



**P.O. Box 1915
Portland, OR 97207
(503) 243-1332**

E-mail: contact@nwskiers.org

Web Site: www.nwskiers.org

October 20, 2003

**VIA E-mail and
First Class Mail**

Mr. John Schuyler
Acting Ashland District Ranger
645 Washington Street
Ashland, OR 97520

Re: Mt. Ashland Draft Environmental Impact Statement - 2003

Dear Mr. Schuyler:

I am the Director of Communications and Public Affairs for the Northwest Ski Club Council, an organization representing 37 ski and ski/snowboard clubs, 23 in Oregon and 14 in the state of Washington. We represent approximately 10,000 snowsports enthusiasts, including alpine and cross-country skiers, as well as snowboarders.

I write this letter on behalf of our member skiers and snowboarders, who are typically part of the "silent majority," and would rather ski/board than concern themselves with writing letters. I have been involved with NWSCC since its inception as the Portland Area Ski Club Council in 1979, and since that time have had input into every ski area master plan proposal on Mt. Hood, as well as Department of Transportation plans for highway development and improvement. I am pleased to have this opportunity to have input on behalf of one of Oregon's midsize areas, Mt. Ashland.

Personally, I also feel especially qualified to speak on behalf of the skiers because I am an avid advanced skier, and have skied at over 50 ski areas throughout the United States and Canada over a thirty-five year period, so I have a basis for comparison of their amenities with those of the local Portland ski areas. Mt. Ashland is one of the areas where I have skied, on a trip with my ski club a number of years ago, and my club again went to Mt. Ashland last February. A number of NWSCC clubs have taken trips to Mt. Ashland in the past. We found most of the ski runs to

REPRESENTING NORTHWEST SKIERS SINCE 1979

be very challenging, and I would have to agree with the assessment that Mt. Ashland is in great need of more beginner and intermediate terrain.

Mt. Ashland is a unique ski area in that, rather than have it close down, the local community pursued a major fundraising campaign and bought the area, and has been operating it as a community resource. I am unaware of any other area in the nation where there has ever been support to that extent. It is unfortunate that a few vocal groups are threatening the proposed expansion, which would benefit the entire community. As on Mt. Hood, the proposed area of expansion is minuscule compared to the total "wilderness" area in the Ashland District (a fraction of a percent), and is in a zone allocated for developed recreation.

As usual in any such documents I have reviewed, the DEIS is a very thorough, comprehensive study of every aspect of the proposed expansion. The ski area has done a very thorough job of designing all proposed improvements to have the minimum impact upon sensitive aspects of the environment. The ski area has existed for over 35 years in the area with no harm to the watershed and water quality. The DEIS concludes that there would be a low or negligible risk to sensitive ecosystems, and that the watershed's water quality would be maintained.

I favor the ski area's proposal, Alternative 2, with some specific comments following that relate to recreational enjoyment of the ski area.

C6 Lift

The proposed lift is located at an excellent elevation for snowfall, and a quad lift will handle a greater number of people, reducing lift lines and enhancing the skiing and boarding experience. This lift will also be located in a more wind sheltered area and will minimize the crowding that occurs when the Ariel lift closes due to windy conditions. The new runs will also make Mt. Ashland a better destination for novices and intermediates, as well as families and older skiers. The area already offers a great deal of terrain for advanced skiers (I loved it!).

Skiway Run and Rodgers Way Surface Tow

I feel that the proposed Skiway Run is a better choice than the extra "Pumphouse" lift proposed in Alternative 6. This lift would add greatly to the costs to the ski area (a nonprofit corporation).

West Ridge Runs

Skiers love ridge runs; they are usually some of the most scenic runs in an area. They also would assist in making avalanche control easier and safer. I understand that a portion of the area is already used by skiers and boarders, and that the impact to plants along the ridge is slight.

(After all, at the time the skiers/boarders are present, the area is covered with a blanket of snow.)

Skier Services Building

I favor the proposed Moraine Lodge Skier Services Building as described in Alternatives 2, 5, and 6. The conceptual drawing reminds me of the Silcox Hut, a historic structure on Mt. Hood. The setting would be spectacular. I believe the building would not detract from the environment, and it would definitely enhance the enjoyment of the patrons of the ski area. It would eliminate the need to have everyone at the area descend upon the main base area for lunch or snacks. I do not support the strategy proposed in Alternative 3: a compost or incinerator-type toilet with a maximum of four stalls. In emergency situations, I have used composting toilets at ski areas all over, and I have to say they are not at all enjoyable. It would be far better for everyone at the ski area to have two separate facilities where they can go for eating and bathroom facilities, as well as for the Ski Patrol to have an area closer to the patrons they are serving.

Environmental Achievement

Mt. Ashland has shown itself to be an excellent steward of the land, winning a coveted Silver Eagle award over Whistler/Blackcomb with its Youth Summer Service Program, which involves local youths in environmental stewardship projects that help maintain the overall health of the City of Ashland's watershed. The projects have included litter pickup, revegetation, and other projects for maintaining and improving the watershed health, teaching the youths that their winter sports come with environmental responsibilities.

Economic Advantages

The expansion would bring in more patrons, as well as provide more jobs in the community. It would enable the area to break even or make enough money to finance further improvements. Mt. Ashland Ski Area is a draw to tourists during the time of year the Shakespearean Festival is not in operation, and provides an economic benefit to the City of Ashland and its motels, restaurants, gas stations, and stores during an otherwise "slow" time of year. I cannot see any downside at all to the expansion.

Conclusion

Mt. Ashland is unique: a nonprofit corporation owned by the local community with a mission to provide educational and recreational facilities for the betterment of the region. They have assisted thousands of local youths to learn to ski and snowboard, and to participate in competitive racing and other healthy outdoor activities.

REPRESENTING NORTHWEST SKIERS SINCE 1979

Mr. John Schuyler
October 20, 2003
Page 4

In order to continue growing skier visits, it is vital that Mt. Ashland be allowed to expand both its lift and lodge facilities. Most skiers who have experienced the enhancements at modern ski areas are reluctant to go backwards and visit areas which have only a few slow lifts with associated crowding at the bottom of the lifts. At present many of Mt. Ashland's ski runs are narrow and moderately steep. The proposed expansion would add a great deal of novice and intermediate terrain in an area that has very desirable long runs in a wind-protected area. The proposed Skier Services Building would be a major enhancement to the area. The tubing facility would bring in a new type of guest to a fun, inexpensive family activity which may lead to them trying skiing or snowboarding. All of the proposals would add to the enjoyment of families, individuals and groups visiting the area.

The purpose of the expansion is to add to the enjoyment of the persons visiting the ski area, as well as to assist the area to break even or become profitable. The items proposed in Alternative 2 would allow this to happen.

We urge you to consider the views of the group that has the most interest in the best possible winter recreation experience at Mt. Ashland: the skiers and the snowboarders. They are active people who love the outdoors, in winter as well as in summer. While the local people have the most direct interest, and the group I represent is based far north of Mt. Ashland, our members have still traveled to Ashland to ski, and will do so in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda A. McGavin
Director of Communications and Public Affairs

cc: Mr. Jeff Hanson, Mt. Ashland General Manager
Mr. Rick Saul, Mt. Ashland Marketing Director
Ms. Katherine Flanagan, Mt. Ashland Co-Marketing Director
Mr. Ty Histaomi, Mt. Ashland Development Director
Ashland Daily Tidings
Medford Mail Tribune

REPRESENTING NORTHWEST SKIERS SINCE 1979