



54 Portsmouth Street  
Concord, NH 03301  
Tel. 603.224.9945  
Fax 603.228.0423  
info@forestsociety.org  
www.forestsociety.org

***Forest Society Comments on Mount Sunapee Resort Draft Master  
Development Plan (2015-19)***

***Offered August 26, 2014***

***At a Public Hearing hosted by NH Department of Resources & Economic  
Development at the Mount Sunapee State Park in Newbury, NH***

My name is Will Abbott and I am here tonight representing the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, where I serve as Vice President for Policy and Reservation Stewardship. The Forest Society is ably represented on the Mount Sunapee Advisory Committee by Nancy Marashio, of Newbury, who is also here this evening.

Most in this room understand the long history the Forest Society has with the conservation of Mount Sunapee, the establishment of Mount Sunapee State Park and the development of the State Park system. From 1911 to 1934 the Forest Society acquired 1185 acres of land on Mount Sunapee (including the summit) for its permanent protection. Our goal at the time was to create a public mountain park for the people of New Hampshire to enjoy as a recreational resource. In the late 1940's we conveyed this land to the State for the purpose of creating a state park. Between then and 1998 the State acquired additional lands adjacent to the 1185 acres, and today the Park consists of more than 2300 acres. Since 1948 the State has operated the park and the ski area as state park enterprises. The NH Department of Resources and Economic Development --- one of the hosts of this evening's hearing ---has the primary responsibility for stewardship of public recreation lands under state ownership.

We believe that the current lessee has done a good job managing the skiing enterprise at Mount Sunapee for New Hampshire and for the state park system. We also believe that the State entered this lease with the understanding that the State was leasing a ski area within the existing boundary of the State Park. Nothing more, nothing less.

The newly drafted Master Development Plan submitted by the lessee as required under the terms of the existing lease is intended to look forward five years. The new draft MDP covers the period from 2015 - 2019. As presented, the draft MDP suggests a new "west bowl" development that includes land not owned by the state. This doesn't make sense. The State cannot expand a lease onto land it does not own.

A second concern is that the current lessee of the ski area is not the landowner of the Goshen land that is being proposed for the "west bowl" project. Who actually owns the dirt matters.

For example, if the owners of the 600 acres of land in Goshen wish to do a development totally separate from the State Park on their Goshen land, as long as the development meets with standards set in Goshen's zoning ordinances, then as owners of the dirt they are within their rights to advance such a development proposal.

If the owners of the 600 acres of land in Goshen wanted to sell or donate the 600 acres to the State to add onto the State Park, and the State concluded --- after completing a thorough natural resource review and feasibility assessment --- that such an addition was in the State's interest, as the owner it could then --- and only then --- consider an expansion of the lease onto the newly acquired state owned land. One very large caveat is that there are many questions that require answers before such an acquisition could or should be considered.

If the owners of the 600 acres of land in Goshen wanted to retain ownership of the dirt and build a development with slope side residential development, and then plug this development into the existing ski lease with the state, this would be problematic. The State cannot use public land to create exclusive rights or benefits to a privileged few that other citizens of the State do not have access to. Public lands are for the public's benefit, not for the benefit of private residential real estate development.

What the current lessees actually have in mind for the proposed "west bowl" development raises a large number of unanswered questions. Obviously, until these many questions are answered, state decision makers do not have the information they need to make well informed decisions.

What is clear today is who owns what dirt. What is also clear to us is that dirt owned by the public carries obligations and responsibilities that state government exercises on behalf of all of us.