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Deal could resolve dispute over Mount Hood slope

The plan involves a Mt. Hood Meadows land swap that would expand the wilderness on the north side

Wednesday, August 03, 2005

KATY MULDOON

The bitter dispute over the future of Mount Hood's northern slope took a peaceful turn this week when developers, environmentalists and Hood River Valley residents agreed on a potential solution.

The agreement calls for Mt. Hood Meadows ski resort to trade approximately 775 acres it owns near Cooper Spur for 120 acres in the Mount Hood National Forest near Government Camp. The Government Camp parcels -- a 40-acre plot east of the unincorporated town and an 80-acre plot to the west -- are zoned for residential development and could accommodate 480 single-family homes. Mt. Hood Meadows has lobbied for years to plant more lodging close to its resort, 70 miles east of Portland.

Meadows would give up its plans to expand the Cooper Spur Ski Area and build a resort there, would agree not to acquire more property on the mountain's northern slope and would relinquish its lease on the small ski area.

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It also would help valley residents and a coalition of environmental groups push for federal legislation facilitating the land swap and would help them seek wilderness designation and a watershed protection zone around Cooper Spur.

"It's a classic Oregon solution," said Dave Riley, vice president and general manager at Mt. Hood Meadows.

The proposal pleased Mike McCarthy of Parkdale, who owns and manages 40,000 pear trees in the upper Hood River Valley. But McCarthy, who has put in hundreds of hours organizing citizen efforts to protect Mount Hood backcountry, said: "This is not the final result. This is just the beginning of a process."

The deal is far from done.

First, the Hood River Valley Residents Committee and Meadows will hire an independent appraiser they've both agreed on to put a value on the properties involved in the proposed swap.

Then they need to open talks with the U.S. Forest Service.

Meanwhile, the interested parties have begun to lobby elected officials, asking for their blessing on the proposal.

On Monday, Hood River County's Board of Commissioners unanimously approved the solution, and Tuesday, county officials met with the governor's staff to drum up support. They also contacted their congressional delegation, said Rodger Schock, the county commission chairman who persuaded the parties to talk.

From a land use point of view, Schock said, it makes sense to consolidate tourism on the mountain's west side. "We'd prefer," he said, "to see the north side of the mountain left as it is: a place to honor, to enjoy and to respect."


The emotional battle has boiled since 2002, when Mt. Hood Meadows first pitched its plan for a Cooper Spur resort featuring 450 hotel rooms, condominiums, homes, restaurants and 18-hole golf course.

Residents, recreationists and environmentalists balked, saying such development would ruin one of Oregon's natural treasures.

If the proposed solution fails, Mt. Hood Meadows will withdraw its support for the north side wilderness expansion and renew its efforts to develop the Cooper Spur land.

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