

FIVE REASONS WHY FRIENDS OF MOUNT SUNAPEE OPPOSES LEASE EXPANSION AT MOUNT SUNAPEE STATE PARK

The current lease expansion proposal asks the people of NH to surrender another 175 acres of Mount Sunapee State Park (about 20% more than the current leasehold) so that a private company can build a slopeside ski resort across the borders of the park to its existing leasehold. FOMS opposes this proposal because:

USING PUBLIC CONSERVATION LAND TO FACILITATE PRIVATE REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT IS NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND IS WRONG ON PRINCIPLE.

State reservations like Mount Sunapee State Park exist to ensure essential public values and to protect open space from the very type of sprawl development that lease expansion would necessarily facilitate. Using parkland originally purchased, gifted, or taken by eminent domain for public benefit to spark private resort development violates NH's long and proud history of protecting state lands as a common asset to benefit the public good.

PRIVATIZING STATE PUBLIC LANDS TO GENERATE REVENUE FOR THE STATE IS IRRESPONSIBLE AND SETS A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT FOR NH'S FUTURE.

Using state conservation lands to facilitate private development for the sake of increasing revenue is short-sighted, unprincipled, and based on desperation logic. Because the NH Legislature has wrongly chosen to make the state parks system self-funding, DRED's consideration of the lease expansion proposal signals that the agency is so starved for funding that it is willing to sacrifice the very public assets the agency was created to protect. If lease expansion at Mount Sunapee is allowed, and if NH's state budget problems continue, the pressure to develop public land to generate revenue will only increase. Condos connected to Rye Beach, an ATV dealership with trails leading into Pisgah or Bear Brook State Parks, advertising on the summit of Mount Washington- once a precedent has been set, forces in Concord will be unleashed. Governor Benson's own policy recommends that we "divest [the state] of land that the private sector could put to better use." The lease expansion debate is the time to draw a line in the sand, and to defend the legacy and promise of a state lands system established to protect essential public values for future generations.

LEASE EXPANSION WILL HARM NATURAL AND RECREATIONAL QUALITIES OF THE PARK.

Lease expansion will diminish important environmental, recreational, and aesthetic qualities that the state park was established to protect. Lease expansion will lead to extensive trail cutting, blasting, and conversion of open forest to rocky trails, will dramatically increase visitation and overusage, cause runoff, erosion, and destruction of wildlife habitat for shy and sensitive species, reduce use of the park for hiking and quiet enjoyment of nature, and the further perpetuation of the myth that Mount Sunapee is no longer a public space. While the operation of a modest ski area within the much larger state park can be compatible with these other essential public values, ski development must be contained and strongly regulated to protect the virtues of this important public asset.

LEASE EXPANSION WILL UNLEASH DESTRUCTIVE SPRAWL ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Lease expansion is expressly intended to magnetize real estate development in the town of Goshen, and will fuel similar resort sprawl in towns all along the Route 103 corridor. Expected impacts from the *first* phase of development include: more traffic on poorly maintained state roads; increased taxes from increased demand of town services and rising property values due to land speculation and secondary development; water, air, soil, noise, and light pollution; and the loss of small town character, volunteerism, and community spirit in towns unprepared to handle the explosive change that lease expansion will unleash. As all available private land in the area that abuts or is near to the state park is developed, quality of life impacts will exacerbate and bleed into towns further and further from the resort itself. Economically, resort development will provide low-wage, seasonal, non-benefited jobs, while driving working class families out of the rural communities due to high property values/taxes and non-liveable wages. The gravitation of the region's economic development toward an out-of-state controlled, seasonal and weather dependent, service industry employer could be disastrous to near-mountain communities that instead should capitalize on the historical, cultural, and natural assets that are their greatest asset and which are at great risk of being lost.

POOR DECISION-MAKING BY DRED SETS A POOR PRECEDENT FOR ALL STATE LANDS.

Without any clear or proven guidance from the Legislature, no published or adopted rules, and little experience within the agency to properly consider major development requests, DRED must choose its own scheme of evaluating whether or not lease expansion is in the public interest. DRED has no established, transparent, and consistent methods for decision-making, and is thus unaccountable to its constituents and the owners of the lands the agency manages. With no financial resources for good process, major questions will remain unanswered. And finally, without any appeal mechanism to a higher authority, the Commissioner of DRED holds the power to make enormously important decisions without any accountability to taxpayers and stakeholders. Decision-making by a state agency should be conducted with the highest standards and the public interest foremost in mind.