

Balance for the 'compass'

Plan, yet preserve, speakers say at first Mt. Hood Summit

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We need the mountain and the mountain needs us.

Last week's Mt. Hood Summit, the first event of its kind, brought activists, agency representatives, and elected officials into one crowded room at Timberline Lodge to discuss how to manage and plan for uses on and around Oregon's highest peak, "our compass bearing," as one participant put it.

Visitors will continue to use the mountain for more and more reasons, but the finite water and wildlife habitat resources vital to the area must also be preserved, speakers said Friday to a 300-person capacity crowd. Viewpoints ranged from barring all future development, to creating a National Park, to those in favor of cooperative planning for accommodating the increases in the millions of people who already come to the mountain from inside Oregon as well as throughout the United States and the world.

A new "cooperative initiative" was introduced Friday by Mt. Hood National Forest supervisor Gary Larsen, who said communities around the mountain are invited to set up forums to discuss the mountain's future. He said they will lead up to "an intimate meeting of about 100 people" one year from now, with the aim of "reaching a common view of where the forest should be in the future."

Hood River County residents attended the summit in force, and the proposed expansion of Mt. Hood Meadows resort at Cooper Spur arose in discussions but was generally alluded to rather than pointedly mentioned.

"Why can't wilderness be expanded and developments such as ski areas shrink?" asked Jurgen Hess of Hood River and the Columbia Gorge Institute. "Human use on Mt. Hood must be controlled and contained."

A prevailing theme was that competing priorities and demands upon Mt. Hood must somehow be brought toward a mutual means of planning for the mountain's future.

"We're struggling," said Rodger Schock, Hood River County Commission chair, calling for a measured allowance for logging in the National Forest. The county has an 11 percent unemployment rate and the logging and lumber tradition has all but disappeared, he told the summit.

"I firmly believe as a life-long environmentalist, we must get to a point where if we're going to harvest timber we do it in a responsible way and I certainly think that's possible," Schock said.

"There is truly strong support for a balanced approach," said Marvin Brown, Oregon State

Forester, a member of one of two panels that spoke at length about policy affecting Mt. Hood and management and protection issues.

Panelist Louie Pitts, government affairs coordinator for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, noted that tribal treaty rights take precedence and must be considered foremost in all discussions of the mountain's future.

Pitt, a former Columbia Gorge Commission member, expressed hope for the process.

"I'm an old Gorge Commissioner. I wouldn't have been involved for nine years if I didn't think there is a more orderly fashion to accomplish things."

Trading views, as well as starting to accomplish things, was the purpose of the summit, called by Rep. Greg Walden, a Hood River Republican and Rep. Earl Blumenauer, a Democrat from Portland.

"Our being here is a way to bring forth some ideas," said Blumenauer.

"This is not a time to say 'we can't do it that way', just because it hasn't been done a certain way in the past," Walden said. "We need to think outside the box. This mountain has way too much going for it to look at things any other way."