

Draft map spurns Cooper Spur

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By RaeLynn Gill

Private land owned by Mt. Hood Meadows, Ltd., at Cooper Spur has not made the first cut of sites in Hood River County that are eligible under state law for destination resort development.

The draft map and the ordinance that goes with it, prepared by a consultant for the Hood River County Planning Department, are about to undergo public review by the county Planning Commission.

The most immediate effect of the mapping decision is on long-range plans by Mt. Hood Meadows, which is considering building a resort in Cooper Spur – land that the county planners have just deemed does not meet state requirements for that use.

Dave Riley, Meadows general manager, is not upset with the results of the formal study undertaken by the Portland consulting firm of Cogans, Owens, Cogan. He said Meadows has actually been waiting for a clear direction about how to proceed with the design and scale for a project on its Cooper Spur property in the southern sector of the county. In fact, Riley said the company could actually end up with a larger development under a state land-use planning exception process.

“We are pleased that the county’s consultant has finally produced a draft Goal 8 map because it will help define the process for our proposal,” said Riley.

For example, Riley said the Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in Coos County was recently approved under the less constrained Goal 2 because it met all necessary requirements except that it was located across a state highway from cranberry bogs. He said although it is more arduous to gain approval through the exception process, greater flexibility is allowed for development than under the stringent Goal 8 criteria.

“I never believed that Goal 8 was necessarily any easier, and we have also been concerned with the lack of flexibility through that process,” Riley said. He said the upcoming proposal will now include a request for a zone change on the private property housing the Inn at Cooper Spur that Meadows purchased in July of 2001. But, Riley said, at this time, the company plans to leave the property it received in a disputed land exchange with the county as forest land. He said great concern will also be given to protecting the Crystal Springs watershed and migration routes for wildlife.

“We’ve been using the last several months to formulate a sustainable and environmentally sensitive proposal that takes into account issues that were raised by local residents and community members in five different listening sessions we held recently,” said Riley.

But Meadows faces a formidable challenge for development in the forest zone from the newly formed Cooper Spur Wild and Free Coalition, with a membership from environmental and

recreation groups throughout Oregon. The CSWFC steering committee includes representatives from Friends of Mt. Hood, Mazamas, Hood River Valley Residents Committee, Oregon Nordic Club, Sierra Club, Oregon Natural Resources Council, Oregon Wildlife Federation, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, Friends of Tilly Jane and BARK (a network of volunteers dedicated to protecting Oregon's public forests.)

The CSWFC declined to comment on the map until it had seen the final version and accompanying public support documents. However, a position paper for the organization opposes expansion or construction of commercial enterprises on the mountain, favoring natural recreation opportunities.

"Specifically, we believe wide sectors of the public should benefit from public property, and that Mt. Hood should be noncommercial wherever possible," wrote the CSWFC.

The county's new draft map outlines three timbered properties that have met the Goal 8 destination resort requirements. One parcel lies on the southeast side of the county line and is primarily owned by Longview Fibre Company. The second is largely an SDS Lumber Company holding near Lost Lake and the third is county forest near Kingsley Reservoir.

Although the draft map and an accompanying ordinance was to have been reviewed by the Planning Commission on Wednesday, that legislative hearing will be now opened and then continued until a later date, according to Mike Benedict, county planning director.

Benedict has granted an indefinite delay of the proceedings at the request of the HRVRC, longtime Meadows adversaries who successfully overturned a previous proposal from the company for a destination resort in the early 80s.

According to Benedict, since the Nov. 20 date has been advertised the commission has to convene, by law, before changing the timeline.

In July, Meadows requested the mapping process and paid the \$8,300 bill for the county to hire an independent agency to locate parcels of 160 acres or more that qualified for a destination resort under Goal 8. During that study, the following areas had to be excluded:

- Land within 24 air miles of the Portland metro, Salem and Eugene-Springfield urban growth boundaries.
- Sites with 50 or more contiguous acres of unique or prime farm land.
- Land within three miles of a concentration of high value crop areas.
- Parcels within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.
- Sites mapped by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as especially sensitive big game habitat.