

Cooper Spur Wild and Free coalition ‘fights with facts’

By RaeLynn Gill

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A number of recreation and environmental groups across Oregon have united to fight an expected destination resort plan by Mt. Hood Meadows, Ltd.

The Cooper Spur Wild and Free Coalition is launching an educational outreach program against development on any of the 775 acres of Cooper Spur Mountain Resort property owned by Meadows. The coalition’s fight will also include any expansion of the 1,400 acres of Cooper Spur ski area that Meadows leases from the U.S. Forest Service in the southern sector of the county.

Heather Weinstein, CSWFC spokesperson, said the coalition believes that the natural resources and wildlife habitat on Mt. Hood are being threatened by an increase in commercial activities.

“We will do whatever we can to preserve the northeast face of Mt. Hood as it is,” said Weinstein.

In a published position statement, the CSWFC opposes expansion of construction of commercial enterprises on the mountain, favoring natural recreation opportunities.

For that reason, the group disagrees with the stand by Dave Riley, Meadows general manager, that a destination resort would be good for the economy of a county that is already 74 percent in public ownership. They also are in contention with his statement that the resort would not interfere with resource protection, since Cooper Spur is already home to many vacation and rental dwellings and the total of all combined ski areas equals only 11,700 acres, less than one percent of the Mt. Hood National Forest.

Weinstein said the 50,000 combined members of the individual groups want to arm citizens with facts and encourage them to become activists in the upcoming battle. The public outreach effort will encourage individuals and organizations to keep abreast of the issues on the CSWFC website, www.cooperspur.org, and become involved by writing letters to the editor and speaking out at official hearings. Weinstein said snow shoe trips will also be given to allow interested parties to view the migration corridor for elk at Cooper Spur, explain the cultural and historical aspects of the

property, and dispute Meadows' environmental record.

"From a grassroots perspective we are able to bring all of our resources together and it's more to our advantage to collaborate," said Weinstein.

She said the coalition's member group has a "loose relationship" that allows each organization to act independently in some respects, such as litigation, with an agreement to keep each other well informed.

According to Weinstein, the coalition decided to form after concerns over Meadow's actions were brought forward by a resident of Mountain Shadows, a subdivision in the forest zone that has 22 homes. Although donations are channeled through the Hood River Valley Residents Committee, comprised of 120 family members, all funds collected are placed into a special account that is designated solely for the upcoming fight.

She said the belief that Meadows will be unveiling a development plan in the immediate future has already led many Hood River County residents to contact CSWFC with their concerns — and offer donations to aid the cause.

"Money is coming in because people don't want to see this happen and want to support the work we are doing," Weinstein said.

In addition to the HRVRC, the coalition's steering committee is made up of representatives from: Friends of Mt. Hood, Mazamas, Oregon Nordic Club, Sierra Club, Oregon Natural Resources Council, Oregon Wildlife Federation, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, Friends of Tilly Jane, and BARK (a network of volunteers dedicated to protecting Oregon's public forests.)

"I think it is great when groups with such diverse interests can come together, it shows a lot of people really care about the mountain,"

Weinstein, a non-practicing attorney from Portland, was chosen to chair the committee because of her background which includes almost 15 years of environmental advocacy. She and Joe Keating, part-time outreach coordinator, are available to present their stand to interested organizations. Their information will include a slide show about the environmental impact of a mountain development and the results of an economic study that is just being finalized.

"We're looking at all angles, science and economics," said Weinstein.

A CSWFC speaking engagement can be arranged by calling Keating at 503-234-2613 or e-mailing keats@teleport.com. The coalition can be reached at Cooper Spur Wild and Free Coalition, c/o Hood River Valley Residents Committee, P.O. Box 100, Parkdale, OR 97041.