Winter Park Resort's Zephyr Express to be replaced by new 10-person gondola (with video)

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Winter Park Resort's skier upload capacity will be significantly increased next year with the addition of a new gondola.

Officials from Winter Park Resort announced early Monday morning plans to replace the Zephyr Express chairlift, currently a high-speed quad chairlift capable of carrying up to four passengers, with a new 10-person gondola. The new gondola is expected to be operational in time for the 2018-2019 ski season. The lift upgrade is part of a $28.2 million capital improvement investment earmarked for the resort by Alterra Mountain Company, the parent organization of Winter Park Resort.

According to resort officials the new gondola will increase upload capacity to 3,600 guests per hour and is expected to decrease wait time by roughly 15 minutes during peak season operations. The new gondola will be a Leitner-Poma gondola and is projected to cost approximately $16 million. The gondola will run from the main resort base area to the Lodge at Sunspot.

Representatives from Winter Park said the official name of the new gondola has yet to be determined.

"Zephyr is certainly on the table for a name but nothing's been decided yet," said Steve Hurlbert, spokesman for the resort.

Zephyr: Going out to pasture
Construction of the new gondola is slated to begin relatively soon with resort officials pegging the start of work on the project sometime this spring. The resort is still in the midst of the regulatory approval process for the new gondola.

In addition to the new gondola project Winter Park Resort plans to invest the remained of the $28.2 million capital improvement funds into a complete overhaul of the resort's snowmaking system, which is currently 42 years old and in the words of resort officials "antiquated." The new snowmaking system project will include pipe replacement work and energy efficiency upgrades along with new snowmaking guns and is estimated to cost roughly $4 million.

Resort officials expect to new system to "allow Winter Park to open additional terrain earlier each season." Other upgrade work includes plans to conduct logging operations on 21 acres in the Eagle Wind territory.

"Logging operations will also be conducted over 21 acres of Eagle Wind Territory improving the gladed skiing experience in the area while also contributing to the overall health of the forest by removing dead and dying timber that will promote forest vegetation," resort officials stated.

The new gondola replacing the Zephyr Express will be the first on-mountain lift installation project Winter Park Resort has undertaken since 2007 when the resort installed the Panoramic Express, providing access to Parsenn Bowl, the Cirque and Eagle Wind.