

Project's future lies with Supreme Court

BY BOB SPIWAK

Okanogan County, in north central Washington, is the largest county in the state. It's bigger than Connecticut and within its mix of desert, plains and alpine terrain five nine-hole courses serve its golfers.

Now, a 18-hole layout is being designed by Robert Muir Graves in the northwest corner of the county. It is questionable whether it, and a proposed 18 to follow, will get beyond the drawing board.

The course is a portion of a proposed \$250-million resort called Early Winters, whose centerpiece for almost two decades has been a destination ski resort. Located just east of North Cascades National Park in the Methow (MET-how) Valley, the resort has been a major controversy since 1972, when the Aspen Corp. planned the original



Methow Valley, site of the hoped-for Early Winters golf course.

ski hill.

If golf were considered at that time, it was barely mentioned. Aspen is now out of the picture and a new development group, Methow Recreation, Inc., has taken up the cause. Its president, Doug Devin, is a local rancher and ski devotee and with other locals as well as out-of-towners, continues to fight for what has evolved into a four-seasons resort.

But local opposition to Early Winters was joined by several environmental groups including the Sierra Club. Each move by MRI has been countered by its opponents, and the conflict reached the U.S. Supreme Court late in 1988. Little was resolved.

At the core of the dispute is the question of major development in an ecologically sensitive pristine area of public and private lands. The valley, some 70 miles long, has a population of about 3,500. The nearest post office is at Mazama. It dispenses mail, gasoline, groceries and gossip. It's a general store with a wood-burning stove to chat over. The Mazama precinct has about 100 registered voters along a 12-mile strip of highway.

The ski resort would eventually provide for up to 8,200 skiers a day, although the initial numbers are estimated at one-third that amount. There would be a village, condominiums, shops ... the usual resort facilities.

The projected assault of skiers worries some locals. Not only hustle and bustle displacing a laid-back lifestyle, but the loss of winter solitude, degradation of a pure river, air, noise, and light pollution, and overall a lessening of the "quality of life" for which many moved to this valley in the first place.

The upper Methow is also the home of the largest mule deer herd in the state. Potential disruption of migration patterns, as well as impacts on other wildlife, has brought game officials and conservationist forces into the fray.

The valley is a long sliver of private land surrounded by national forest. The proposed ski hill is on Sandy Butte, the south wall of the development and on federal land.

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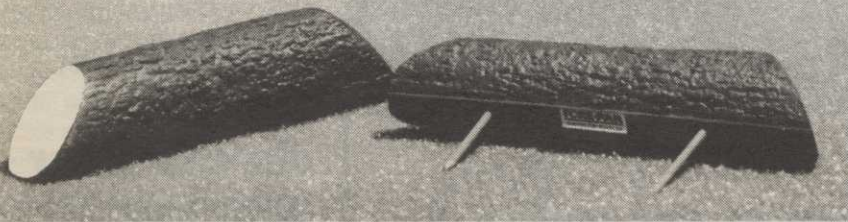
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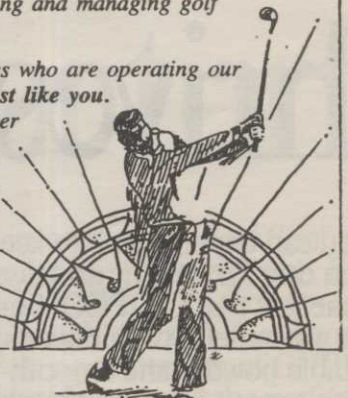
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Ag Secretary Yeutter to address institute

Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter will be the keynote speaker at The Fertilizer Institute's 1990 annual meeting scheduled for Feb. 11-13 at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tenn.

Yeutter will hold a "town meeting" with TFI members on Monday, Feb. 12 at 4 p.m. He will discuss legislative issues for the coming year, including the 1990 farm bill.

The theme of the meeting is "Agriculture: Right On."

"I think it is appropriate to begin the 1990s by focusing on the tremendous benefits of U.S. agriculture," said TFI President

Gary D. Myers. "Our meeting will be a celebration of the success of U.S. agriculture and a preview of the challenges of the next decade."

Two panel discussions will explore issues for the year ahead. One will focus on the supply and demand outlook for nitrogen, phosphate and potash, the major fertilizer nutrients. Another will be a review of studies being conducted to determine the effects on food production of the elimination of commercial fertilizer.

"Before we make public policy decisions based on risk paranoia, we need to under-

stand the consequences of banning or significantly reducing fertilizer use," said Myers.

The meeting will also feature TFI committee meetings and a board of directors meeting.

Washington

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The golf complex would be adjacent to the resort village, on private land. The two 18-hole courses and a three-hole golf "academy" would occupy what is now unused farmland gone to weeds.

Surrounded by mountains that are snow-capped most of the year, its alpine magnificence drew repeated comments of wonder from Graves when he first visited the site last September.

The valley was formed by Ice Age glaciation. When the ice retreated, what little topsoil remained was removed by "outwash," the flushing of soil by rivers born of the melting ice sheath.

All domestic water in the area comes from wells, and with the aquifer lying beneath a cobble and gravel surface barely covered by soil, golf course opponents cite the possibility of pollution by herbicides, fungicides, pesticides and fertilizers.

The area gets about 12 inches of precipitation a year, most of it as snow. Recent years have been near drought. During the winter of 1987-88, Wells in the valley as far as 10 miles downstream of the resort site went dry. With irrigation of 18 holes in similar terrain using from half to a million gallons a day, the question is, where will the water come from? Not only for the resort and its two villages, but for the remaining 65 miles of river valley.

In the mid-1970s, a coalition of concerned people was formed under the banner "Methow Valley Citizens' Council." To the proponents of resort development, this group represented obstruction, tree-hugging and Bambi-loving. MVCC hired an attorney and in court disputed the Forest Service's initial Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the original Aspen resort. Aspen lost the court battle and took its investment money to British Columbia.

Over the years since then, the Forest Service has worked toward perfecting the EIS.


As the state and county governments became supporters of the resort, the Sierra Club and other environmental groups joined with MVCC in opposition. After a lower court upheld the revised EIS in 1987, the Citizens Council took the case to the 9th Federal Circuit Court of Appeals.

In a decision that surprised many, that court overturned the lower court decision and ruled that the EIS was inadequate. This decision was subsequently appealed in part by the Forest Service to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Last May 1, the high court ruled that two of the four inadequacies cited by the Circuit Court did not have to be addressed before a permit could be granted by the Forest Service. These were a "Worst Case Analysis" and a "Mitigation Plan" involving impact on the deer herd.

Prior to construction, however, they would have to be dealt with, along with evaluations

of alternative sites for the ski hill, air pollution.
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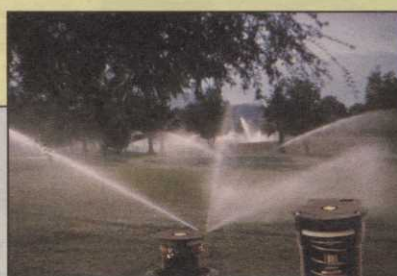
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Landmark developing first course in northern U.S.

Landmark Land Co. is getting involved in its first northern U.S. course at Petoskey, Mich.'s Three Fires resort complex, according to the Detroit News.

Three Fires is an 1,100-acre property, including 5-1/2 miles along Lake Michigan, being developed by Southfield developers Larry LoPatin and Daniel Holloway.

Included in the project is a 27-hole golf course scheduled to open in the spring of 1992.

According to the Detroit News, it is believed that Landmark Vice President and Charlevoix, Mich. native Chuck Fairbanks was influential in his company's decision to venture out of the warmer climes, where it

has developed such well-known facilities as PGA West and LaQuinta in Palm Springs, Calif. Oak Tree in Edmond, Okla. and Palm Beach Polo and Country Club in Florida.

Before getting into the real estate development business, Fairbanks was head coach of the National Football League New England Patriots, the defunct United States Football League's New Jersey Generals and the University of Colorado.

Michigan's golf boom also had a lot to do with the Landmark decision.

The state has more public courses than any state in the country and is among the leaders in number of players, frequency of play and number of courses.

Westchester in LA closing holes for changes

Parts of the Westchester Golf Course adjacent to Los Angeles International Airport will be closed for portions of the next two years while renovations are being done.

A fully automated sprinkler system, modern clubhouse and redesigning of several holes means nine of the 18 holes will close for up to two years and the driving range for two months.

The \$3.5-million facelift will eventually result in longer holes on the executive course, a larger pro shop and better lighting for nighttime play.

Washington

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tion in the nearby Pasayten Wilderness, completion and approval of ski hill and resort village master plans, along with state and county approvals.

Since the golf course site is on private land, the court battles thus far may have impact only if the developers tie the golf to the skiing, or if there is a land swap between the developer and the Forest Service.

There is a small National Forest Campground next to the course site which the developers have considered as an entry to the course. A trade may be considered wherein private land owned by Early Winter would be traded for the campground. Federal lands equal Supreme Court requirements.

On its own, the golf course still has to be led through a maze of permitting by federal, state and local agencies before construction can begin.

MRI's Devin is confident Graves is the architect to get the job done. Graves is familiar with the Northwest and has produced The Resort at Port Ludlow (Wash.) and Black Butte Ranch (Oregon) courses, both perennial "Top 100" courses in golf magazine rankings. He last year completed a new course, Meadowood, for Spokane County, Washington.

Graves has a reputation for being a particularly conscientious environmental planner when it comes to course design and construction.

The developers of Early Winters are optimistic that Graves will find the answers to the environmental problems.

Through what might have been a public relations faux-pas, the golf aspect of the resort was not publicized until a year or so ago. The project was referred to locally and in the Seattle and Spokane media as "The Ski Hill."

With the increased prominence of golf as a major recreation, MRI began to give it more emphasis. Many opponents of the ski hill and base village are hearing for the first time that golf is in the future, too, and they don't like it.

"It's bad enough to have an 18-hole course up there," said one, "but putting in 36 holes is a slap in the face."

The major concern seems to be for the aquifer—the quality and quantity of water.

"I'm delighted," said another. "I hope they give the locals a special deal to join. Otherwise, we won't be able to afford it."

Officially, Devin is hopeful that construction of the first 18-hole course will begin late this summer.

He's being noncommittal, however. Nobody knows better than he that any timetable will be determined by the level of opposition.

Bob Spiwak is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Mazama, Wash.

Pleasure Island eyed for championship course

Pleasure Island located adjacent to the eastern Texas city of Port Arthur would be a good location for a championship golf course, according to Jim Hardy of Golf Services Group of Houston.

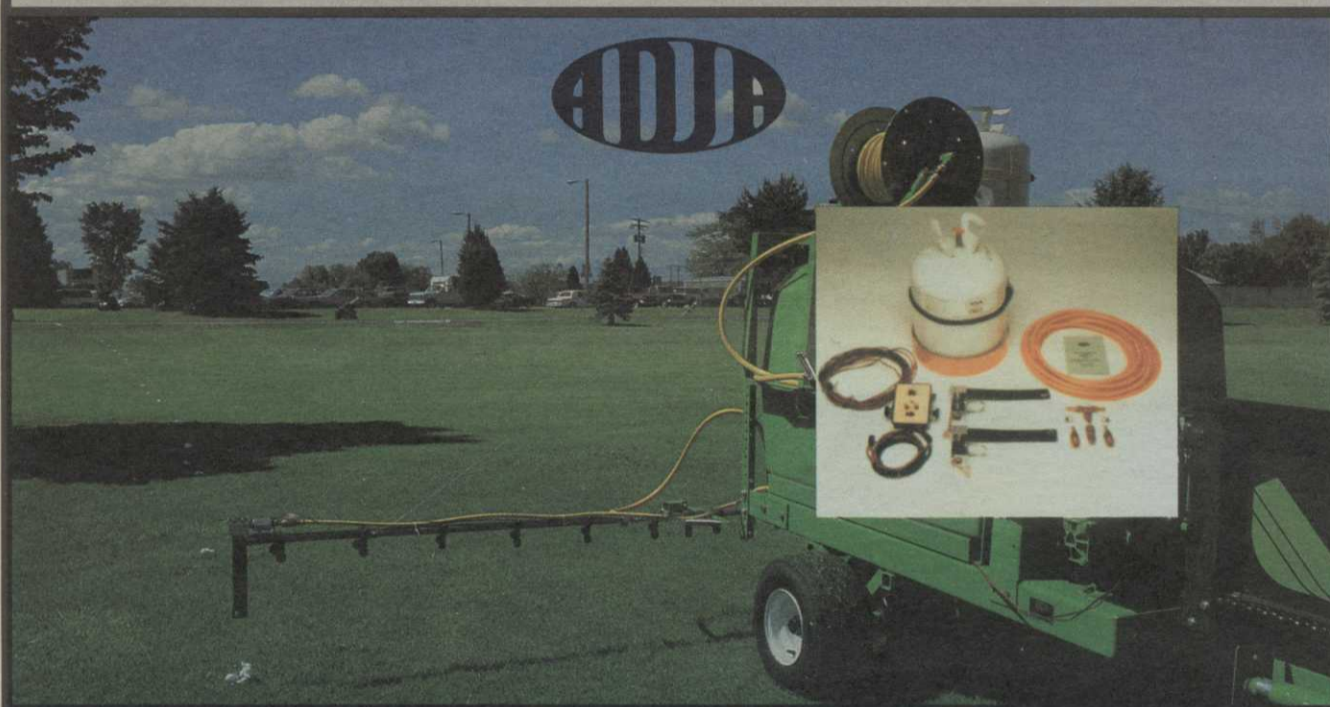
Hardy made his suggestion at a November joint meeting of the City Council and island commission. The two groups hired Golf Services to do a feasibility study on the possibility of building a golf course to stimulate the island's economy.

"High-quality golf is the current, primary, large-scale real-estate and economic development tool employed throughout the United States," Hardy was quoted in the Beaumont Enterprise.

Hardy recommended building a championship, daily-fee course, something he said is unavailable in the Port Arthur-Beaumont area.

An eight-member committee of councilors and island commissioners was appointed to further study the proposal.

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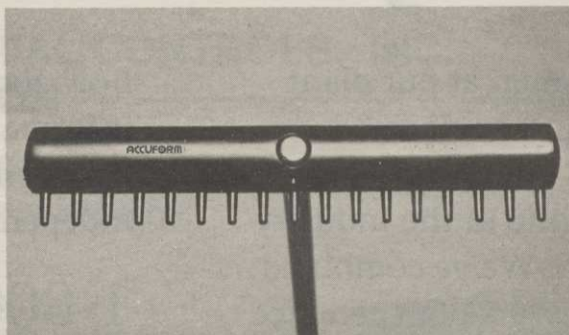
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