



## Landscape Assessment

Remarkables Sugar Bowl  
Lift Replacement

NZSki Limited

July 2018



# patch

landscape ■ architecture ■ planning

## INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report provides an assessment of the landscape character and visual amenity effects of a proposed replacement chairlift in the Remarkables Ski Area Sub-zone, Queenstown. This report includes:

- A description of the landscape,
- A description of the proposal,
- A landscape assessment,
- Conclusion,
- Attachments.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

2.1. The Remarkables Mountains (2200amsl) are part of the larger Hector Mountain range which forms the dramatic southern and southeastern backdrop to the Queenstown area. The craggy western face of The Remarkables is a memorable, well-known and iconic view from Queenstown and the surrounding area. This western face spills down steeply from the summits of Single Cone and Double Cone to meet the Coneburn Valley and the edge of Lake Wakatipu.

2.2. The Remarkables Ski Area Sub-Zone exists within a parcel of land known as the Rastus Burn Recreation Reserve which is managed by the Department of Conservation (DoC) and part of a lease, easement and concession agreement between Doc and the applicant, NZSki Ltd. The sub-zone is set within a basin to the east of the Remarkables summits, to the north of the Wye Creek and Doolans Creek catchment and to the west of the Ben Cruachan range. It should be noted that the Doolans Creek catchments is within the Central Otago District (**Attachment A**).

2.3. The Remarkables Ski Field is currently spread across three main areas known as the Shadow Basin to the west, Curvey Basin to the south and Sugar Bowl to the east. Currently, the ski area infrastructure contained within the Remarkables Ski Area Sub-zone consists of:

- The Remarkables access road,
- Water treatment ponds at approximate 1420masl,

- A series of parking areas,
- A 'pick-up' platform at the base of the Homewood Basin ski run,
- A large, architecturally designed base building, a utility building and a medical building,
- An approximately 150m long, covered surface conveyor,
- Chairlifts with top and bottom structures including:
  - The Shadow Basin chairlift which begins near the base building and extends to the west to reach the upper extents of the Shadow Basin at approximately 1940masl,
  - The Alta chairlift which begins approximately 170m south of the base building and extends south to approximately 1760masl,
  - The Curvey Basin chairlift which begins near the base building and extends to the upper reaches of Curvey Basin near the base of the feature known as East Wye Saddle at approximately 1900masl,
  - The Sugar Bowl chairlift which begins mid mountain at approximately 1660masl and extends to the northeast to a relatively flat area at approximate 1856masl.
- A utility shed near the top of the Alta chairlift.
- Snowmaking machines,
- A series of earth worked ski trails,
- Snow fences and signs.

2.4. The ski area infrastructure described above forms part of a modified landscape character which exists within the frame of a much larger, natural mountain landscape.

2.5. The ski area is well contained within the Rastus Burn catchment and is not readily visible from Queenstown or the surrounding areas. The visual effects of ski area infrastructure do not spill into the Doolans Creek, Wye Creek or into the west face of the Remarkables. Some visual effects of the ski area infrastructure encroach on the highly natural Lake Alta area, but this area continues to display a highly natural character. The existing ski field infrastructure is generally only viewed from within the Rastus Burn. The only prominent indicator of ski area development on the Remarkables as viewed from Queenstown and the surrounding area is the access road, which zigzags up the lower northern and western slopes of the mountain.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1. A detailed description of the proposal is contained within the Assessment of Environmental Effects which forms part of this application.
- 3.2. This proposal seeks to construct a new chairlift which will provide access from the base facilities to the Sugar Bowl Basin. Currently, users need to take two chairlifts to reach a similar destination. The existing Sugar Basin chairlift will be removed. Two new ski runs are proposed which will link the upper and mid Sugar Bowl areas with the bottom station.

#### *Proposed Chairlift*

- 3.3. The proposed Sugar Bowl chairlift will be a six-seat, detachable chair with:
- A bottom station at 1611masl near the base building which will be 6.92m in height from a proposed ground level. It will be partially glazed in a polycarbonate coloured grey. The balance of the station building will be coloured in a mix of Anthracite Grey (similar to Resene Mirage cc which has an LRV of 10%) and Pure Green (Similar to Resene Vida Loca which has an LRV of 29%) with a Traffic White underbelly; all in a matte finish. A small control room will be clad and coloured to match the station building.
  - A top station building and control room at 1868.5masl which will be 6.93 in height from a proposed ground level. It, and a small control room will be coloured and clad as per the base structure.
  - Ten lift towers ranging in tube length from between 8.12m and 19.3m. These lift towers will be coloured in a dark grey similar to Ironsand which has an LRV of 9%.
  - Steel cables between the top and bottom station extending approximately 1.05km in length.

#### *Proposed Ski Runs and Earthworks*

- 3.4. Earthworks will be required to form two new ski runs. These include:
- The proposed Sugar Stash Trail which will be 30m wide and exits below and north of the proposed lift line.
  - The proposed Sugar Run Trail will be 50m wide and will act as a new extension of the existing Casterway Trail.
  - A proposed Sugar Link Trail which will traverse the contours between the two proposed main trails.



- 3.5. A total of 137,000m<sup>2</sup> of area will be disturbed to form the proposed trails. The earthworks will require a total of 171,000m<sup>3</sup> of hard cut and 217,000m<sup>3</sup> of fill. It is understood that hard cut will equate to an increase in fill, and that there is likely to be a balance of cut and fill.
- 3.6. An Ecological Assessment was prepared by e3 Scientific (E3S). It is understood that the alignment of the proposed trails was slightly amended following the recommendation of this report. This report states that tussock grassland and cushion field communities exist within parts of the proposed trails and that no works will take place in wetland areas<sup>1</sup>. The E3S report determined that the ecological value of the vegetation that is proposed to be disturbed is high and the ecological value of the threatened avifauna ranges from very high to moderately-high. All non threatened plant and bird species are considered to have a low ecological value.<sup>2</sup> E3S states that NZ Ski Ltd has a proven track record of relocating plants and E3S has recommended 12 conditions of consent which they consider, if adopted and adhered to, will ensure the proposal will result in no more than minor ecological impacts.

#### 4. LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

##### *Statutory Considerations*

- 4.1. At time of writing, the relevant portions of the QLDC Proposed District Plan (**PDP**) are subject to appeal. I have been provided with legal advice that, given the number of appeals which have been lodged with particular regard to Landscapes and Rural Character – Chapter 6, that the Operative District Plan (**ODP**) carries more weight than the PDP. Following that advice, the following report will provide a detailed assessment of the proposal within the frame of the ODP.
- 4.2. In terms of the ODP, the site is part of the Ski Area Sub-zone and the relevant assessment matters are contained within Part 5. It is understood that Ski Area Sub-Zones are excluded from the landscape classifications (i.e. Outstanding Natural Landscape, Outstanding Natural Feature, Visual Amenity Landscapes) and therefore not subject to those landscape assessment matters.
- 4.3. It is understood that within the Ski Area Sub-Zone, Council has control over the following matters:

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<sup>1</sup> E3S report page 8.

<sup>2</sup> E3S report page 21, part 5.2.3

- Ski tows and lifts (location, external appearance, alignment and methods of construction, location),
- Buildings (external appearance and size; associated earthworks, access and landscaping; provision of water supply, sewage treatment and disposal, electricity and communication services (where necessary)).

4.4. The following assessment evaluates the proposal under the following ODP assessment matters relevant to landscape and visual amenity contained within part 5.4.2.3, *Assessment Matters – General*, including:

- i. General - Nature conservation values*
- vi. Controlled Activity – Commercial Recreation Activities and buildings in Ski Area*
- xxi Zone Standard – Building Height*
- xxvi Significant Indigenous Vegetation*
- xxvii Earthworks*
- xxix Site Standards – clearance of indigenous vegetation*

### **Extent of Effect**

4.5. In assessing the extent of effects, this report uses the seven-point scale recommended by the *NZILA 6.0 Practice Support Documentation, Best Practice Note, Landscape Assessment and Sustainable Management 10.1*, (02/11/10). The scale is:

*Extreme, very high, high, moderate, low, very low, negligible.*

### **Visual Effects**

4.6. The Remarkables Ski Area Sub-zone is within a discrete landscape unit where visual effects are well contained by the surrounding mountains. Outside of the Sub-zone, the existing ski area infrastructure is visible from:

- The elevated mountain ridges, saddles and spurs adjacent to the Ski Area Sub-Zone and within the Rastus Burn,
- Parts of the Lake Alta area and the Remarkables summits,
- Parts of the Remarkables Ski Area Access Road,

- A 'wedge' of the Wakatipu Basin, including parts of Malaghan's Road, Hunter Road, Speargrass Flat Road and Lower Shotover Road (**Attachment B**),
- The Coronet Peak Road and Coronet Peak Ski Field,
- The reserve lands associated with Coronet Peak and Brow Peak.

4.7. Using 3D modeling software, I have modeled and studied the proposed alignment of the lift towers. I created a visual representation (**Attachments C and D**) to demonstrate what part of the proposed new chairlift will be visible from the Wakatipu Basin. From the road junction of Hunter Road and Malaghan's Road, approximately 12.4km in distance from the proposed chairlift, it may be possible to see the bottom station and lift towers 1-5. Proposed lift towers 3-5 will potentially break a ridgeline as viewed from this distant location. From this location it is currently possible to see the base building, the Curvey Basin chairlift and the Alta chairlift, but at this distance the existing ski area infrastructure is barely legible to the untrained eye. While the proposal will result in an increased level of visible ski area infrastructure and a potential ridgeline breach, the distance of views and the breadth of the wider landscape will allow the ski area infrastructure to be well absorbed visually. I consider the proposal will result in a very low adverse effects on visual amenity as experienced from the Wakatipu Basin, Coronet Peak or the public places associated with Coronet Peak and Brow Peak.

4.8. Within the Ratus Burn area, a distinct ridge drops down from Pt 2069, north of the proposed lift line. This ridge separates Sugar Bowl Basin from the area known as Scarpa Chutes. The ridge dissipates near the 1750masl contour where the grade of the mountain meets to form a consistent face, falling down to the ski field's base area. Proposed lift towers 1-4 will be erected on this more consistently graded, lower mountain face. Lift tower 5 will be constructed at a transition point between the aforementioned ridge, the lower mountain and the upper Sugar Bowl Basin. The balance of the lift towers and the top station will exist south of the ridge in the mid to upper parts of the Sugar Bowl. These upper parts of the proposed chairlift, including towers 7-10 and the top station will only be visible from elevated places south of the aforementioned ridge.

4.9. From the ridges, saddles and summits which hold the Rastus Burn, the proposed chairlift and new trails will be visible, but they will be seen within the context of the existing ski area

infrastructure. The existing ski trails, lifts towers, etc. are part of a modified visual landscape and the proposal will contribute to this visual modification. I consider the proposed lift line, lift towers and earth-worked trails will result in very low adverse effects on visual amenity as experienced from the surrounding alpine environment including the Lake Alta surrounds and the Remarkables slopes and summits.

- 4.10. As discussed above, lift tower 5 will exist at a transition point between the ridge to the north, the upper Sugar Bowl Basin and lower mountain. There is potential that this lift tower may be viewed on the ridge, and potentially skyline as viewed from short parts of the Remarkables Road as one nears the ski area. This view will be seen from within the Rastus Burn catchment, in the context of the other Ski Area Sub-Zone activities. Lift tower 5 will increase the visual presence of ski area infrastructure from the northern portion of the Ski Area Sub-zone and the Remarkables Ski Area Access Road but will not decrease the visual amenity beyond what is anticipated as part of the overall modified environment enabled by the Ski Area Sub-zone will not. It will not adversely affect the more outstanding views held from this road, which are available on the northern and western slopes of the Remarkables where, from the access road much of the Wakatipu Basin is visible.
- 4.11. The proposed earthworks to form the ski trails will be visible from within the Ski Area Sub-Zone, from some of the surrounding mountain slopes and the lower portion of the trails may be visible from the 'wedge' of the Wakatipu Basin. From the floor of the Basin the earth worked areas will not be legible and will result in a negligible adverse effect on visual amenity. From within the more immediate area, the earth-worked areas will result in a low adverse effect on the visual amenity as the trails will present a consistent grade, texture and colour across a mountain slope which at present is more variable in terms of its cover and form. This effect will be discussed in more detail under the landscape character portion of this report.
- 4.12. I consider the earthworks will result in a low adverse effect on visual amenity as experienced from parts of the Remarkables Ski Area Access Road and within the Ski Area Sub-Zone. This adverse visual effect will be diminished to very low and negligible with the distance of views. Overall the proposal may result in some adverse visual effects, with particular regard to the location of lift tower 5 which will be visible on a ridgeline and may be visible on a skyline from limited parts of the Remarkables Ski Area Access Road. I consider that the visibility of the



proposal will be within the realm of what is expected in the Ski Area Sub-Zone and will result in no more than low adverse effects on visual amenity.

### **Landscape Character Effects**

- 4.13. The types of works proposed are generally anticipated within in the Ski Area Sub-Zone. There is an expectation of continued modification and expansion of the facilities within the Ski Area Sub-Zone so long as these works are undertaken in a manner which does not result in significant adverse effects on the environment. Visitors to the Ski Area Sub-Zone do not expect a pristine, unmodified environment. Ski areas throughout the world represent modified pockets of land, generally within alpine environments where structures such as lift lines, snowmaking equipment and buildings etc. are expected elements.
- 4.14. Regardless of what is 'expected' within a Ski Area Sub-Zone, Council's assessment matters seek to retain, protect and enhance the landscape values within these sub-zones with particular regard to natural character.
- 4.15. The ecological assessment undertaken by E3S provides an evaluation of the existing indigenous vegetation and recommendations on how to avoid remedy or mitigate the proposal's effects on this vegetation. I accept E3S's assessment that the ecological effects of the proposal will be no more than minor, and I consider the removal of indigenous vegetation will result in a low adverse effect on the landscape's natural character subject to implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.
- 4.16. The proposed area which will be affected by the proposal is a small part of a much larger, natural alpine landscape. The existing Sugar Bowl lift will be removed and replaced with the proposed lift. I consider the proposal will not result in cumulative adverse effects which may lead to unacceptable degradation of the landscape's character.
- 4.17. The earthworks required to form the ski trails may require the removal of some small rock outcrops, especially on the slope which faces the base area. This will result in a low adverse effect on the natural character of that part of the mountain as it will remove natural element(s) which contribute to the overall natural character. This adverse effect will be very low in extent.

4.18. Overall, I consider the proposal will result in no more than a low level of adverse effects on the landscape character.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1. The proposal seeks to replace the existing Sugar Bowl chairlift with a new chairlift which will extend from near the base facility to near the top station of the existing chairlift. Two new ski trails are also proposed which will require the removal of some indigenous vegetation and rock outcrops.

5.2. While the Ski Area Sub-Zone is well contained within the Rastus Burn catchment, the proposal will present a higher level of visible ski area infrastructure. Some of the proposed lift towers will be visible from a small portion of the Wakatipu Basin and from parts of the Remarkables Ski Area Access Road. From the more distant locations, these towers and the bottom station will barely be legible. While the proposed lift towers, especially lift tower 5 may be visible from parts of the Remarkables Ski Area Access Road and could potentially breach a skyline as viewed from the road, this type of infrastructure is expected in the Ski Area Sub-Zone. Proposed earthworks will result in some adverse effects on natural character, but the natural character of the wider alpine environment will remain dominant. Overall the proposal will result in no more than low adverse effects on visual amenity and landscape character.

Steve Skelton

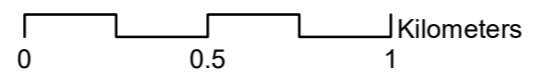
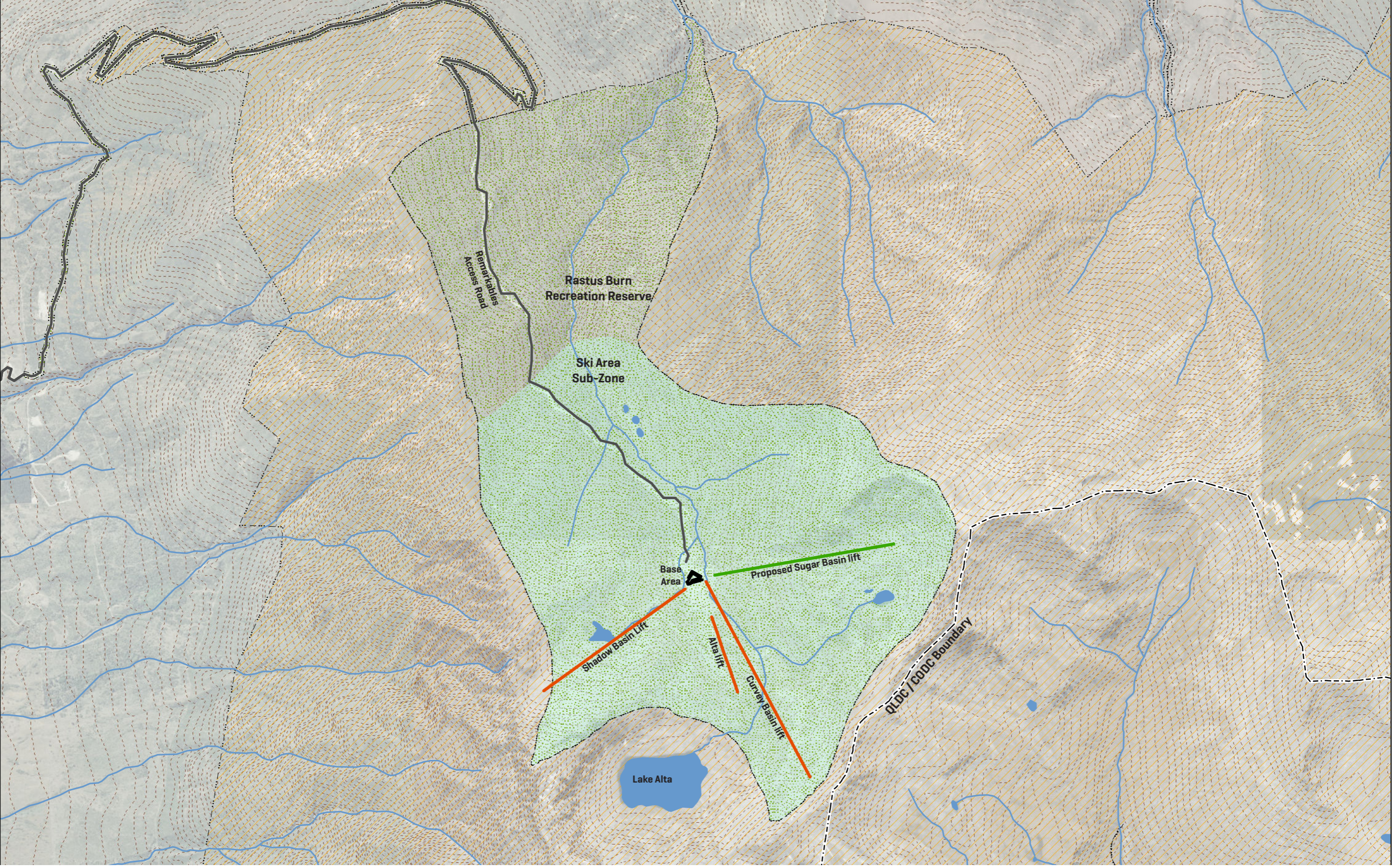


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View from the Remakables looking north towards the 'wedge' of the Wakatipu Basin.





Existing view from the Malaghans Road and Hunter Road junction.





Simulated view from the Malaghans Road and Hunter Road junction.