Two Minnesota State Agencies Differ On Giants Ridge Course

One state agency is supporting creation of a \$4.5 million golf course and housing development at the Giants Ridge Recreation Area near Biwabik, Minn. Another is seeking to slow down the process.

In favor of the project is the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB), which is financing it.

Meantime the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is concerned about the process used to study the project's environmental effects.

These concerns include potential damage to water quality, songbird habitats and species of rare plants.

DNR officials aren't against the golf course per se, but they have said there are other sites in the area with less potential for environmental harm.

Therefore, the DNR is filing a friend-of-the-court brief in a case being brought by two enviornmental groups—the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and a Biwabic group—before the Minnesota Court of Appeals. These two groups claim the Giants Ridge project needs a thorough

environmental review at the state level—but they were unsuccessful arguing their case in a lower St. Louis County court.

DNR Commissioner Ron Sando supported citizens groups last summer when they requested that Minnesota's Environmental Quality Board (EQB) to require additional studies, including an analysis of alternative sites. However, the EQB ruled that county planners already had done enough research.

IRRRB Commissioner James Gustafson, quoted in an article by Tom Meersman, staff writer for the Minneapolis Star Tribune, said "the issue is not rare plants but how to provide for an economic stimulus for an area of the state that needs job and higher property values. There's not a golf course in Minnesota that's gone through an environmental scrutiny that we have and passed with flying colors."

Gustafson expects the golf course to be planted this coming summer and open for play in July 1996.

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