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Thursday, August 15, 2002

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[Features](#)
[Letters](#)
[Opinion](#)

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[Local Sports](#)
[Briefs](#)
[Schedules](#)

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[People](#)
[Community](#)
[Photo Gallery](#)
[Entertainment](#)

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[Daily Regional](#)
[Ads](#)
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[News Tip](#)
[Community Event](#)
[Letter to the Editor](#)

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[Before Aug. 2001](#)
[Story Archive](#)
[Photo Archive](#)
[Return to Search Results](#)

County finalizes forest land swap with Mt. Hood Meadows

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The county is finalizing its controversial exchange of forest land with Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Resort.

That move has been protested by the Hood River Valley Residents Committee who believe Meadows is making a strategic move to develop a destination resort in the upper valley.

However, Dave Riley, Meadows general manager, said the only problem with the debate over development plans is that there has been no application submitted for any project.

In August, the Hood River County Commission authorized the trade to proceed following an independent appraisal if the county did not have to pay more than \$1.5 million to gain about 140 acres in the trade. Meadows has proposed turning 785 acres over to the county in return for 640 acres that lies near the Cooper Spur Inn property it purchased this summer.

Ken Galloway, county forester, said the appraisers have valued the county's property at \$1,324,023 and that owned by Meadows at \$2,334,908, a difference of \$1,100,885.

Both properties are zoned exclusively for forest use and Galloway said any change in that designation would have to undergo a lengthy and complex conversion process by the planning department and planning commission that would be open to public comment.

He said the deal was negotiated because it makes good business sense since the county will gain more land and be allowed access to 100 acres of high yield timber land that can now only be reached for harvest by helicopter operation, increasing logging costs from the standard \$50-\$75 per 1,000 board feet to between \$375-\$450.

Galloway said after the county recently completed the exchange of its 1,000 acres of Scenic Area properties with the U.S. Forest Service for about \$7 million, he was instructed to seek out other timber land that could replace that revenue base. In addition, Galloway said he routinely searches out parcels that can consolidate property for both landowners to save survey and roadbuilding costs.

To date, Galloway said Longview Fibre Company and Meadows are the only positive respondents to the exchange offer made to 22 parties this spring.

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