

DEVELOPMENT

Future is now at ski resort

By Kim Prinz
North Island Weekender

Despite a boom in construction, a newly paved road slated to be finished by 1996, and marketing strategies that include the Lower Mainland, Seattle, and much of the Pacific Northwest, officials at Mt. Washington still maintain that it's a destination meant mostly for islanders.

"We're not trying to be a little Whistler," says CEO Pat Dixon. "We're trying to be an island resort that offers islanders the best recreational value they can get."

But the "best recreational value" is not coming without some controversy. Many people are dismayed and alarmed at the amount of construction taking place at Mt. Washington. Some are concerned that the environment is taking second place to progress.

"The construction of the new road has caused a lot of problems recently," says environmentalist Father Charles Brandt. "There are serious concerns over Brown's River, Dove Creek, and the Tsolum River. There hasn't been a problem lately because it's been

fairly dry, but once the rain starts there will be heavy siltation in those rivers."

But that, according to Dixon, is not the resort's responsibility.

"The highway project stuff — we have no influence over that," says Dixon. "That's the responsibility of the Ministry of Highways. It's their project."

Six kilometres of mountain road is expected to be paved for the opening of ski season and the rest of the 19-kilometre stretch is due to be completed by Nov. 1, 1996.

However, according to Brandt, it isn't just the road that's causing heavy siltation in the surrounding watersheds.

"The new condos and ski lodges are causing a lot of pollution," says Brandt. "A lot of siltation is coming from this area. I'd hate to see tremendous development of the area, but that seems to be what they're planning. I'm very leery of all this construction up there."

Dixon, however, maintains that there are strict environmental protection strategies in place during the construction of new buildings,

which has included the completion of 85 new units this year — three condominiums and 10 chalets.

Currently, a 14-unit duplex subdivision is under construction and will be ready by December. Dixon also says that they are in the midst of planning a new lift installation and the planning process will continue through the next year.

Father Brandt is also concerned about the fresh water supply for all the new buildings going up.

"Where are they going to get water?" he asks.

Not a problem, according to Dixon.

"We're drilling now to identify new sources," he says. "We have enough right now to service the existing buildings, including the new duplex."

And despite Father Brandt's concerns over the sewage disposal, Dixon is confident that their

new method of disposal will benefit the surrounding environment.

"We're installing a program that will lead to irrigation of the forests with the effluent," he says. "The solids are shipped down to Comox Valley, but the liquids will be treated through an aeration process and then be spread on the forest. So we're in good shape as far as that's concerned."

Fertilizing the forest is not the

only thing Dixon has been working on. This year, many of the runs have been revegetated, including Rainbow, Jack's Trail (which was also recontoured — no more stopping in the middle), and numerous areas around the lodge have also been revegetated.

"Of course," says Dixon, "you won't be able to see any of that work because it will all be covered in snow come ski season."



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Waste plan could be costly

The regional district's newly-formed liquid waste management committee could be costly, Director Brenda Leigh warned last week.

The committee is to make recommendations to the regional

Without a plan, the district cannot begin to solve pollution problems which plague Baynes Sound.

Brett added, "It doesn't have to be provincial money. We can approach this in some other way."



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