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POWDR plan dropped, Holland Lake Lodge back in local hands

JOSHUA MURDOCK Lee Newspapers
Feb 29, 2024

A Utah ski corporation hoping to drastically expand Holland Lake Lodge is no longer in control of the company that owns the historic lakeside lodge in the Swan Valley near Condon, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

Longtime lodge owner Christian Wohlfeil is now back in charge of the lodge business, the agency stated. In a phone call Monday Wohlfeil refused to answer questions about the business.

In October, Wohlfeil told the Missoulian, “There will no longer be a proposed partnership with the Utah-based POWDR and we will be withdrawing all pending applications to the U.S. Forest Service.”



An aerial view of Holland Lake Lodge taken in September.

BEN ALLAN SMITH/Missoulian

Meanwhile, the Forest Service stated that Wohlfeil is again in charge of Holland Lake Lodge.

“The Forest Service received documentation to show that POWDR/E3 is no longer a controlling interest in Holland Lake Lodge, so the Forest Service accepted their application withdrawal,” Flathead National Forest Supervisor Anthony Botello wrote in an email Tuesday.

Botello took the supervisor role starting Jan. 1 after last summer's departure of former Supervisor Kurt Steele. He stated that longtime lodge owner Wohlfeil is back in charge of Holland Lake Lodge Inc.

Kira Powell, the forest's public affairs officer, wrote Monday that POWDR and subsidiary E3 Destinations "had controlling interest of Holland Lake Lodge Inc. and had submitted an application for a new special-use permit." But the company pulled its request for a new special-use permit last fall, scuttling its push to expand the lodge. As part of withdrawing its permit application, she wrote, the company showed it transferred control of Holland Lake Lodge Inc. back to Wohlfeil.

A special-use permit is a common arrangement that allows a private business to operate on public land. The permits are generally non-transferable, meaning that an entity that assumes control of a business holding an existing permit must apply for a new permit of its own.

POWDR, which entered into a joint venture with Wohlfeil, sought a new special-use permit to operate Holland Lake Lodge and pursue its plans to build 32 new buildings — including a 28-room lodge, a restaurant and 26 cabins — and remove 10 structures around the lodge. The expansion, which the Forest Service rejected in November 2022, would have increased the size of the lodge's current special-use permit from 10.53 acres to about 15 acres.

POWDR's application for its own special-use permit followed a report from two attorneys opposed to the expansion who pointed out that federal regulations seemed to prohibit POWDR from operating the lodge under Wohlfeil's previous permit.

Wohlfeil still holds a valid special-use permit to continue operating the lodge in its current state

Wastewater

Separately, the Forest Service stated that problems with a wastewater system serving the lodge and nearby campsites could jeopardize the operation of both this summer season.

“The wastewater treatment system that serves part of the Forest Service campground, the RV dump station and Holland Lake Lodge has been found to have issues and will not be operable in its current capacity this summer,” Botello wrote. “The Forest Service is looking at options for Lodge, campground and RV dump stations future use.”

The sewage system came under scrutiny last summer after it was revealed that the Forest Service failed to report a tear and subsequent 2022 repair in the lagoon’s liner to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The lagoon is about 1,000 feet away from the lake. The liner failure was uncovered in a public records request by the group Save Holland Lake.

Last August, DEQ ordered the Forest Service to study possible wastewater leakage from the lagoon; the Forest Service was granted an extension for completing the study, from September to November. The Forest Service reported late last year it found no impacts to groundwater.

The Missoula City-County Health Department also ordered the Forest Service to retroactively apply for a new permit for the system covering because of the latter’s failure to report repairs.

Critics of the now-abandoned lodge expansion plans questioned whether the existing wastewater system could handle increased usage.

Joshua Murdock covers the outdoors and natural resources for the Missoulian.

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