

County okays Meadows swap

Date Published to Web: 8/21/2001

By RaeLynn Gill

Hood River County Commissioner Les Perkins was the sole holdout on Monday's 4-1 vote for the county to swap forestland with Mt. Hood Meadows, Ltd., of Oregon.

"My whole feeling is that there are better pieces of land out there and I just think we need to look at it harder and find better options," said Perkins.

He believed the 785 acres proposed for trade by Meadows would be subject to even stricter environmental restrictions against logging because of steep terrain that created the potential for erosion into fish-bearing streams. In addition, Perkins, the District 4 representative for the upper valley, joined concerns expressed by Crystal Springs Water District over the possibility of future development near its watershed.

The Hood River Valley Residents Committee has strongly opposed the timber land exchange because it believes that move will set the stage for Meadows to build the destination resort it has been planning for more than 20 years.

However, Ken Galloway, county forester, said he recommended that the county trade 640 acres with Meadows because it would net 145 acres from the deal, acquire more mature trees, and gain better access to three high-yield county properties.

Galloway reminded county officials at the Aug. 20 meeting that he was following their directive to find more land to replace the 1,000-acre exchange this spring of Scenic Area properties with the U.S. Forest Service for about \$7 million. However, he said timber parcels within the county are difficult to acquire because most are owned by larger landowners who were in the business for the "long haul" and not interested in selling. To date, Galloway said Longview Fibre Company and Meadows were the only positive respondents to the exchange offers he made to 22 parties this spring.

However, Ken Maddox, president of the Hood River Residents Committee, told the commission that the trade was not of "equal value" as required by law because the county would most likely have to pay Meadows \$1.5 million to offset the difference in acreage.

Will Carey, county counsel, refuted that claim, saying that "equality" in this case did not mean that the acreage had to be exactly the same, but that if the value of one land exceeded the other then monetary compensation had to be given.

He also disagreed with Maddox' assertion that the county did not follow the correct legal procedures for advertising the hearing. Carey said the county followed state law that expressly dealt with county forest and park exchanges to expedite the process and which allowed a shorter time period for advertisement. He said the statutes referenced by Maddox for longer notification centered on tax foreclosures or lands given to the county.

The county and Meadows are now setting the course for the exchange by splitting the \$23,000 cost for Bill Alexander Forestry, Inc., of Pendleton to do an independent appraisal of each property's value. His written report will be finalized by mid-October and county officials have set a \$1.5 million cap on the difference it will pay Meadows without further review.