

OREGON PUBLIC BROADCASTING  
**Hood River Considers Resort Costs, Benefits**  
January 23, 2003  
By Rob Manning

HOOD RIVER, OR -- Mount Hood currently boasts three of the Northwest's busiest ski resorts - Timberline, Ski Bowl, and Mount Hood Meadows.

The owners of Mount Hood Meadows would like to see a fourth ski destination on the mountain and are hoping to have year-round recreation and lodging to go with ski trails and snowboard parks.

But the north side of Mount Hood where Mount Hood Meadows Development Corporation proposes to build the resort has been a popular hiking spot. Area residents worry about having enough water and about disturbing large mammals if the resort is built.

Hood River County also has to balance the likely economic boon from a new resort against possible damage to its farm economy. The resort is already attracting lots of attention.

About four hundred people came to the Hood River Ramada to debate development of the Cooper Spur resort. The problem was, the room where the meeting was held could only fit 275.

As testament to the importance of the debate between possible benefits and drawbacks of a new resort, many of those who couldn't get in the door waited outside for hours in a cold, steady rain hoping to seize a seat vacated by an audience member.

Those who made it in heard Mt. Hood Meadows Development Corporation General Manager David Riley describe the economic shot in the arm the development could bring.

David Riley: "Property taxes will go up from the \$10,000 that we currently pay to \$1.5 to \$2 million a year. Approximately 200 jobs will be created and construction of the resort would be a tremendous opportunity for the construction and services sector."

Mount Hood Meadows has been working on putting a resort on Cooper Spur for years.

Last year, the company bought the Cooper Spur Inn and about 170 acres of land around it as the starting point for a resort.

Around the same time, the company entered negotiations to trade 750 acres of its land for 620 acres of land belonging to Hood River County. Because Meadows gave up more land than it took back, Hood River County agreed to pay Meadows one million dollars in compensation.

But even with 800 contiguous acres, the resort company can't make much progress until they find a way to make the destination resort fit Oregon's land use system.

Maps of eligible lands showed that only 70 acres of land Meadows currently owns at Cooper Spur

could be used - more than 100 acres short of the minimum size of a destination resort under Oregon law.

That leaves Meadows with two main options - going north toward Hood River or going south into Mount Hood National Forest.

Jorgen Hess of the Columbia Gorge Institute argued against entering the national forest.

Jorgen Hess: "This would set a national precedent for all national forest lands being zoned 'open to destination resort development.' In no way should national forest lands be eligible."

If forests are off-limits, several farmers also disputed the classification of their farms as "eligible" for use as a destination resort.

A number of resort opponents spoke on behalf of Cooper Spur Wild and Free, a coalition of environmental and sporting groups including the Sierra Club and the Mazamas.

The group argues that there are a number of major difficulties with making room in the county's land use plans for a new resort.

Hood River residents are also skeptical.

Meadows' natural resources consultant Rob Dillinger tried to appease environmentalists with studies of habitat and wildlife in Cooper Spur, but by his own admission, actual on-the-ground studies are dated.

Rob Dillinger: "We obtained a copy of the maps used in 1984, but there were no highly sensitive big game areas mapped. What elk do in the area - there are two herds - the East Fork Hood River herd and the west fork Hood River herd it is hypothesized because no one could say for certain. The east fork herd moves along blue grass ridge. The west fork herd may move through the area but no one knows there have been no studies."

Esther Lee: "The herd of elk that he's talking about - one stayed on one side the other stay on the other side"

Esther Lee owns property close to Cooper Spur .

Esther Lee: "We got all 28 of them on our lawn. And then they went up, and as far as they didn't know where they went in the summer, well, you go up between the Cooper's Spur and the Land Yield Crags and they lay right there at the bottom of that glacier. I can tell you where they went every summer when it got hot. Of course they had to deal with the deer flies but that's ok."

Beyond the difficulties with wildlife, the biggest concern of local residents is water. Local farmer Larry Keating counted up the gallons used by a 400-unit hotel and an 18-hole golf course and wondered how low the water table could go.

Larry Keating: "My calculations show that a 100-acre golf course needing an inch of water will require two million gallons of water per week in hot summer. I don't know where that water is

going to come from, but even if it's from deep in the ground it's going to suck it like a funnel from the surrounding area."

Meadows' GM Dave Riley argues the impact on the county will not be so huge.

County commissioners, for their part, caution that the maps are not final and their pursuit of a destination resort under Oregon's land use Goal 8 is still very much up for debate.

For Meadows, and for local resident, Frank Jacobson, the more important issue is a healthy economy for the county.

Frank Jacobson: "In the 12 years we have lived here, the economic life has slowed down. The timber industry in the county is severely challenged and is losing its ground, unemployment is high and the opportunity for economic development is seemingly discouraged. As a small business owner, I am looking to the future possibilities that Goal 8 and Mount Hood Meadows is proposing."

Jacobson was in a tiny minority at the meeting, but not all resort opponents were ignoring the economy.

Leon Aliski wanted county commissioners to remember they're selling Hood River - and the product might not need changing.

Leon Aliski: "Travel, scenery, tourism, recreation, right? You're selling it, doing a good job. You guys have a niche here. A lot of your customers are here tonight. Maybe you want different ones, maybe you want to listen to the ones you have."

The discussion over Cooper Spur resort is far from over.

The county is currently reviewing its "recreation goal" as it must under state land use laws - and commissioners are still listening to testimony and correcting maps.

Hood River County will host another meeting to talk about a possible resort at Cooper Spur next Wednesday, and is likely to submit its destination resort ideas as part of its Goal 8 "recreation" plans.

If Meadows isn't happy with that result, it's still possible the small Cooper Spur ski area could be expanded - as an exception to farm or forest lands.

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