

Commentary

What will feds decide on ski-area expansion, wetlands?

Did 'dumb bunnies' fill in wetlands, or did it really occur on purpose?

1996 is sure to get off on an interesting foot, as January will be a busy month. The U.S. Forest Service has announced that it will release the long-awaited decision on the ski-area expansion. (The ski company has proposed an expansion into neighboring Prospect Basin.)

The public will get 30 days to comment on the decision. Also scheduled for release in January is a net settlement agreement between the Environmental Protection Agency and Telluride Ski & Golf Co. The EPA and Telski were set to go to trial in October over Telski's illegal filling of wet-

lands in the Mountain Village, when at the last minute a new settlement agreement was announced, but no details were released.

It will be curious to see the terms of this new settlement. The last one, in 1993, suggested that the ski company restore 15 acres on site, and another 28.5 acres at Menoken Farms outside Montrose (more than 70 miles away and the next watershed).

Telski also was to pay a fine of \$185,000. Public outcry was fierce, especially over the Menoken Farms site and the extremely low fine. In the end, the judge rejected the



From the ground up

Cameron Brooks

agreement. "I cannot conclude that the proposed consent decree is fair, reasonable and adequate, or in the public interest," wrote Judge Kane in his decision. "I cannot overemphasize the role that the public plays in this process."

So what's all the fuss about? In 1971, the Forest Service issued the first permits for the development of a ski area. Then, in 1979, a group of investors led by Ron Allred bought the ski area and surrounding lands with the intention of developing a mountain resort community. In the years that followed, the

ski company proceeded to build a golf course, add the ski area and build the Mountain Village and its core.

Things continued in this quiet fashion until 1989, when a biologist working for San Miguel County observed that construction activities in the Mountain Village were illegal, and advised Telski and the EPA.

According to the EPA's *Proposed Finding of Fact*, prepared for the canceled trial, "In the Fall of 1989, after being informed again that their construction activities violated the Clean Water Act, defendants continued to fill wetlands without a permit."

No one can be sure exactly how many acres of wetland were affected by the development. A study commissioned by the EPA in 1990, the year after the violations

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Letters to the editor

Is your favorite forest next to feed hungry chain saws?

It will be a sad day for San Miguel County when citizens here realize that the infamous Louisiana-Pacific Corp. and its logging partners have won the upper hand in this county.

But, lawyer talk and legal threats may well win out if Gray Brothers of Delta gets what it wants. On Jan. 2, San Miguel County commissioners are expected to rule in favor of the Gray Brothers' appeal to a county planning commission decision.

At issue is Gray's application to amend its special-use permit to allow winter logging (making it virtually a year-around operation), drop road-impact fees for paved roads from some 34 cents per ton mile to

spruce forests are fresh targets for the timber industry's hungry chain saws.

A recent freedom-of-information probe shows forests in the Glenwood Springs and Gunnison areas may be the first to fall.

Is your favorite forest next?

**Grace Herndon
Norwood**

Add Upper Bear Creek/Delta Bowl to backcountry skiing

I am writing to voice my support for the ski-area expansion.

I think it is a tremendously important step to take at this moment in Telluride's history, and will not only serve to improve the ski terrain, but will be a huge boost to our local economy. I would also like to add that Tel-

bird and Alta's (mandatory ski with a partner, avalanche beacon and shovel, and a sign-out, sign-in list) we could offer safe access to some of the finest terrain in the world. I hope you will consider the addition of Upper Bear Creek/Delta Bowl backcountry access to the Telluride skiing experience. Thanks again for all the quality improvements and I look forward to the ski terrain expansion in the years to come.

**Dave Rich
Telluride**

Telluride school kids should add trees to town landscape

Since 20 years I am coming to Telluride as a representative of the Sunnyside Corp.

From the stranger driving by who stopped and stayed with me for well over two hours to the extraordinary efforts of the San Miguel County Sheriff's Department, Placerville and Telluride Fire Departments and the uniting EMT folks and Dr. Donner and the on-call staff of the Telluride Medical Center, the sense of competency, community and caring was overwhelming.

You are all wonderful. You saved my life. It is no accident that you people do what you do. Each one of you is blessed with a special gift, and in keeping with the holiday season, you generously shared them with me. I am very grateful.

**Roy Conovitz
Telluride**