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My Turn: Muellers' Sunapee end game has been clear for a long time

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The reason for all controversy surrounding ski resort expansion at Mount Sunapee is that there is a lot at stake.

Consider: Mount Sunapee Resort is located within a New Hampshire state park of conservation land comprising wilderness trails and ancient forests that contain trees more than 200 and 300 years old that are protected by state law. The ski resort has been operated by a private company (owned by Tim and Diane Mueller) aggressively seeking to make a large profit from real estate development by expanding its leased ski operations to strategically join it to its private property in the small town of Goshen.

Tactics included deception, intimidation and suing the state of New Hampshire.

Tim Mueller won the lease in 1998 claiming he was "just a snow farmer" with no intention of developing private real estate around Mount Sunapee, later retracting the promise when it was revealed that he'd already secured a purchase-and-sale agreement for land abutting the state park. In 2004, the Muellers submitted a plan to expand ski operations and to extend their leasehold to abut their private property where they anticipated building 175 to 250 slopeside condominium units. Rejected by the former governor, the proposal clearly violated public trust and the park's conservation values.

In 2007, the resort operator sued the good people of the state of New Hampshire. The lawsuit included a claim against the state for \$13 million based in part on the loss of potential real estate development in Goshen.

In 2008, the Muellers sold their lease holdings that included the Mount Sunapee lease for a reported \$132

million to a global real estate investment firm, CNL, which is now poised to sell the lease to maximize investor return.

Here we are in 2015 with an expansion plan that expressly enables private development on the Muellers' private land that abuts the state park and enhances the value of their private development in Goshen, while still violating public trust and the park's mission and conservation values.

Although touted as the region's economic engine, the resort in its economic analysis reveals something different. After 17 years of private management of the ski operations, area towns remain burdened with a stagnant and declining job market. Looking forward, most of the new jobs will be low wage, temporary and part time, which will not strengthen buying power but allow families just the necessities. Additionally, at the 2015 public hearing, we learned that many costs associated with expansion have not been considered and Goshen residents said higher property taxes would force many out.

While the resort downplays destruction of protected forest and their lawsuits and tactics, the gains they publicly advertise cannot be reconciled in the overall bigger picture.

(Mike Sullivan lives in Goshen.)

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