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ANYONE FOR A DANCE?



Jordan Curet/Aspen Daily News

Construction of the Dancing Bear Aspen Mountainside building resumed on Wednesday morning after work was halted by the recession's impact in 2008. Construction is expected to be completed for the 2015/2016 ski season, with a new restaurant space and private residences.

Can conservation, industry strike a deal on Thompson Divide protection?

Kessler hopes Forest Service decision brings industry back to the table

By Collin Szewczyk

Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

In wake of the Forest Service's decision to limit future oil and gas leasing on the White River National Forest, a local conservation group is hoping that industry will be open to working out a deal that would bestow permanent protection for the Thompson Divide.

Zane Kessler, executive director of the Thompson Divide Coalition, said that without the assistance of the oil and gas industry, long-term protection of the area is not possible.

"We're hopeful that this recent decision will bring industry back to the table," he said Wednesday. "Our interest is in working with specific leaseholders to protect the area in perpetuity, and make them whole in their investment."

But with both sides awaiting a Bureau of Land Management decision on the legitimacy of 65 existing leases in the controversial area, an agreement could be a long time off.

Eighteen of those leases are held by Houston-based SG Interests and seven are owned by Ursa Resources, LLC, which operates out of Denver.

A call to Robert Guinn, vice president of land for SG wasn't returned on Wednesday, and Ursa declined to comment on the matter.

The Forest Service's decision doesn't change the status of those leases, which have been challenged and are being reviewed by the BLM.

An administrative order handed down by the Interior Board of Land Appeals called for an environmental impact statement to be conducted to analyze those leases. The EIS is slated to be complete in August 2016.

Of the 2.2 million acres in the WRNF, more than 1.2 million acres will be closed for oil and gas leasing through management direction, according to a draft

FOREST SERVICE ON PAGE 4

Aspen Highlands to open this weekend with 700 acres, including the Bowl

Buttermilk opening will debut new children's ski school center

Aspen Daily News Staff Report

Aspen Highlands' opening weekend will include access to much Highland Bowl, as well as most of the upper mountain steps off the Deep Temerity lift, Aspen Skiing Co. announced Wednesday.

Despite a dearth of early season snow so far, Highlands will open Saturday with 700 acres. Buttermilk

will also open Saturday with top-to-bottom skiing on the main Buttermilk side, as well as the debut of a new ski and snowboard school facility at the base called the Hideout.

With Highlands and Buttermilk joining Aspen Mountain and Snowmass, which opened last month, SkiCo resorts will feature 2,325 acres of open terrain.

SkiCo Vice President of Mountain Operations Rich Burkley said in a press release that with all four mountains open this weekend, the season will be in

SKIING ON PAGE 5

Citing litigation, Related developer blocked man's campaign efforts

By Chad Abraham

Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

The developer of Base Village refused to allow a Snowmass Village resident to campaign for a mayoral candidate in the Snowmass Center before the November election, citing ongoing lit-

igation between him and the town that could impact the long-stalled project.

In a letter to the editor, Richard Goodwin, who is suing the town over its extension of Base Village development rights for Related, brought up the company's denial of his request to

campaign in the Snowmass Center for Jason Haber. Haber is a former town councilman who ran unsuccessfully for the mayor's seat, which was won by Councilwoman Markey Butler. Related owns the center, which is arguably the most frequently visited place in Snow-

mass due to the post office and grocery store being anchor tenants, and a host of other properties around the village.

Goodwin, besides the lawsuit, has been a persistent and vocal critic of the town's direction on Base Village.

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