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Mt. Hood Meadows' plan adds Cooper Spur

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by Stu Watson

Parkdale – Mt. Hood Meadows Development Corporation plans to buy the historic Cooper Spur Ski Area on the northeast slope of Mount Hood.

The pending deal fuels a growing debate about Meadows' plans to develop a destination resort in the upper Hood River Valley near the Cooper Spur Inn, which Meadows purchased earlier this year.

The deal for the tiny Cooper Spur Ski Area involves Meadows North LLC and EcoSpur LLC. Meadows North is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mt. Hood Meadows Development, the company that owns and operates the Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Resort.

Coco Yackley, owner of EcoSpur, purchased Cooper Spur Ski Area in 1999 from Judy Newman. The ski area, which has one rope tow and a T-bar, is popular with families and beginning skiers.

Yackley, who works from Hood River for Intel, said she wanted to expand the resort to offer an array of winter recreation for families, including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and tubing.

"Meadows was able to make that happen on a more rapid timeline than I was able to do," she said.

A price was not disclosed.

In a news release, Dave Riley, vice president of Mt. Hood Meadows Development, said the permit off the Cooper Spur Ski Area costs 1,400 acres, which could allow expansion.

He said Meadows hopes to replace the T-bar with a chairlift during the summer. He said skiers can expect better grooming and expanded rental and ticketing facilities at Cooper Spur this season.

The pending sale puts in place another piece of a puzzle taking shape for years. Meadows has long explored the possibility of developing a destination resort in the upper valley.

It moved closer to acquiring the necessary property this summer. First it bought the Cooper Spur Inn, near the access road to the ski area first developed in 1927. The Inn has a lodge, six cabins and a restaurant on 156 acres.

Then Meadows began talks with the county about swapping timberland. The county has been looking to buy timberland to replace 1,018 wooded acres it sold earlier this year to the U.S. Forest Service for inclusion in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

For that land, the county got 7.6 million. In August, it entered into a deal to exchange 640 acres of timberland adjacent to the Cooper Spur Inn property for 785 acres of Mt. Hood Meadows forestland to the north.

Dave Meriwether, the county administrator, said he expects the deal to close Dec. 1.

The land exchange has come under criticism from nearby property owners and the Hood River Valley Residents Committee, founded in the 1970s as a county land-use watchdog.

Dennis Chaney, retired from the Portland Police Bureau, represents 19 residents of the Mountain Shadows Homeowners Association. The development lies just to the north of the county land proposed for trade.

Chaney says Riley spoke to the homeowners earlier this year about plans to develop a hotel, condos, executive homes, an 18-hole golf course, spas, pools and an ice rink.

Riley has declined several requests to discuss details but said Meadows wants to create more of a year-round enterprise.

"If we could diversify our business into a year-round recreation, that would be a good thing for us and for Hood River," Riley said.

Chaney says a destination resort in the area would affect wildlife and groundwater and would create traffic problems on the Cooper Spur road, which links the site to Oregon 35 and the community of Parkdale. Cooper Spur is about 11 miles north of Mount Hood Meadows.

Ken Maddox, president of the Residents Committee, said destination resort won't create the type of family-wage jobs that the country should be emphasizing for economic development.

"It's a complete failure of imagination," he said.