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Organization:

Title:

Comments: While the idea of high elevation nordic skiing at Mission Ridge is beyond exciting to me, there are major fire risk and water use issues not adequately addressed in a proposal of this size. I believe the proposal should not be approved as it stands.

Local Wenatchee area residents have already pointed out some major flaws with the current proposal:

Source: El Sendero Backcountry Ski & Snowshoe Club

Fire:

Given the location of the proposed development, any fire response will be multi jurisdictional in nature. Responding agencies will include local rural fire departments, the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the US Forest Service (USFS). All of these agencies adhere to the same safety standards. These standards place a priority on firefighter safety. Escape routes and Safety Zones are of foundational importance. Considerations for escape routes include fuel type and density, topography including slope steepness and orientation, chimneys, box or narrow canyons, number of routes, and travel time to Safety Zones.

Safety zones will be of a size and nature to protect all firefighters in a worst case scenario. For perspective, the Mission Ridge parking lot is approximately 7.0 acres and is located in the narrowest portion of a box canyon (one way in one way out) above a 20% slope with a mature conifer forest below. The USFS sets standards that require a safety zone of a size and nature that the crew of firefighters could find safety without the use of a fire shelter or other special equipment. One may argue that the Mission Ridge parking lot qualifies as a Safety Zone. It may satisfy the initial calculation of required size for a safety zone which assumes flat ground, no wind, and radiant heat only. However, the Mission Ridge parking lot is not located on flat ground, and no wind is a non-conservative assumption. It is important to emphasize that emergency planning is required to consider worst case situations. For a minimal fire response crew (one engine) to be safe in the Mission Ridge Parking lot, with an upslope wind of 10 mph and 100 foot flame lengths, USFS standards require a Safety Zone over twice the size of the existing parking lot. Additionally any fire response will have to drive over 5 miles on a narrow canyon road with slope angles exceeding 20% most of the way to escape. The Squilchuck drainage has already been designated a high fire risk area. The Forest Service should take into account the role it will play permitting infrastructure that will someday place firefighters in a potentially compromised safety situation.

Water:

The entire wintertime flow of Squilchuck Creek is allocated by existing water rights while both Beehive Irrigation District (senior water right) and Mission Ridge (junior water right) compete to fill their respective reservoirs. Existing water rights in the Spring and Summer exceed the available flow in the creek with Miller water users having their water rights regularly cut when the stream flow is inadequate to cover all existing water rights. The development proposes to drill wells and pump water from the deep aquifers which are hydraulically connected to the surface waters of the Squilchuck drainage. There is no available water to be removed from the aquifer. Any water that the development removes directly affects current water right holders who already consume the entire stream flow. One of the critical findings of the Stemilt Partnership's report is that the upper watershed cannot support Urban-level development, yet that is what has been proposed.