



Friends of Mount Hood

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - April 5, 2011

Contacts: Chris Winter, Staff Attorney, Crag Law Center, chris@crag.org - (503) 701-6002
Lori Ann Burd, Staff Attorney, Bark, loriann@bark-out.org - (847) 567-4052
Dennis Chaney, Board Member, Friends of Mt. Hood, dcfomh@hotmail.com - (503) 701-7818
Barbara Wilson, Chairperson, Friends of Mt. Hood, wilson0752@comcast.net (503) 644-0762

CONTROVERSIAL DOWNHILL BIKE PARK DRAWS OPPOSITION

TRAILS WILL DAMAGE FRAGILE ALPINE MEADOWS AND SALMON HABITAT

(Portland, Oregon) April 4, 2011 - The Forest Service closed its 30-day comment period on the controversial Timberline Lift-Assist Downhill Mountain Bike Park. A diverse coalition of conservation groups and outdoor recreation clubs filed comments opposing the proposal and pointing out major gaps and flaws in the draft environmental assessment released last month by the Forest Service. Based upon a review by an expert hydrologist, the groups determined that the Forest Service's draft assessment downplayed the negative effects and relied heavily on questionable restoration of other locations damaged by past development. The new Supervisor of the Mt. Hood National Forest and local staff must now review and respond to these comments.

The Friends of Mount Hood worked with an independent scientist and local citizens to conduct an extensive review of the project. The Friends of Mt. Hood, Bark, the Mazamas, the Portland Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Oregon, the Sierra Club, the Native Fish Society, the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs and the Northwest Environmental Defense Center filed extensive comments and an expert declaration opposing the project (Attached hereto). Collectively, the groups have tens of thousands of members in Oregon.

The proposed downhill bike course has drawn opposition because of its proposed location at 6,000 feet in a sensitive alpine location with very fragile volcanic soil. Timberline proposes to cut over seventeen miles of trails into the volcanic slopes so riders can bomb down the mountain around the historic Timberline Lodge, which is a National Historic Landmark listed on the Registry of Historic Places. Timberline also plans to hold large downhill race events.

The bike park would only be able to operate less than 90 days a season. While there is another bike park on Mt. Hood at Ski Bowl and free ride trails down at Sandy Ridge, Timberline has proposed these trails in the headwaters of key habitat for native trout and salmon. Although the Forest Service initially told the public these trails would help reduce illegal use, the agency eliminated that goal from its purpose for the project in order to avoid analyzing the feasibility of other locations. Barbara Wilson, Chairperson of the Friends of Mount Hood, observed, "The draft assessment report plainly shows that Timberline is the wrong location for this project. The

Forest Service could easily work with bike groups to build downhill trails at lower elevations like they have done on nearby National Forests.”

The proposal has drawn criticism from long-time local residents. Pat Sharp, a resident of Zig Zag and local leader, said, “The Forest Service needs to choose another location for this sport or expand the downhill bike course at Ski Bowl. Let's preserve the beauty of the fragile alpine meadows at Timberline for future generations.” Local elk hunters have also spoken out against the project because the mountain meadows at Timberline are historic summer grazing meadows for elk and the bike trails would destroy the solace that elk need to feed and raise their young. The cut slopes that would result from the construction would also greatly increase the opportunity for invasive non-native plants and noxious weeds to colonize the area.

A review of the report by an outside expert identified numerous flaws. The downhill race course will result in tons of additional sediment in streams and these impacts will be far outstripped by the proposed restoration of other degraded areas. The conservation groups and recreation clubs identified numerous shortcomings in the Forest Service's report. Crag Law Center's Chris Winter, attorney for Friends of Mt. Hood, stated “Timberline has a lot of work to do to fix up the mess it has made of this fragile mountain ecosystem. Before they propose doing more damage, they need to get their house in order.” In their letter, the conservation groups and recreation clubs have called on the Forest Supervisor to deny the proposal.

Conservation and outdoor groups oppose this project because of its location but support the creation of new opportunities for mountain biking. Lori Ann Burd, Restore Mt. Hood Campaign Manager and Staff Attorney at Bark said, “recreation is one of the most important uses of Mt. Hood National Forest and we want to ensure the Forest Service makes it a priority, but not at the expense of elk and salmon. The Forest Service recently rejected proposals from Bark and other recreation groups for low impact hiking and mountain biking trails along decommissioned roads in the Collawash watershed.”

Background: For over two decades, the Friends of Mount Hood has been dedicated to monitoring development and management of national forest lands on Mount Hood. Since 1999, Bark has focused on the Mt. Hood National Forest to make it a place where natural processes prevail, where wildlife thrives and where local communities have a social, cultural, and economic investment in its restoration and preservation. The Mazamas, founded on the summit of Mt. Hood in 1894, is the second oldest mountaineering club in the nation. The Sierra Club is the nation's oldest conservation organization. Since 1995, the Native Fish Society has worked to protect and restore native, wild fish and their habitats in the Pacific Northwest. The Native Plant Society is dedicated to the enjoyment, conservation, and study of Oregon's native plants and habitats. The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs was established in 1932 for the promotion of the proper use, enjoyment and protection of America's scenic wilderness and outdoor recreation resources. Crag is a law center that supports community efforts to protect and sustain the Pacific Northwest's natural legacy. Since 1969, the Northwest Environmental Defense Center has worked to protect the environment and natural resources of the Pacific NW.