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First name: Lowell

Last name: Skoog

Organization: N7YPE

Title:

Comments: 7 March 2020

Dear Sir or Madam:

I would like to comment on the proposed expansion plan for Mission Ridge Ski Area currently under consideration by Chelan County and the U.S. Forest Service.

I am a Seattle resident and skier with many visits over the years to ski the lifts at Mission Ridge as well as the adjacent backcountry. I skied the chairlifts at Mission with several Wenatchee friends just a week ago. From my friends I heard about the proposed expansion plans and obtained more detailed information. My comments follow.

Summary:

I am concerned that the residential development proposal is too large and may be unsustainable in the long term. I am particularly concerned about fire safety and over-demand on available water sources. I feel that the proposal provides relatively minor improvements for recreational skiing, improvements that could be made without such a major residential development.

Specific Comments:

The proposal I'm reviewing is from Ecosign Mountain Resort Planners Ltd., dated 20 November 2019. It calls for 621 new Duplex/Condo/Townhome units, 275 Single Family Homes, 57 Lodge Rooms, and 80 beds for employee housing. Total Pillows estimated at 3800-4000, plus 11,000 square-feet of office space.

My first concern about the proposal regards fire safety. Wenatchee Mountain is dry, east-side forest. 2015 was the largest wildfire season in Washington state history. Homes around the town of Wenatchee were threatened and fire almost crossed Wenatchee Mountain from the heavily-burned southwest flank to the Squilchuck Basin where the ski area is located.

I believe that the proposed residential development would be indefensible in the event that fire swept through the Squilchuck Basin. I'm concerned that the single access road proposed for the new development would not be adequate to provide entry by firefighting resources, or exit by residents, in the event of a major fire.

I am also concerned about water sources for the proposed development. It's a dry area. Is there enough ground water in the area to support such a large development? Are there plans to pump water from another source, perhaps the Upper Wheeler Reservoir? It would be good to know what the plans are and how feasible they would be in light of other usage demands and expected climate change. The availability of water also bears on the risk posed to the development by wildfire.

I do think that the proposed ski lifts integrated with the proposal could be beneficial for Mission Ridge Ski Area. Mission doesn't have much beginner terrain, and I think the proposed Lift 8 would improve this. I'm not familiar enough with the terrain to judge what sort of skiing the proposed Lifts 6 and 7 would offer. These lift improvements, combined with a much smaller residential proposal, would be acceptable to me. I'm not in favor of the proposed Lift 5 because it would essentially eliminate the best backcountry skiing at Mission Ridge, into Stemilt Basin.

Beyond these site-specific comments, I'm concerned about the broader impact of the proposed development. It seems to me that the proposal is only minimally related to skiing and the ski area-it's chiefly a large, year-round real estate development. This will contribute substantially to traffic on the Squilchuck Creek road and will contribute to sprawl, generally, in the Wenatchee Valley. It probably won't contribute significantly to the viability of Mission Ridge as a ski area.

My conclusion is that the proposed development has significant environmental and safety issues that I would need to see addressed before I would consider supporting it.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Lowell Skoog