



Cooper Spur Wild and Free Coalition

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Destination Resort Threatens Wildlife

Working to preserve and protect the biological integrity and historic nature of the northeast side of Mt. Hood

What's at risk?

Big Game Migration Corridor

Mt. Hood Meadows wants to build a four-season destination resort and expand the Cooper Spur Ski Area right in the middle of a key deer and elk migration corridor.

- **Deer and elk have only one safe place to cross the Hood River Valley** during their spring and fall migrations: namely, the 1 ½ to 4 mile wide corridor of winter range habitat at lower Cooper Spur. If the deer and elk have to cross higher up the mountain, they face starvation, exposure to storms, and impassable deep snow. If they cross lower down in the valley, they face fences, orchard operations, housing subdivisions, and high-speed traffic. In the forested corridor, the deer and elk find adequate food, thermal and hiding cover, and traversable terrain. Every year, deer and elk use this corridor to move off their summer ranges on Mt. Hood, traveling to winter ranges as far away as the White River Wildlife Area or the edge of the Columbia River. **Black bear** and **cougar** follow the deer and elk routes.
- The lands at Cooper Spur that would be developed into a destination resort cut 2/3 of the way through the migration corridor. If hotels, parking lots and trophy houses are built on this land, Mt. Hood's deer, elk, black bear and cougar will either change their historic migration patterns to go around the development, or abandon their wild habits to go right through it— in both cases risking their own survival and making dangerous and costly nuisances of themselves along the way.
- **Calving grounds and summer range** in the upper Cooper Spur and adjacent areas are important for deer and elk population stability and form part of a narrow strip of habitat connecting large habitat areas to the east and west of Mt. Hood. For both deer and elk, this link allows genetic exchange between separate subspecies on opposite sides of the Cascades.
- The Cooper Spur Ski Permit Area cuts through almost 3/4 of this habitat strip of summer range. If Meadows treats this land the way it's treated the other side of the mountain, we can expect to see huge tracts of forageland bulldozed, wet meadows filled with pollution and gravel, and deer and elk habitat seriously degraded. Even if Meadows changes its past poor environmental practices, ski development will hurt deer and elk by increasing human encounters, compacting vegetation, and delaying spring greenup.
- Timber sales in and surrounding the wildlife corridor area are already planned to further exacerbate wildlife needs. (Tartan, Kilt, Clear, Yaka)

"You'd lose habitat in an area four to ten times the size of whatever they put in...a large resort at that site would change migration patterns." Jim Torland, District Wildlife Biologist, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Dalles.

Old Growth Connectivity Corridor

- A Cooper Spur resort would interrupt a migration and genetic connectivity corridor for old-growth animal species, including **spotted owl, marten, wolverine, and flying squirrel**.
- The lower Cooper Spur area contains **the only remaining east-west corridor of low elevation, large tree, closed-canopy forest on the north side of Mt. Hood**. This connection allows genetic exchange between old-growth populations in the widely separated Surveyor's Ridge and Bull Run Late Successional Reserves. Logging has already damaged the corridor; another impact could sever it completely. The ski permit and resort areas bite into the fragile corridor from above and below.

"The primary area of concern is the east/west connection at low elevations. This link is currently quite tenuous." Mt. Hood National Forest, Hood River Ranger District. East Fork Hood River & Middle Fork Hood River Watershed Analyses. Ch. 3, p. 19.

- To help preserve old-growth connectivity across the landscape, and to protect the nest site of a known pair of spotted owls, the creators of the Northwest Forest Plan mapped a 100-acre Late Successional Reserve in the Cooper Spur area. This fall, the Regional Ecosystem Office removed an LSR from forest managers' maps because it was inside the Cooper Spur ski permit boundary. No new reserve was added. **All of lower Cooper Spur's old growth is now unprotected.**

Stream Habitat for Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Fish and Birds

- Forests in the proposed development areas act as a filter for the East Fork Hood River and several of its tributaries, catching rain and allowing clear, clean, cold water to seep slowly into the streams. If Cooper Spur's forests are logged over and developed, this continuous trickle will be replaced by periods of drought, punctuated by sudden floods of warm, polluted, muddy runoff from buildings, parking lots, and bare, broken soil.
- Cooper Spur's waterways provide spawning grounds: for fall- and spring-run **Chinook salmon**, a federally listed Threatened species; summer- and winter-run **steelhead trout**, also federally listed Threatened; **Coho salmon**, listed Endangered in Oregon; and both resident and sea-running **cutthroat trout**, a listed Sensitive species in Oregon.
- **Harlequin Ducks**, a listed Sensitive Species in Oregon and a federal Species of Concern, fly in from the Pacific coast to breed on the Cooper Spur area's cold, fast-flowing streams. Harlequins are abundant in the upper East Fork and its tributaries, relatively rare at most other locations in the Mt. Hood National Forest, and unknown throughout much of Oregon.
- **Raptors migrating on the Pacific Flyway** travel south along the East Fork, follow a ridge complex through the Cooper Spur area, and cross Mt. Hood at Bonney Butte, where Oregon's highest concentration of migrating raptors is recorded each fall. Some of these birds, especially the State Sensitive northern goshawk, use Cooper Spur area waterways and forests as resting and foraging habitat.

Cumulative Impacts from Adjacent Timber Sales

- The Polallie-Cooper timber sales, Clan, Kilt and Tartan, surround the proposed resort on three sides. These sales will remove the most commercially valuable large trees through clearcutting and thinning the forest that currently blocks human traffic between the Cooper Spur Ski Area and the resort land.
- By the time a new resort goes through, commercial timber harvest will already have delivered a blow to Cooper Spur wildlife, causing a reduction in habitat capability on approximately 1007 acres of mature forest with an irreversible loss of 198 acres of mature forest habitat. This will further limit the effectiveness of the connectivity corridor in the short term (for about eight years), and is expected to result in the "incidental take" (death by habitat loss) of a spotted owl pair.
- The Polallie-Cooper sales will add about 4.1 miles of new forest road to the area. Open forest roads significantly reduce deer and elk survival in the surrounding forest. Although the Polallie-Cooper planning documents claim that these roads will be closed, **the Forest Service has already agreed to keep at least one new logging road open as a new Snow-Cat trail for the Cooper Spur "Mountain Resort"**.
- The Clear timber sales, planned for an area just to the west of the proposed resort, will further impact the fragile region. The Forest Service has not prepared an environmental assessment for these sales or considered the cumulative impacts from those activities.
- At first, Forest Service officials denied knowledge of Meadows' plans. The public has contended that the Forest Service has done so in order to avoid reassessing the impacts of the Polallie-Cooper timber sale in light of the ski development proposal. Now, the Forest Service representatives openly admit to helping Meadows prepare its expansion plans—**but the Forest Service still refuses to assess cumulative impacts before cutting old-growth.**

"I'm working with (Meadows) to refine the ski development proposal now, looking at what they've got in mind and helping map out sites. No, that information is not available to the public at this time." Doug Jones, Lands and Permit Specialist, Hood River Ranger District, 12/18/02.

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