A heavy fog and three feet of snow cover the tiny settlement of Mazama, Wash., producing a landscape as dead as the dreams of a massive four-season resort at Early Winters, up the road.

That is the scenario painted by a Seattle newspaper, which stressed that the Early Winters Corp. was broke.

Corporate president Harry Hosey sees it differently, although admitting the threatened spotted owl may hold the ultimate fate of the resort in its talons.

Located in northeast Washington's Okanogan County in the eastern foothills of the Cascade Mountains, the proposed resort has had a history more stormy than a mountain blizzard over the past 20 years.

Long fought by environmentalists, with the Methow Valley Citizens' Council leading the attack, abetted by heavyweights like the Sierra Club, the fray has divided not only the community, but families as well.

First planned as a moderate-sized destination ski resort by the Aspen Corp., the project grew in size and expense. It became a proposed destination four-season resort, at one time planning for as many as 8,000 skiers on the hill at one time.

A golf course was added to the plans in the 1980s and architect Robert Muir Graves was hired to lay out the initial 18 holes and "golf academy" while providing for another 18.

A report stated that the resort had run out of money, that Hosey, who had laid off his staff of five, was in debt to consulting and engineering firms as well as Okanogan County, which had advanced $30,000 for a sewer study. The corporation has spent almost $12 million on the proposed $200-million resort, and not a permit has been issued.

Portraying reports of bankruptcy as "almost totally garbage," Hosey said he had "the total support of my partners." "My preference now is not to generate controversy or be in the media," he said. But, he and the resort are both in the media throughout Washington, where the spotted owl, a threatened species, is either loved by environmentalists or hated by the timber industry.

Hosey admitted that if the owl's presence at the resort site is documented, the project is doomed and he will sell the property. "Right in the restaurant" (site), Hosey said.

At that time the hill was declared an Owl Habitat Conservation Area, and Hosey felt "the regulations were not onerous and did not preclude development."

In 1990, the Forest Service made a decision that confirmed (owl) "pair-occupancy" on Sandy Butte, the ski hill project was dead, according to Hosey. It was decided that removal of trees for the ski runs would lessen the "canopy" required by the little owls.

With the international financial crunch, investors are getting edgy, and while Hosey disagrees, corporate insiders have indicated the purse has been snapped shut.

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Virtually all of the top
golf courses in the United
States use Banner.

What these course super-
intendents have discovered
is that a preventive turf pro-
gram that includes Banner
is more efficient. Not just
because it's effective against
a broad spectrum of diseases
like Summer Patch, Dollar
Spot, and Anthracnose. But
because of its low effective
rates and long residual.

Which means that when
you use Banner, you treat on
your own schedule. Not the
disease's.

Early Winters
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Graves, along with associate Neal
Meagher, said the firm's efforts on
the course are still in the prelimi-
nary phases.
The course is on paper, but "...we
haven't been given the full go-
ahead," he said.

Meagher said that any final
plans depend on whether the
project would call for 18 or 24 holes.

John Hayes, a local landscape
consultant, is working quickly to
put together "interested parties"
who might purchase the resort if
early Winters Corp. puts it up for
sale. Long a champion of retaining
the rural character of the Methow
Valley (there are less than 5,000
residents in its 70-mile length), he
would favor a much smaller version
than the present grandiose plans.

"Any kind of a resort, scaled
down, would need a mix of golf and
skiing to be economically effective,"
Hayes said.

When asked if the golf project
would be started again from scratch,
should his plan materialize, he re-
plied, "I would guess you dance
with the one that brought you,"
indicating that the Graves organi-
zation would remain on the job.

Citizens' Council attorney David
Bricklin noted: "The number of
hurdles that Hosey had to jump was
increasing, not decreasing. Long
before the spotted owl reared its
head, Hosey was in a lot of trouble."

Vicki Welch, co-chairman of the Methow Valley
Citizens' Council, asked her reaction to the story,
said: "I feel joy. We were expecting something
like this... We ran into people last summer who had done
work for him (Hosey) who had not been paid."

As if the environmental group she
leads would oppose a smaller
resort, she said there would prob-
ably be no resistance to a scaled-
down project. "It depends, of course,
on the specifics of the project, and it
would have to be examined for en-
vironmental impact."

Early Winters Corp. follows
Aspen and Methow Recreation, Inc.
as corporate entities attempting to
produce a resort over the past two
decades. A major blow was suffered in
1980 when the U.S. Supreme
Court found the Forest Service
Environmental Impact Statement
faulty in certain areas, which de-
layed the permitting process.

That opponents of the project
prevailed before the high court
came as a surprise to backers, who
were already mentally waxing skis
and chipping to Graves' velvet
greens.

Since then, it has been a down-
hill slalom for Early Winters and
Hosey, who predicted ground
would be broken for the golf course in

Then, still to be resolved is a
matter of water usage involving the
Yakima and Colville Indian nations.
Water consumption for golf and
artificial snow may impact the
aquifer, according to the Depar-
tment of Ecology, and with overuse
it could limit or destroy fish
spawning grounds which the Native
Americans claim were given them
in an 1888 treaty.

Ironically, in the early 1980s,
public sentiment favored a small
four-seasons resort. But as the plans
got bigger, opposition grew. The
corporation's energy and treasury
have been expended on defending
itself, on planning and consultants
and attorneys in order to obtain the
necessary permits.

In Northwest Indian lore, when
the owl calls your name, you are
going to die. The owl, a spotted one,
may have called "Early Winters."