

The Friends of Mount Sunapee is grateful for the opportunity to offer this information to members of the public. We hope to foster a thoughtful public conversation about these issues, and to encourage the owners of the state park, the people, to engage in guiding the future of the mountain. We believe that Okemo's proposed expansion of resort activities across precious public land and into Goshen raises important yet unanswered questions about the ramifications of resort-style development in our state park and mountain region. We welcome your comments, suggestions, questions, and interest in the activities and advocacy positions of the Friends of Mount Sunapee.

Who are the Friends of Mount Sunapee?

The Friends of Mount Sunapee is a non-profit alliance of neighbors, leaders, conservationists, and civic-minded citizens from towns across our mountain region, including citizens from Warner, Bradford, Sutton, Newbury, Goshen, Washington, Lempster, Newport, Sunapee, New London, across New Hampshire and the country.

What is the mission of the Friends of Mount Sunapee?

The Friends of Mount Sunapee advocate for preservation of Mount Sunapee State Park, conservation of the Sunapee highlands and Lake Sunapee watershed, and continuation of the unique rural and natural character of the communities in the mountain's shadow.

We seek to maintain our region's unique qualities of clean air and water, large forest tracts and open lands, wildlife and their habitats, and traditional methods of enjoying these resources. We advocate for local land use practices, regional planning measures, and land protection initiatives that assure livable, natural, and healthy communities. We promote leadership and accountability for government and corporations, and we seek public involvement and openness in all policy-making processes that determine our region's future. With education, information, and citizen involvement, we will preserve the unique character of our state park, our mountain, and our region.

Become a Friend of Mount Sunapee- Join today.

For information on joining the Friends of Mount Sunapee as a volunteer or contributor, please contact us.

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LEASE EXPANSION AND MOUNT SUNAPEE STATE PARK:

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR THE PUBLIC TO ASK

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FRIENDS OF
MOUNT SUNAPEE
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QUESTION #1:

IS IT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST TO LEASE MORE OF MOUNT SUNAPEE STATE PARK?

When evaluating the proposed lease expansion and the resort style sprawl it would make possible, the primary responsibility of DRED and our elected officials is to ask first and foremost:

- ? Does Mount Sunapee State Park exist to serve as an attraction for private real estate development, or does it exist to protect essential public values?
- ? Is it acceptable for more public land to be put under Okemo's control to facilitate real estate development on private land?
- ? What benefit does the lease expansion and proposed real estate development bring to the public? Will this enhance or reduce the area's quality of life and traditional cultural, historic, and critical environmental assets such as clean water and open space?
- ? How does the lease expansion enhance the public's enjoyment, both natural and recreational, of our public land?
- ? What precedent will be set for other parks and public lands in New Hampshire if the Executive Council should grant the lease expansion? Will other parks, including Pillsbury, Kearsarge, and Monadnock become catalysts for private development on their borders? Will other landowners adjacent to Mount Sunapee State Park be given equal access to public/private development?
- ? For former landowners and their descendants who had their land taken by government for the creation of a public park to protect essential public values, would privatization of those lands reverse the promise made to them?

*Friends of Mount Sunapee believe that **Mount Sunapee State Park exists to serve as a public protectorate, a refuge safeguarding essential public values.** The Park is a vital public asset serving the region and its population, created to provide public benefits like clean water for Lake Sunapee, healthy habitat for sensitive and threatened wildlife, globally rare primeval forests, open space for local school children and families to picnic and explore our mountain's natural legacy, of course, an affordable place for regular folks to ski. The leasing of public land to facilitate resort style, real estate sprawl next to our state park is unquestionably detrimental to these essential public values and sets a dangerous precedent for other state-owned public lands.*

QUESTION #4:

WHAT ARE DRED'S FISCAL OVERSIGHT RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE STATE PARK AND THE LEASE?

Another essential responsibility of the DRED Commissioner is to oversee the fiscal implications of the lease and development of the state park generally, and to insure that the private corporation entrusted with our state park is solvent, capable, and forthright in its financial obligations to the people of New Hampshire under the terms of the lease. With this responsibility comes the duty to thoroughly investigate and make public any fiscal impacts that arise whenever the lessee decides to transfer its security interest in the lease.

- ? Should our state park be leveraged by a private company to provide capital for the corporation's investment in other ski resorts in Vermont and Colorado? As reported in the *Union Leader* 3/2/04, nearly half of the existing \$33 million mortgage on the lease and adjacent private land was spent on projects away from Mount Sunapee.
- ? What would happen if Okemo were to fail to pay its debt obligations to KeyBank of Ohio? Would KeyBank gain control of the lease? Would existing public assets such as lifts and buildings become encumbered or liquidated? Would the ski operation be guaranteed to continue?
- ? When the existing lease expires and if it is not renewed by the state, who will own the proposed cross-border developments? Will the new ski trails be open to the public?
- ? What further mortgages or lease assignments would Okemo seek to leverage their investment and gain more debt?
- ? Should the public be made aware of Okemo/Triple Peaks investors? When evaluating the fiscal fitness of the new owners of the lease, should the Commissioner ask for a full accounting and prospectus for the new controlling entity, as was required during the 1998 Request for Proposals (RFP) process?
- ? Is it good public policy for the people of NH or state government to allow transfers of the lease in part or whole without using an open public process for answering these questions? Should a vote of the Executive Council be required, as it is for leasing in general?

QUESTION #2:
WHAT ARE DRED'S RESPONSIBILITIES FOR OVERSIGHT OF THE LEASE AND THE PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESS?

In 1998, the NH Legislature enabled the leasing of Mount Sunapee's ski operation and placed all oversight authority in the hands of a single person, the Commissioner of DRED. With the exception of the constitutionally-required approval of leases by the Executive Council, the DRED Commissioner alone holds the vast responsibility of protecting the public interest and essential public values, and upholding the public trust implicit whenever public resources are placed in a public servant's control.

To best determine whether or not the proposed lease expansion and subsequent sprawl development are in the public interest, and to best determine how local communities and natural resources will be negatively impacted by any additional leasing or development of public land, the DRED Commissioner should mandate and implement a public planning process that:

1. Is guided by an **independent entity** experienced in planning and environmental impact review processes;
2. Encourages **broad public participation**, particularly in the communities most affected by expansion including the towns of Goshen and Newbury, communities along Route 103 and Lake Sunapee, and other local towns affected by the potential resort-style growth;
3. Is **clearly defined** and **logically scheduled**, and makes information readily available to the general public through meetings, mailings, and the **internet**;
4. Uses professionally produced, independent, and **science-based research** to answer the tough questions;
5. **Is not inherently prejudiced toward expansion**, but instead is skeptical of the proposed lease expansion and development plans unless there is evidence that further development is appropriate, benign, financially feasible, and would provide a positive outcome for both local people and the mountain they love.

QUESTION #3: WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF EXPANSION ON THE PARK, THE MOUNTAIN, AND THE REGION?

- ? Is there demand for further development of Mount Sunapee? Is Okemo financially capable of following through with its plans, given other commitments by the owners?
- ? How many new residents will the development bring to the area? Where will new employees live? How will they commute to Goshen/Newbury?
- ? What jobs will be created, and will they pay a livable wage? Will these jobs really go to local people? What economic opportunities will be lost when hundreds of acres of land are developed? What potential for sustainable, long-term forestry and logging will be lost?
- ? Will taxes go up because of the development? Will rising land values force moderate income people out of Goshen? Will new taxes cover the increase in costs for fire, police, road maintenance, schools, ambulance, and town growth management services?
- ? Can our local roads support a dramatic increase in cars drawn to the expanded resort? What will it cost to prepare our roads for yet more traffic? Where will these cars park? And will local and county safety services get too expensive?
- ? What effects will sprawling ski growth have on our environment? On air and water quality? On wetlands, steep slopes, thin soils, and agricultural lands? How much light pollution and electrical consumption?
- ? How will wildlife and their wild places be impacted? What scenic roads and views will be changed?
- ? What public recreation areas will be closed off? What hiking, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, and snowmobiling trails will be lost? What hunting and fishing lands made off-limits?
- ? What historic places will be altered? What Native American sites will be disturbed? What quiet places will be lost, and what noise created? Will the region's quiet rural and agricultural way of life survive?