

'Friends' group promotes resort on Mt. Hood

Date Published to Web: 1/14/2003

By RaeLynn Gill

Thousands of citizens claiming to represent the "silent majority" of Oregonians are speaking out in support of new destination resort facilities on the north face of Mt. Hood.

The newly formed Friends of Cooper Spur Mountain Resort boasts 95,000 members to date but expects that number to climb much higher as more people become aware of its existence. The grassroots movement has volunteered to help Mt. Hood Meadows, Ltd., get the word out about the many benefits that will result from growth of its private holdings.

"This group is made up of people who felt there needed to be a voice for responsible development on the mountain because something of this magnitude will be very positive for the entire state," said Tom Templeton, FCSMR chair, who resides in Government Camp.

The FCSMR contends that a resort development would boost Hood River County's property tax revenue from the current \$10,000 to an estimated \$1.5-\$2 million annually. And that architectural plans will be drawn up so that structures are clustered together to blend harmoniously with nature and protect wildlife migration corridors and the Crystal Springs watershed.

Templeton volunteered to head the organization when "no growth rhetoric" appeared to predominate news coverage of the issue – even though many people he knew felt a resort would be compatible with state goals to increase tourism and would help spur the ailing economy.

For example, Templeton said the 160 acres of Cooper Spur property owned by Meadows has been falsely depicted by special interests as "pristine wilderness" when, in reality:

- * The property has been heavily logged by previous owners and there is old-growth timber still standing.

- * Scientific surveys have concluded that no Threatened or Endangered wildlife or fish species inhabit the site.

- * Recreational uses have taken place on the land for more than 100 years.

- * There are already 15 rental units on the Cooper Spur site and an additional 35 vacation homes built nearby.

"There just comes a time when you have to speak up for what you believe," said Templeton, who is employed as a manufacturer's representative.

Once an initial FCSMR membership base was established, Templeton approached Dave Riley, Meadows general manager, to ask how the fledgling group could assist with a public outreach campaign. They were then armed with economic data compiled by Meadows' consultants that is now posted on a Website, www.friendsofcooperspur.com. That information includes the following:

- * More than 200 permanent new jobs from entry level to executive management will be created by an expanded resort.
- * The annual payroll of more than \$6 million will be fed back into the local economy through a "multiplier effect" that will increase earnings for other area workers.
- * Meadows has committed to including conservation easements in its plans that will protect animal passage through the property as well as wetlands and streams.
- * The company has vowed that no harm will come to the waters of Crystal Springs since the property intended for construction lies outside of state-designated watershed boundaries.
- * Architectural designs will preserve scenic vistas by using naturalized vegetation to screen structures that will blend into the terrain through the choices of color, texture, non-reflectivity and scale.

Although Meadows will not finalize its plans until the county has completed its mapping of possible destination resort sites, Riley said the completed design will be a "masterpiece" of environmentally sound architecture.

"People have been asking for details and what we've done here is give them details," he said. "The silent majority is no longer going to be standing on the sidelines, they are now going to be sitting at the table and be heard."

Templeton said that all interested citizens can sign up as a FCSMR member on the website, e-mailing tom@friendsofcooperspur.com, calling 503-337-2222, ext. 215, or sending a letter with their name and address to: FCSMR at PO Box 1351, Hood River, OR 97031. Financial donations are not being accepted at this time.