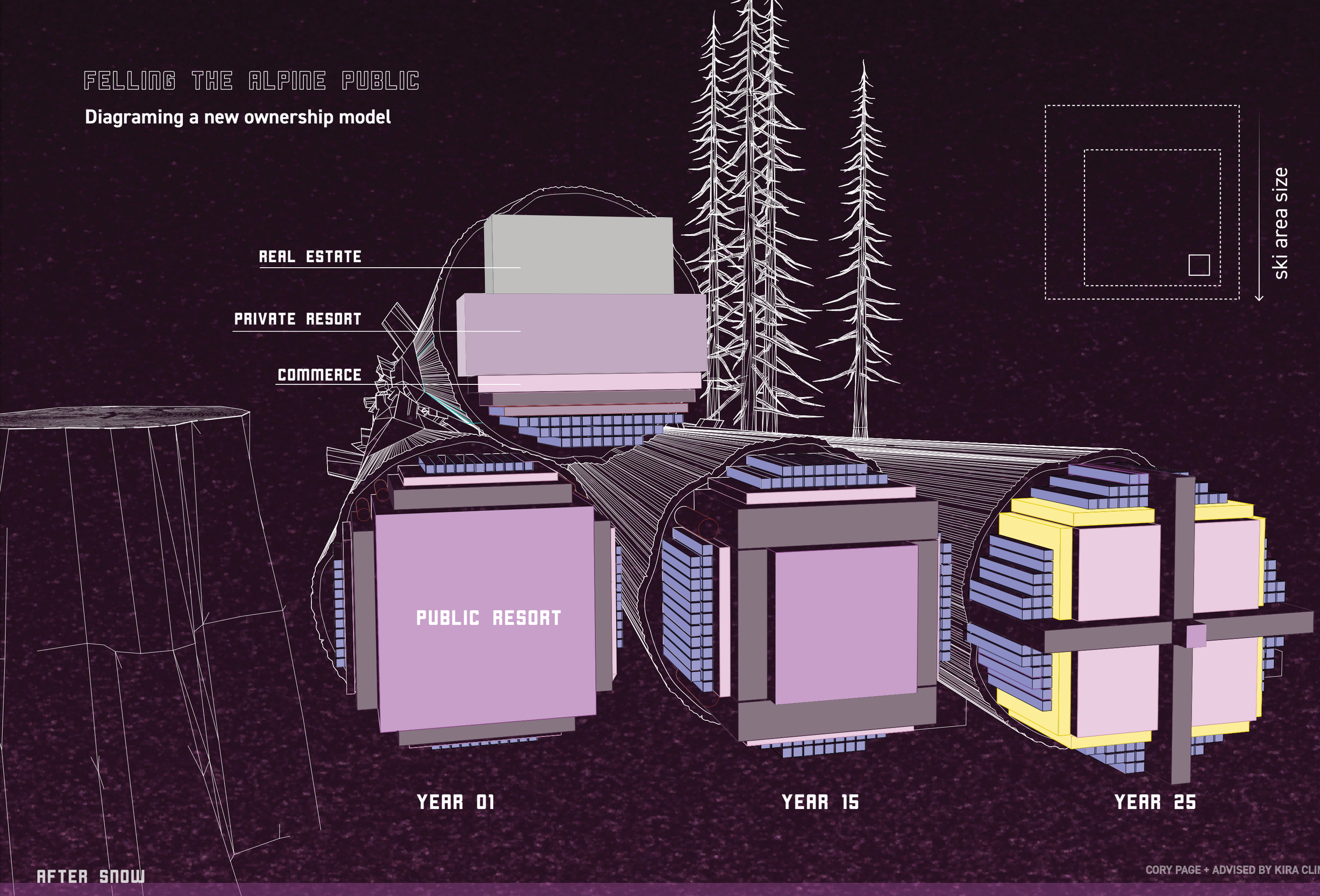
TREE CAIRNS

Upwards of 50% of the forests in Telluride are either dying or already dead. This alarming reality stems from underfunded forest management, the destruction of old-growth stands during the mining era, and the forest service's inability to maintain tree stocks within the ski resort boundary.

The Foil design strategy reimagines forest management by selectively culling standing dead trees to construct cairns—marker-objects that delineate the blurred thresholds between public and private space. These cairns act as year-round reminders of an emergent alpine public, one that expands as the privatized model of skiing is dismantled.

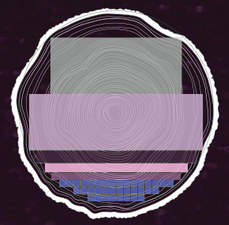
FELLING THE ALPINE PUBLIC

Diagraming a new ownership model

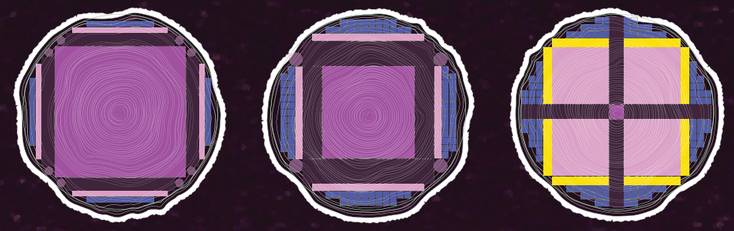


FELLING THE ALPINE PUBLIC

existing model



alpine public



YEAR 01 YEAR 30 YEAR 50





milling standing deads

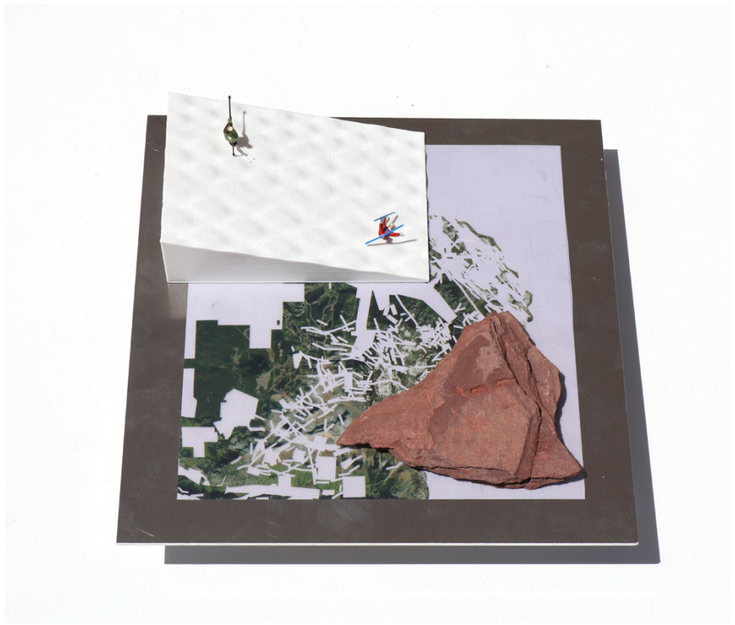


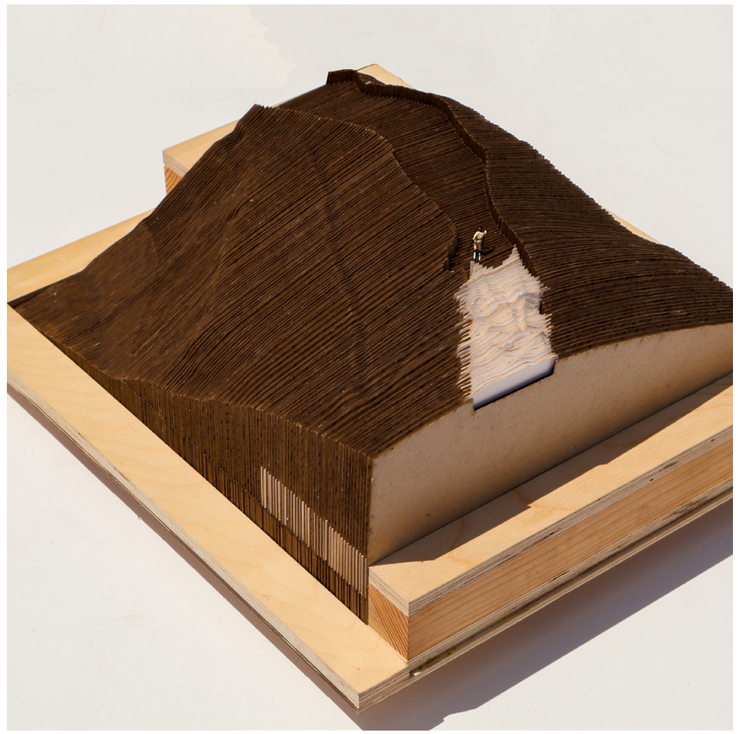
access indicators

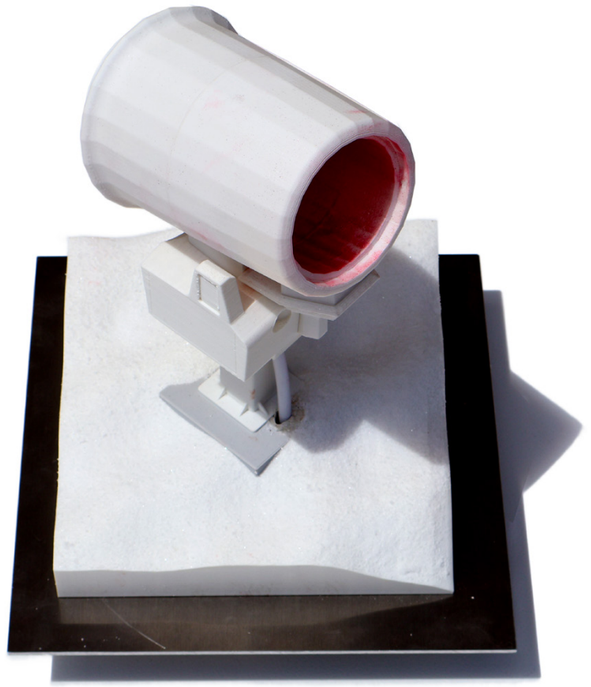


scale 1:87



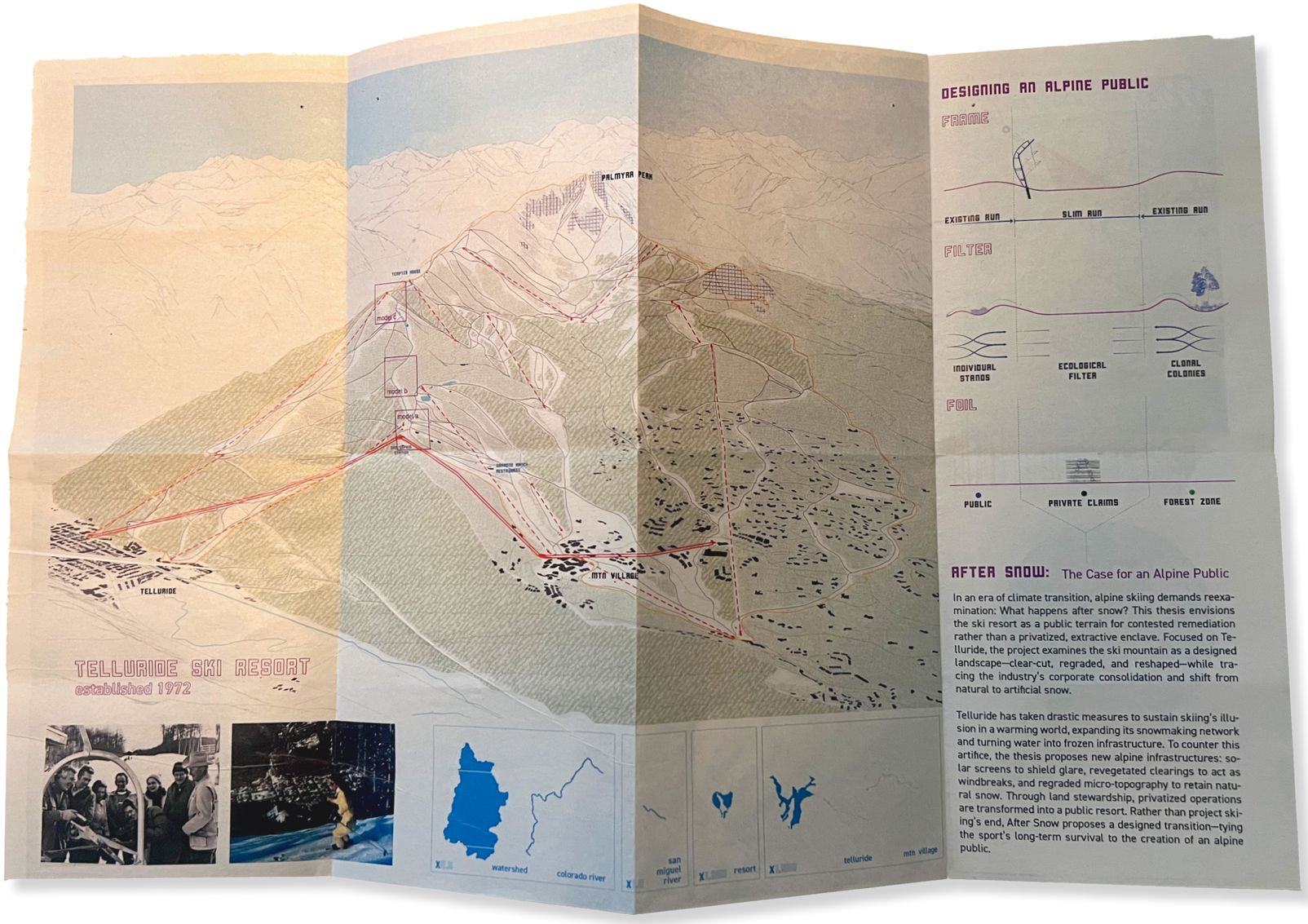






Lift 9 scale model: 1:500

EXHIBITION MAP

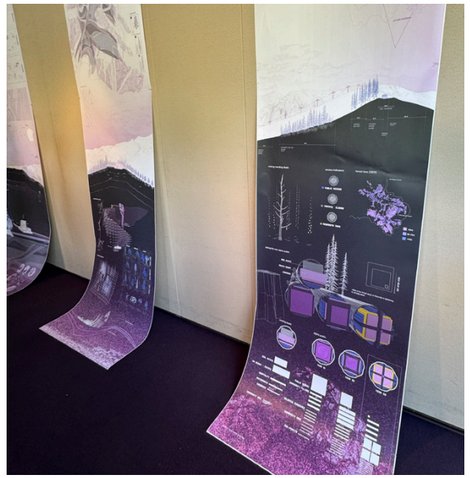





GLITTER BOMB!



THANK YOU KIRA






THANK YOU KIKI






THANK YOU MARIANNE

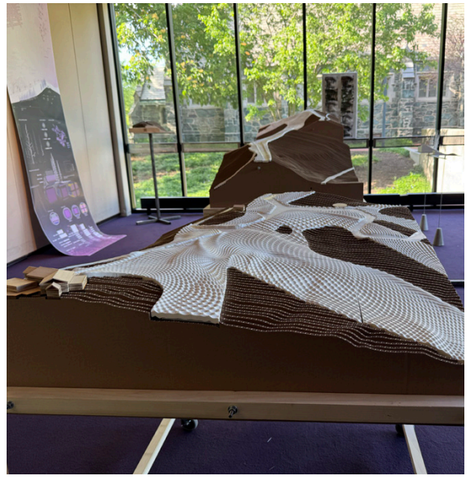




Image Credits

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2 Eng, Ben. "Telluride Ski Resort." Photograph. Expedia. Accessed May 20, 2025. https://www.expedia.com/pictures/colorado/telluride/telluride-ski-resort.d6089775?view=large-gallery&photo=147389.
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4 Ehrenzeller, Gian. "Swiss Ski Resorts Struggle with Snow Shortage and Record Temperatures." SWI swissinfo.ch, January 4, 2023. https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-made/swiss-ski-resorts-struggle-with-snow-shortage-and-record-temperatures/48180290
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6 Ehrenzeller, Gian. "Swiss Ski Resorts Struggle with Snow Shortage and Record Temperatures." SWI swissinfo.ch, January 4, 2023. https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-made/swiss-ski-resorts-struggle-with-snow-shortage-and-record-temperatures/48180290
7 Nakaya, Ukichiro. Snow Crystals: Natural and Artificial. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.
8 Photo by Ben Clarke, posted in the American Southwest Facebook group, January 2023.

9 Telluride Tourism Board. "The Gondola." Telluride.com. Accessed May 19, 2025. https://www.telluride.com/discover/the-gondola/
10 Map of the San Juan Triangle. Circa 1903. Public domain image via Picryl. Accessed May 19, 2025. https://picryl.com/media/map-of-the-san-juan-triangle-dpla-55859ece2e344a9869d30ea82bb9a33f-0d09ae
11 Telluride Tourism Board. "The Destination." Telluride.com. Accessed May 19, 2025. https://www.telluride.com/discover/the-destination/
12 Telluride Historical Museum. Ribbon Cutting at Telluride Ski Resort, c. 1970s. Photograph. Telluride Historical Museum Archives.
13
14 Mitterwallner, Veronika, et al. "Global Reduction of Snow Cover in Ski Areas under Climate Change." PLOS ONE, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0281234.
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17 Photo courtesy of Telluride Ski Resort. From 5280 Magazine, "Telluride Ski Resort Celebrates 50 Years," December 14, 2022.
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