

Meadows seeks resort comments

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Mt. Hood Meadows has kicked off a public outreach program to explain its conceptual plans for a new destination resort.

Dave Riley, general manager, said community members are being asked to comment on a variety of options for expanding the Cooper Spur Mountain Resort facilities. He said Meadows has spent the last two years working with hydrologists, wildlife specialists and landscape architects to design the project. He now wants feedback on the preliminary plans that can be incorporated into the final application.

"We are engaged in a long term effort to develop a proposal for Cooper Spur which balances the social, economic and environmental elements of the resort," Riley said.

Presentations on the possible options are scheduled for the evenings of Tuesday through Thursday, July 8-10 and July 15-17. Attendance at each program is by advance reservation only and seating will be limited to 25 individuals. Riley said the group size is being kept relatively small to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in a question and answer session. He said more meetings can be scheduled if necessary to accommodate interested groups or individuals.

"Our desire is to involve the community in the process of determining what we ultimately propose," Riley said.

For example, he told about 20 audience members at the first public forum on Tuesday that Meadows had heard their concerns about building within the Crystal Springs Watershed. He said no structures would be placed within that boundary but the company had determined that ski trails would be appropriate about four miles from the spring. Riley said that decision was based on the fact that hundreds of acres of timber were routinely harvested within one-half mile of the spring without causing harm. In addition, he said there appeared to be no pollutants from 22 vacation homes that were served by a single septic system within a one mile radius.

Riley said the resort would be housed somewhere on the 160 private acres that Meadows purchased from Dan Dillard in 2001. He said that land has already been heavily logged and is not classified as a wilderness area. In fact, Riley said the Cooper Spur Ski Area permit within the Mt. Hood National Forest allows the operation to cover 1,400 acres, although only 50 acres are currently in use. He said the permit area comprises one-tenth of one percent of the 1,063,450 acres of National Forest. Riley said 80 percent of the public land is already under special protection and the five ski areas on Mt. Hood's slopes make up less than one percent of its overall land mass.

In spite of the existing vast open areas, Riley said Meadows' heard citizen concerns about wildlife passage through the resort. He said 300-foot-wide corridors will be replanted along Buck, Doe and

Tilly Jane creeks. According to Riley, the company was willing to re-create a "welcome path" for big game even though none of the property had been designated as a significant travel zone.

To help the project blend well with its surroundings, Riley said building heights would probably be limited to three stories.

In addition, he said the exterior would be naturalized with wood and stone.

According to Riley, many of the suggestions for the preliminary design have come from a cross-section of residents who have agreed to serve as an advisory panel during the past few months.

"We have asked the same thing of our community advisory group – if something were to be developed, then what should it include and how should it look?" said Riley. He hopes the upcoming meetings will allow the community to become excited about the new resort, especially since local contractors will share in the \$120 million of construction cost.

He said the development is expected to provide more than 200 full-time jobs, at least half of which will pay an hourly wage of \$12 or more.

The property taxes are also estimated to provide more than \$1 million annually for public education.

"It's a significant economic engine for a county that has such high unemployment rates," Riley said.

For more information on Meadows' planned project, or to schedule a seat at one of the community meetings, call Stu Watson at 386-8860 or 386-8870.