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## Ski park zips past county approval

### Road access issues, ecology impact may stop winter opening

By Joanne Kelley, Rocky Mountain News  
June 17, 2005

A proposed ski and snowboard terrain park near Evergreen cleared another hurdle this week, but its developers may be pressed to open by winter.

The Clear Creek County planning commission Wednesday night unanimously approved the development plan for the project, which will be built at the long-dormant Squaw Pass Ski Area along Colorado 103, west of Evergreen.



Marc Piscotty © News/2002

Squaw Pass Ski Area closed its runs in 1974, but under a new plan it might be up and running again this winter. The old chairlift poles still stand at the site, which is 35 miles from downtown Denver.

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But because of road access issues and the possible environmental impact of the planned ski area, the county said it won't grant building permits until the developers resolve or agree to some 18 conditions.

"They're probably going to be in a crunch this summer," said Frederick Rollenhagen, the county's planning director. "They want to

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begin construction before it (the ground) freezes. It all depends on how quickly they can get these things finished up."

Gerald Petitt, a hotel executive who grew up in Colorado but is now based in Bethesda, Md., bought the roughly 240-acre property more than two years ago for about \$700,000.

After a zoning hearing in November, Petitt said he hoped to have the new ski area open by the 2005-2006 season.

One of his biggest obstacles in moving forward with his plan: getting road access across the neighboring forest service land before construction can begin.

Petitt could not be reached for comment.

Clear Creek County's Rollenhagen also said a forest management plan needs to be finalized, as does a review of wetlands on the property and potential geologic hazards.

The developer also has agreed to pay the county 1 percent of lift-ticket revenues for road improvements and the county's ambulance fund, given the potential for injuries at the ski area.

County road officials have questioned whether Colorado 103, which stretches over Squaw Pass from Evergreen's Bergen Park to Idaho Springs, can handle the extra traffic the ski area will bring both during the day and at night.

Ownership of Petitt's land has changed hands several times during the three decades since the ski area shut down because of a lack of snow and snowmaking capabilities.

The developers have already drilled wells and plan to add reservoirs to aid in snowmaking.

The original ski area operated from about 1961 to 1974.

Among other terms of the county's development plan:

- A limit of no more than 700 visitors a day.
- Ski run lights must be shut off by 9 p.m. on weekdays and 10 p.m. on weekends and holidays.
- Annual groundwater testing to ensure water quality doesn't deteriorate as a result of snowmaking operations.

The ski area, 35 miles from downtown Denver, has posted its first job opening on its Web site. It's seeking a mountain manager with

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five years' experience who knows the "new school skier and boarder market."

In filings with the county, the developers have estimated their proposed terrain park could draw about 55,000 winter visitors from outside the county and add roughly 35 to 50 jobs in the county, although some positions would be seasonal.

## Squaw Pass history

- **Dates of Operation:** 1961-1974

Area Stats:

- **Elevation:** Summit, 10,000 feet; base, 9,300 feet; vertical drop, 700 feet
- **Average snowfall:** 200 to 225 inches annually (mostly in late spring); as little as 75 inches in a drought year
- **1974 ticket prices:** \$3 per day (adult)
- **Why the original area closed:**

With no snowmaking and iffy natural snow conditions, the Squaw Pass Ski Area couldn't compete with larger areas. Also, industry insurance rates rose sharply after a gondola accident at Vail. *Source: Coloradoskihistory.Com*

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