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The Future of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows

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Readers:
Char Miller

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INTRODUCTION

As the sun begins to drop behind the nearby peaks, the steady whine of rotating machinery is broken by a few words that all skiers love to hear: “Last chair of the day folks!” Yells the lone lift operator: “Make it count.” With a brief sprint for the quickly approaching chair, my dad and I plop down in an expression of victory. After a long day of hiking along ridgelines in search of freshly fallen snow, we relish the opportunity to get one last lift up the mountain – this time alone, with no other skiers in sight.

The chair picks up its usual speed and as we begin our 2,000 ft. ascent I’m reminded of the reality that will greet me when I return to the bottom of the mountain. In a little more than an hour, we’ll be in the car and headed back to suburbia with all of its daily obligations – which in my case involve mostly middle school basketball practice and English homework. We’re no different from most of the other skiers at Alpine Meadows; a couple of weekend warriors, my dad and I savor each Saturday so that we can rise early and make the 300 mile drive out to Tahoe for our chance to get in a few turns.

My thoughts about home continue as our lone occupied chair carries us above the approaching saddle. Suddenly, I’m jolted back by frigid, high mountain winds. Having now reached the summit, I duck for cover and begin mentally preparing for the familiar trek ahead. With one last squeeze of our metal chairlift, I leave the luxurious piece of machinery behind and shoot onto the snow, headfirst into the wind.

Rather than begin our first turns, my dad and I pop our skis off and press forward towards an even higher ridgeline on a trail known simply as High Traverse. A

challenging climb for most skiers, the High Traverse ascends until it reaches the highest peak of the resort. Those who tough it out are rewarded with the only access to a series of legendary, often untracked powder bowls on the backside of the mountain. At fourteen years old, it is a trek I've done a few times, but now, with the combination of strong headwinds and tired legs, I find myself struggling to keep pace. With my head down, I continue to plant one foot in front of the other. "This is what makes Alpine special," I've heard my dad say countless times before. "The best parts are saved for those who earn their turns."

After what feels like an eternity, the hike finally flattens out and I raise my head to see a sign that informs us of the next leg of our journey: "HIGH AVALANCHE DANGER, EXPERTS ONLY. BE CAREFUL OF UNMARKED EXPLOSIVES." Standing 8,637 ft. high in the Sierra Nevada sky, we've reached the point of no return. While the Alpine Meadows ski patrol works tirelessly to tame the highest-classified avalanche terrain in North America, the mountain still stands in its powerful, primal form. Up here, there are no cat-tracks or direct-access lifts that offer an easy way back down. In their place is a two-ski track that tightropes across the unstable ridge. Once successfully navigated, skiers must then hurl themselves off an 8-foot cornice to access the powder-filled bowls.

With no more altitude to gain, my dad and I pop our skis back on and drop into the treacherous traverse. The track carved out by past skiers is iced over, but we make sure to stick to it so as to avoid the vertical drop off that lies on either side. Sliding across the rolling ridge, we quickly pick up speed to the point where my skis begin to chatter. The route is anything but straight, and as we dart in and out of turns I catch a few brief

glimpses of the massive drop-off that lies below. While the sheer height is enough to make my heart pound, I know that the real danger lies within in the endless sea of evergreen trees below. Down in that out-of-bounds territory, there are no ski patrollers to come to your rescue. Many have lost their lives by falling down this very ridge and getting lost within in the dense thickets of Tahoe National Forest.

Skidding over a patch of loose rocks, I finally come to our destination. It is officially deemed Big Bend Bowl, although few skiers actually call it by its real name. Instead, those who accept the burden traversing out to the massive expanse of untamed territory usually adorn it with their own name. Such is the Alpine Meadows way. With most locals having unofficially renamed runs after epic lines or brutal wipeouts that have occurred there, most skiers are quite content with identifying runs based on their topographical features – which they know like the back of their hand. As for my dad and me, we named this particular bowl Playland – a name we thought only appropriate considering the amount of work required to access it.

As I come to a stop, I let out a deep breathe and look out over the cornice before me. The wind is still kicking up snow, but I stop short of sheltering my face. Instead, my eyes catch sight of the enormous blue that pierces the otherwise evergreen sea in the distance: Lake Tahoe. Crowned by a ring of snow-capped peaks, the majestic lake grabs ahold of my gaze and refuses to let go. Instantly, my thoughts are silenced and I am overcome with a profound stillness. Looking out over the ridge, it's just me, my dad, and the sound of whipping winds. For the first time in my early adolescent years, I'm struck with a deep sense of nature's raw beauty.

As I sit at my computer, reflecting upon my profound experience that day back in 2004, I find it rather odd to remember that the ridgeline I was standing on was still part of a ski resort. Having now worked as an employee of Alpine Meadows, I've seen first-hand how the company works to turn a few snow-covered mountains into a full-fledged, capital-intensive operation that provides entertainment for thousands of visitors each year. Sure, Alpine Meadows has left much of its terrain in its rugged, undeveloped form, but a cynical part of me wants to write off my experience of connecting with nature as a bit phony – akin to someone saying that their greatest sense of adventure came from visiting a Six Flags theme park.

And yet, as I stood upon that ridge, I did not feel like a tourist. I can still recall the vivid sensations I felt while looking out onto Lake Tahoe. The cool air, warm rays, and sweet smell of Ponderosa Pine – all of which added up to an experience that was too pure to be the product of some form of consumer entertainment. In that moment, I didn't feel like I was standing on land that was property of a private-equity firm, I felt like I was standing on land that I was fundamentally a part of.

I know that I'm not alone in this feeling. Spend some time in the season-passholder's locker room and you will meet a core group of loyal ski bums, both locals and day-trippers alike, who will tell you why they choose to ski at Alpine Meadows, despite its proximity to the more developed, world-class Squaw Valley ski resort.

“There's a reason that people have been driving three miles further for more than 50 years,” writes long-time Alpine Meadows skier and owner of UnofficialAlpine.com Mark Fisher. “We purposefully drive past Squaw Valley, past the beckoning Olympic flame and rings. We choose to tackle Alpine Meadows road, even though it is steep,

frequently icy and subject to morning closures for avi control. We've been drawn to something that is different.”¹

While this sense of Alpine's differentness varies for each skier, all can agree that it is not contingent upon Alpine's out-of-boot amenities. At Alpine Meadows, there are no ice-skating rinks, gondolas, or casinos. Unlike the village at Squaw, the lone lodge at the base of Alpine offers no amenities aside from a cramped locker room, a ski shop, and a small cafeteria. Instead, the experience that Alpine Meadows offers is one that is much simpler, yet richer – pure skiing.

The stark difference in development philosophies between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley is ingrained in the very founding of the two resorts. Despite their geographical proximity, the resorts have served as the flagships for two completely different sides of the Tahoe ski community ever since the two valleys were first seen to have potential for ski resorts during the 1940s.

Squaw Valley's rise to stardom began in 1948 when Alexander Cushing, a Harvard-educated Wall Street Lawyer, teamed up with local visionary Wayne Poulsen to form the Squaw Valley Development Company.² From the very start, the company made it clear that Squaw Valley was destined for greatness. Rather than start small, the company put all of its resources into developing a single chairlift and in 1949, Squaw Valley ski resort opened with Chair One – the single largest chairlift in the world.³

With his one-chairlift resort, Cushing moved quickly to put Squaw Valley in the spotlight. He immediately ousted Poulsen from leadership in the Squaw Valley

¹ Fisher, Mark. "All I Want For Christmas Is Alpine Meadows." *UnofficialAlpine.com*. N.p. 25 Dec. 2013. Web. 05 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialalpine.com/?p=2643>>.

² Ancias, Eddy Starr. "Men Who Love Mountains". *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. Charleston: History, 2013. 16-29. Print

³ Ibid.

Development Company, and then, as its president, Cushing took a gamble that would define the very spirit of Squaw Valley for generations to come. Just six years after the opening of his primitive resort, Cushing gathered together his financial assets, along with some key friends that included Laurence Rockefeller and World War II French underground hero Joe Marillac, and set out to convince the International Olympic Committee into letting Squaw Valley host the 1960 Winter Olympics.⁴ In a move that shocked the world, Cushing won the bid. Nevermind that his resort had only one chairlift, two rope-tows, and a dirt road. It was the first time that the Olympics had not been awarded to a city, but to a piece of real estate.⁵

Declared “the best Winter Olympics ever,” the 1960 games forever changed the surrounding Tahoe community.⁶ No longer a place deemed just for ranchers, people began arriving from the San Francisco Bay Area and the local economy boomed. Newly opened motels in the nearby towns of Truckee and Tahoe City sold out at premium prices, and within a decade some four hundred to five hundred people had made their homes at the base of Squaw Valley.^{7,8}

In addition to bringing a massive increase in tourism, the 1960 Olympics was also the catalyst for a steady influx of professional skiers to Squaw Valley. Drawn by the resort’s “Go Big or Go Home” mentality, these pro skiers based their operations out of Squaw Valley and began filming themselves performing death-defying back flips across

⁴ Ancias. “Snow Jobs”. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 29-40.

⁵ Unofficial Networks. “How Squaw Valley Won the 1960 Winter Olympic Bid [Part 2].” *Unofficial Squaw*. Unofficial Networks, 2 Mar. 2012. Web. 09 Dec. 2014.
<<http://unofficialnetworks.com/2012/03/squaw-valley-won-1960-winter-olympic-bid-part-2>>.

⁶ Ancias “Big Dreams” *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 50-68.

⁷ Ancias “Snow Jobs”. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 29-40.

⁸ Ancias. “Slippery Slopes and Different Folks”. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 105.

the resort. Chief amongst these daredevil skiers was Shane McConkey, who was the first to popularize the combination of skiing and BASE-jumping. Often hailed as the greatest extreme skier of all-time, McConkey inspired a generation of adventurous skiers to leave their roots and come to Squaw Valley in an attempt to leave a legacy of their own.⁹

With films such as *The Walls of Freedom*, *Hot Dog*, and *G.N.A.R.*, McConkey and his friends demonstrated to the nationwide ski community that one must not go any further than California in order to find world-class terrain – a form of publicity that was much needed by Squaw Valley in the down-years that followed the Olympics. Over the years, these pro skiers remained fiercely loyal to Squaw Valley, and were responsible for creating an environment known as “Squallywood” that continued to push the limits of the ski industry as a whole.

Today, Squaw Valley is still home to a number of big-name, steadfast skiers, and the resort is still recognized as one of the premier ski resorts on the West Coast.

In addition to the now 1,000 residents who live at the base of the mountain, Squaw Valley is also home to a high-end resort village modeled after those found at European ski resorts. Fit with dozens of shopping venues, fine restaurants, and condominium complexes, the village allows Squaw Valley to function as a four-seasons resort that serves as the primary economic motor for North Lake Tahoe.¹⁰

But as hundreds of thousands of skiers flock to Squaw each year to be enthralled by the Squallywood atmosphere, a smaller, yet stubbornly consistent group of Tahoe locals and Bay Area families continue to drive past the resort. Uninterested in Squaw’s

⁹ The Shane McConkey Foundation. “About Shane McConkey.” *Shane McConkey*. MicroArts Creative Agency, n.d. Web. 09 Dec. 2014. <<http://shanemconkey.org/about/>>.

¹⁰ Squaw Alpine. “Events & Things to Do.” *The Village at Squaw Valley*. Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, n.d. Web. 10 Dec. 2014. <<http://squawalpine.com/events-things-do/village/dining-ap%C3%A8s>>.

glitz and glamour, these skiers share in the same vision once had by a man named Jon Reily in the summer of 1957. Riding out from Squaw Valley stables in late August, Reily ventured into the undeveloped valley adjacent Squaw and dreamed of building a different kind of ski resort – a resort today known as Alpine Meadows.¹¹

Describing his dream “a skier’s ski area -- just fine skiing without a lot of development, planned by skiers with an emphasis of families.”¹² Reily tried luring investors with deals such as ten years of lift privileges. His gamble paid off, and in 1961 Alpine Meadows ski resort was born.

While its inaugural season brought much higher revenue than expected, Alpine Meadows was anything but an instant success.¹³ Unlike Squaw Valley, which functioned as a four-seasons destination, Alpine Meadows focused solely on skiing. As such, Mother Nature was the biggest enemy to the resort: its success hinged upon the amount of snow that fell each winter. The faith of Alpine’s shareholders was tested during its second season – 1962-63 winter was the driest the region had seen in one hundred years.¹⁴ Too much snow was also a problem for Alpine, as an avalanche in March of 1982 destroyed two chairlifts and the entire lodge at the base of the mountain.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Alpine Meadows survived due in large part because of the support it received from a core group of loyal skiers. One such devotee was Werner Schuster, who arrived at Alpine Meadows in 1963 and worked his way up from ski instructor to

¹¹ Ancias. “Men Who Love Mountains”. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 16-29.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ancias. *The Sixties*. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 74-75.

¹⁴ Ancias “Snow Jobs”. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 29-40.

¹⁵ Ancias. “Three Tragedies, Two Fantasies, and a Work in Progress”. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 120-124.

executive vice-president of business development at Powdr Corporation – the company that acquired Alpine Meadows – in 1995.¹⁶

“I never forget what we’re selling,” said Schuster in Robert Frohlich’s *Mountain Dreamers*. “It’s not just a lift ticket, but an experience, an emotional experience, a family experience. If you can get that message across to people who have never even experienced snow-sport, then skiing will always have a competitive advantage over other choices of recreation. It is truly a lifestyle we can sell sincerely, because it’s the one we’ve opted for.”¹⁷

It was people like Schuster, who were passionate about preserving Alpine’s wholesome ski culture, that allowed the resort to flourish for over half a century. During a time in which Squaw Valley was setting the industry standard in ski resort development, Alpine Meadows was able to find its own niche within that competitive business environment. With its great terrain, low prices, and friendly atmosphere, Alpine Meadows gave off a modest mystique that captured the hearts of skiing’s younger generations, inspiring them to bring their future kids to Alpine Meadows as well.

I was one of those younger generation skiers who, while hiking across the High Traverse in 2004, fell in love with natural beauty of Alpine Meadows. My memory of that experience serves as the driving force behind my love of skiing, and I can still recall nearly every natural detail from my vantage point along that lookout.

But as I stood upon that ridgeline in 2004, taking in the sight of the Lake Tahoe and the surrounding National Forest, there was one mountain that slipped from my attention. Had I turned my head to the north, I would have spotted the backside of KT-22,

¹⁶ Ancias “Snow Jobs”. *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 29-40.

¹⁷ Ibid.

a beacon of the nearby Squaw Valley ski resort. I had seen KT-22 many times before, but had I looked at the mountain that day I would have noticed something peculiar. In focusing my eyes on the landscape just under a mile away, I would have seen a series of black toothpicks that stood out along the face of the mountain. Too uniform to be the skeletons of some burned trees, I would have realized that these black toothpicks were actually newly installed chairlift towers that stretched from Squaw Valley towards Alpine Meadows onto a mix of private and US Forest Service-held land.

These newly installed towers marked the beginning of a new era for Alpine Meadows. While originally installed for private use only, outside of the ski resorts, the towers were the first physical steps towards answering an age-old question in the Tahoe community: Would it be possible for Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows to one day combine into one mega-ski resort? In combining the two resorts, Tahoe would become home to the second-largest ski resort in North America, second only to Whistler-Blackcomb in British Columbia. With access to Squaw's world-class amenities and Alpine's hidden terrain, skiers at the proposed resort would have the best of both worlds. Furthermore, the consolidation of the two operations could lead to even bigger and more advanced developments that would forever change the socio-economic make-up of the surrounding Tahoe community. To most casual skiers, the idea is fascinating.

Had my eyes met the backside of KT-22 on that day, I probably would have thought that the idea was fascinating as well. As a young skier without a clue as to how the ski industry operates, I would have had no idea that those tiny black toothpicks signaled a threat to the small-time, family-centered ski resort experience that I had grown to love.

In the years that followed, I saw how those chairlift towers became a symbol for the expansion of a ski empire that had the potential to fundamentally change the future of the local Tahoe community. Following the death of the resort's founder, Alex Cushing, Squaw Valley was acquired in 2010 by a Denver-based private equity firm called KSL Capital Partners. KSL, Squaw Valley's first owner outside of the Cushing family, immediately made their presence felt by committing to spend \$50 million in capital improvements over their first three to five years.¹⁸ The following year, KSL bought out Alpine Meadows and combined the two resorts under the umbrella company Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC.

Wasting no time, Squaw Valley Ski Holdings has quickly set plans to physically combine the two resorts into the mega-resort that many have dreamed of. With its eyes set on the chairlift that was installed in 2004, Squaw Valley Ski Holdings is now poised to acquire the privately held 460-acres that lie on the backside of KT-22, between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows.

The consolidation of the two resorts not only threatens Alpine's cherished ski culture, but also looks to drastically change Squaw Valley. In looking to consolidate the two resorts, Squaw Valley Ski Holdings has proposed large-scale developments at the base of Squaw that would bring on challenges of water-shortages, traffic congestion, and a shift in region's outdoor lifestyle.¹⁹

In response to these proposed developments, a number of Tahoe locals have begun to fight back against Squaw Valley Ski Holdings. Through town hall meetings,

¹⁸ Michelson, Megan. "Squaw Valley Sold to Private Equity Firm." *ESPN*. ESPN Internet Ventures, 29 Nov. 2010. Web. 05 Dec. 2014. <<http://espn.go.com/action/freeskiing/news/story?id=5864435>>.

¹⁹ Incorporate Olympic Valley. "Myths and Truths." *Incorporate Olympic Valley*. Incorporate Olympic Valley PAC, 2014. Web. 05 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.incorporateolympicvalley.org/myths-truths/>>.

online forums, and local newspaper editorials, prominent Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley skiers alike have banded together to show their opposition to the recent direction taken by their ski resorts. In an effort to gain a greater sense of self-determination over the future of their community, long-time residents at the base of Squaw Valley have started a grassroots campaign to incorporate the area into a new town named Olympic Valley. With a population slightly over 1,000, the proposed community of Olympic Valley would take decision-making out of the hands of a county government located some 70 miles away in Auburn, California and give locals more power over land-use policy. Armed with this power, Olympic Valley locals could limit KSL's proposed developments to how they see fit, allowing for development that can "co-exist in a long-term sustainable manner with the beauty of [their] mountains, [their] history and character, and [their] natural resources."²⁰

At present, the future of the region is at a crossroads. The David vs. Goliath-like battle has Tahoe locals fighting for not only their ski resorts, but also their lifestyles, communities, and surrounding National Forest. They are not alone in this kind of fight. Across the Western United States, ski town communities like Olympic Valley have seen their ski resorts implement new developments that fundamentally change the structure and spirit of their towns – all while the ski industry's regulator, the US Forest Service, has been unable to act. With the majority of ski resort revenue now being generated not on the slopes, but outside of the US Forest Service's domain, it has become increasingly clear to locals that they must be the ones who stand up to protect the integrity of the gateways to their national forests. This paper examines the ongoing conflict between

²⁰ Ibid.

Squaw Valley Ski Holdings and the local Tahoe community and analyzes this conflict within the greater historical context of ski resort consolidation and development across the Western United States.

CHAPTER 1 -- A HISTORY OF SKIING IN THE WEST

Long before the first white man began carving turns in the Sierra Nevada mountains, the sport of skiing had already long established itself as a fundamental part of Northern Eurasian culture. Cave paintings in the arctic regions of Scandinavia, northern Russia, and China depict men and women standing on long skis, and archeologists estimate that the first known pair of skis dates back sometime between 6300 and 5000 B.C.E.²¹

Yet in spite of the sport's ancient beginnings, it was not until the turn of the 20th century that skiing became a popular tourist activity. Following the invention of fixed-heel bindings by Austrian Mathias Zdarsky and the implementation of the parallel turning technique by his understudy, Hannes Schneider, skiing began to take its modern day shape around 1910. No longer viewed as simply a means for travel, the sport became appealing to thousands of novices who flocked to the Alps to begin experimenting on steeper and more advanced terrain.^{22,23}

Around this time, the sport of skiing also began to gain popularity within the United States, particularly in the West. While heroic tales of skiing mailmen such as Snowshoe Thompson and Father John Dyer had arisen as early as 1856, few urban residents had dared to try skiing in the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains until the

²¹ FIS. "6300 BC." *History of Skiing*. Federation Internationale De Ski, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2014. <<http://history.fis-ski.com/>>.

²² Childers, Michael W. "A Gateway Into the Mountains." *Colorado Powder Keg*. Lawrence: U of Kansas, 2012. 14-15. Print

²³ Allen, John E., PhD. "Mathias Zdarsky, Father of Alpine Skiing." *International Skiing History Association*. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Dec. 2014. <<https://www.skiinghistory.org/history/mathias-zdarsky-father-alpine-skiing>>.

proliferation of Zdarsky and Schneider's contributions to the sport.²⁴ By the end of the World War I, however, Scandinavian immigrants had introduced the sport of ski jumping to the West, and many rural mountain towns began featuring both ski jumping and downhill competitions in winter carnivals that attracted hundreds of spectators.²⁵

The introduction of skiing via these winter carnivals could not have come at a better time for the sport, as the years following World War I were characterized by what Forest Service Chief Henry Graves then identified as "a widespread and spontaneous movement for outdoor recreation."²⁶ With increased affluence and leisure time, America's middle-class purchased automobiles and set out west to explore the previously inaccessible American West. While national parks such as Yellowstone and Grand Canyon grabbed most of the headlines, millions of urbanites were also drawn to national forests for their opportunities to camp, hunt, and recreate. Between 1916 and 1922, national forest visitation grew from an estimated 2.4 million people to 6.2 million, with the majority of growth occurring throughout the west.²⁷

Among their use for many other forms of recreation, national forests were also the ideal site for the nation's budding interest in recreational skiing. While millions of Americans began exploring the American West via automobile, thousands continued to venture farther into the mountainous public lands in search of fresh tracks. In order to provide access for recreational skiing in these forests, the Forest Service constructed

²⁴ Benson, Jack A. "Before Skiing Was Fun." *Western Historical Quarterly* 8.4 (1977): 431-41. *The Western Historical Quarterly*. JSTOR, 23 Oct. 2007. Web. 05 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/967340>>.

²⁵ Childers, Michael W. "A Gateway Into the Mountains." *Colorado Powder Keg*. Lawrence: U of Kansas, 2012. 9-36. Print.

²⁶ Graves, Henry. "A Crisis in National Recreation," *American Forestry* (July 1920): 391-397.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 391

hundreds of small rope-tow service ski hills throughout the country.²⁸ By the 1930s, however, some 10,000 avid American skiers were demanding that the Forest Service construct ever-larger ski areas within national forests.²⁹

As the regulating agency of these national forests, the Forest Service had little idea of how to manage the sudden birth of downhill skiing – let alone the more widespread boom in outdoor recreation.³⁰ Prior to World War I, the Forest Service had viewed recreation as a mere secondary use of national forests for three reasons.

First, the Forest Service’s progressive founders had instilled a culture within the agency that viewed the nation’s forests in terms of their raw materials, rather than their impact on quality of human life. This mentality was further emphasized by the agency’s first Forest Chief Gifford Pinchot, who believed that the agency’s regional district managers should remain relatively autonomous so as to best focus on their management of local timber and grazing without having to worry about political issues. Even after the dismissal of the Pinchot in 1910, the agency still remained largely decentralized – with district managers who worried more about loggers and cattlemen than a few overeager skiers.³¹

The second reason for the Forest Service’s disregard of recreation was the fact that, prior to the end of World War I, few Americans had a convenient means of access to public lands. Before the rise of the automobile, the majority of urban Americans could only reach mountainous public lands via railroad. As such, the majority of Americans at

²⁸ Childers. "A Gateway Into the Mountains." *Colorado Powder Keg*. 9-36.

²⁹ Rothman, Hal. "The Spread of Recreational Tourism: Skiing in the Postwar West." *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-century American West*. Lawrence, Kan.: U of Kansas, 1998. 202-227. Print.

³⁰ Arave, Joseph. "The Forest Service Takes to the Slopes: The Birth of Utah's Ski Industry and the Role of the Forest Service," *Utah Historical Quarterly* (Fall 2002): 34-35

³¹ Childers. "A Gateway Into the Mountains." *Colorado Powder Keg*. 9-36.

the beginning of the century chose to recreate closer to home at either city parks, public beaches or amusement parks.³²

But the third and most important reason for recreation's lack of priority within the Forest Service was that it was commonly thought to be unprofitable. When the Forest Service and its national forests moved from the Department of Interior to the Department of Agriculture, the Transfer Act of 1905 mandated "that all money received from the sale of an products or the use of any land or resources of said forest shall be...available...for the protection, administration, and extension of the Federal forest reserves."³³ Under the act, the Forest Service could charge fees from the lucrative grazing and timber operations within their forests. These fees were vital to the agency, as they allowed for the management of both industries and helped the agency cover its budget. At the time, the economic importance of the timber and grazing industries far outweighed that of recreation as a whole – let alone the sport of skiing. As such, most foresters within the agency believed that recreational development would take away from the agency's primary objective of providing sustainable forestry and grazing.³⁴

But while most everyone within the Forest Service clung stubbornly to the belief that timber and grazing should remain king, the agency's lone landscape architect, Arthur Carhart, recognized the massive potential that the growing field of recreation offered. As the most vocal advocate for recreation within the agency, Carhart fought vigorously for more centralized and broader planning efforts in order to best meet the public's growing interest in recreation. Recreation's growth could not be ignored, and because of this he

³² Ibid.

³³ US Congress, Transfer Act of 1905, 58th Cong. 3rd sess., 1905.

³⁴ Childers. "A Gateway Into the Mountains." *Colorado Powder Keg*. 9-36

argued that the Forest Service had a moral obligation to effectively manage the infantile industry so as to best preserve the beauty of America's lands for future generations.³⁵

“Left to themselves, hundred of people will settle on summer home sites on the edge of the lake,” he wrote, regarding the increase in recreation at Colorado's Trapper Lake. “Individuals naturally desire to help themselves to the best they can obtain regardless of others. This very greed undirected defeats its own purpose in a location of this kind by destroying the very qualities which the individual locates his house on the shore of the lake... There is an absolute moral obligation on the part of the Forest Service to return not to a small group but to the whole nation the greatest value possible from every resource. The aesthetic values are no exception.”³⁶

Though met with much initial resistance, Cahart was responsible for opening up a can of worms that the Forest Service could not ignore. By calling attention to the possible degradation of public lands that could stem from recreation, Cahart started a management debate, pitting recreation use versus preservation that would only continue to haunt the Forest Service as recreation gained popularity.

Interest in skiing continued to grow through the 1920s and into the depressive era, when, eager for funding, multiple counties requested approval from the Forest Service to develop “ski meccas” which could in turn be used to raise tax revenue.³⁷ Though halted during World War II, the construction of these ski meccas such as Colorado's Berthoud

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Carhart, Arthur. “Memorandum: Uses, White River,” February 1, 1920, Arthur H. Cahart Papers, Box 22, FF9, Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado. As cited in Childers. “A Gateway Into the Mountains.” *Colorado Powder Keg*. 9-36

³⁷ “Ski Mecca for Nation is Started: First Shelters on Berthoud Pass Begun by US Forest Service,” Colorado Arlberg Club Papers: newspaper clippings 1932, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver Colorado Childers. As cited in “A Gateway Into the Mountains.” *Colorado Powder Keg*. 9-36

Pass and Winter Park proved to be lucrative investments, attracting some 20,000 skiers in the years that followed the war.³⁸

Much like the years that followed World War I, the years following World War II saw another massive boom of recreational tourism in the West. As the home for many war-related industries, the West's population grew substantially with people working high-paying jobs in places such the Basic Magnesium plant in Henderson, Nevada; the California shipyards; and the Washington and Kansas aircraft factories. With wartime rations in place for gasoline and rubber, the majority of these affluent workers never got the chance to explore their surroundings, much less recreate in their nearby public lands.³⁹

At the war's end, this combination of affluence and pent-up demand for leisure sparked a new boom for recreation as the number of people visiting national forests grew from 7.5 million people in 1944 to over 21 million by 1947.⁴⁰ In addition to re-popularizing outdoor recreation as a whole, the war also directly served as a catalyst for expanding the sport of skiing. Skiing received widespread admiration when Finns on skis resisted the Soviet invasion in 1939, and by 1945 more than 200,000 Americans had been trained to ski by the US military.⁴¹ Upon their return home from the war, American men

³⁸ Denver Ski Patrol Ninth Annual Accident Report, 1946-1947, Charles Minot Dole Papers, Box 2, FF25, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado as cited in Childers. "A Gateway Into the Mountains." *Colorado Powder Keg*. 9-36.

³⁹ Nash, Gerald D. *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

⁴⁰ National Forest Recreational Use, 1924-1996, Forest History Society, <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/policy/Recreation/RecreationVisitors.aspx>.

⁴¹ Rothman. "The Spread of Recreational Tourism" *Devil's Bargains*.

from the Tenth Mountain Division, as well as foreign allies such as Squaw Valley's Joe Marillac, found work as ski instructors across the West.⁴²

With the massive influx of skiers brought by the war, the previously struggling "ski meccas" of the West quickly became inundated, as some states saw their skier population increase by as much as 75 percent in two years.⁴³ Ill prepared for such a massive increase in demand, the Forest Service neither had the manpower nor the capital to build and operate new ski areas. As a result, the Forest Service decided to privatize the industry, treating recreation much like its management of timber and grazing. While still retaining public ownership of the land, the Forest Service could issue permits to private enterprises, which in turn could operate ski areas on national forests without any financial support from the agency.⁴⁴

For the Forest Service, the decision to privatize the ski industry appeared to be a win-win. As a young industry that was showing no signs of slowing down, the ski industry would most likely drain the Forest Service of nearly all its capital and manpower for simply the improvement and operation of the nation's ski areas.⁴⁵ And yet, as particularly lucrative business opportunities, ski areas take up considerably less acreage than traditional grazing or timber operations.⁴⁶ As such, privatizing the industry allowed the Forest Service to reap the monetary benefits included in the Transfer Act of 1905 without accumulating any improvement or operational costs.

⁴² Ancias."Snow Jobs". *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 29-40.

⁴³ Goeldner et al., *The Colorado Ski Industry: Highlights of the 1998-1999 Season* (Boulder: University of Colorado Business Research Division, Graduate School of Business Administration).

⁴⁴ Steen, Harold. *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 297-307.

⁴⁵ Rothman. "The Spread of Recreational Tourism" *Devil's Bargains*.

⁴⁶ Today, ski resorts account for less than one-tenth of 1 percent of all national forests. See Childers. "Introduction" *Colorado Powder Keg*. 4.

But the privatization of the ski industry did not come without a price. In turning ski resort development over to private business, the Forest Service had essentially turned recreation into a commodity – cementing the fears held by Arthur Cahart some 30 years before. Rather than serve as the Cahart’s valiant mediator between wild lands and the greed of man, the Forest Service now found itself struggling to keep up with endless permit requests from profit driven businesses that were pumping millions of dollars into local and state economies.⁴⁷

Among the first entrepreneurs to capitalize on the recently privatized ski industry was Chicago industrialist Walter P. Paepcke, who moved to the small town of Aspen, Colorado in 1945. Prior to Paepcke’s arrival, Aspen was nothing but a rundown mining town. With limited infrastructure, a declining population, and no foreseeable economic future, Aspenites had little to look forward to other than their autumn pastime of watching nearby sheep stroll through town.⁴⁸ With the arrival of Paepcke, however, everything changed. In just a few short years, Paepcke used his incredible assets to buy and reconfigure over a hundred lots in the small town, and by 1954 he put Aspen on the map as one of the premier ski centers in the entire American West.⁴⁹

What made Paepcke’s success story especially unique was that in spite of the region’s incredible ski terrain, Paepcke had arrived in Aspen with no serious intentions of developing a ski resort. Rather, Paepcke had bought up the hundreds of dilapidated lots with the hopes of renovating them for a utopian social experiment, hinged up to the

⁴⁷ Childers. “Go Build it on the Mountain.” *Colorado Powder Keg*. 36-68.

⁴⁸ Rothman. “The Spread of Recreational Tourism.” *Devil’s Bargains*. 206-208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 224.

creation of a summer institution that offered studies in music, literature, and art for the nation's elite.⁵⁰

But while Paepcke's vision for an elite utopian society never came to fruition, his purchasing of hundreds of lots in the tiny town was not for nothing. Instead, Paepcke's initial focus on developing Aspen as a summer town inadvertently solved a problem that was troubling other first-time ski resort owners in the 1950s and 1960s. Because skiing could only take place in the winter, early ski areas lived and died by their amount of snowfall – with each year's profits about as unpredictable as forecasts themselves. Paepcke's Aspen, however, was different. In offering year-round activity, profits from one season could be used to subsidize another – a strategy that many resorts would seek to emulate in the future.⁵¹

In addition to successfully implementing a year-round resort, Paepcke also foreshadowed the future of the ski industry in a different way. In establishing his year-round resort, Paepcke fundamentally transformed the local economy of Aspen, destroying the small-mining town spirit that had prevailed since its founding. Grappling with old-timers about the meaning of Aspen, Paepcke tried to gain good will by calling upon the local newspaper to paint him as a man of integrity, judgment, and character.⁵² His vain attempt was seen through, however, and within the first few years of development Aspenites came to realize the devil's bargain that elitist ski resorts could bring.

In bringing in access to “modern world” goods and amenities, the potential to acquire wealth, and a new vision of place, Paepcke was not just installing a ski resort but

⁵⁰ Gilber, Anne M. “Re-creation Through Recreation: Aspen Skiing from 1870-1970,” (Aspen Historical Society, 1995), 49-50. As cited in Rothman “The Spread of Recreational Tourism.” *Devil's Bargains*.

⁵¹ Rothman. “The Spread of Recreational Tourism.” *Devil's Bargains*. 225.

⁵² *Aspen Times* June 12, 1945. As cited in Rothman. “The Spread of Recreational Tourism.” *Devil's Bargains*. 209.

colonizing the small-town of Aspen.⁵³ While locals recognized that Paepcke would save Aspen's failing economy, they also realized in doing so, he would colonize a new Aspen that would become increasingly more reliant on tourism and real estate than the town's traditional extractive industries. Like any colony that came before, the new Aspen would be run by outsiders who came in, ran the resort according to their preferences, and reaped in its rewards while the locals picked up the scraps in menial service positions.⁵⁴

Individuals in Aspen were given two options: to accept the diminished roles offered to them or to resist change. In the end, the choice was personal. The new Aspen continued on to ski industry fame while the old Aspen, living only in history books, stood as a testament to the tensions between rural mountain communities and their colonizers that would only continue for decades to come.⁵⁵

In the years that followed, major ski areas across the West took a page out of Paepcke's book and began to market themselves not just as winter destinations, but as four-season resorts. Sun Valley, Idaho soon established itself as a premier year-round resort, and by the end of the 1960 Winter Olympics Squaw Valley had turned its nearby Sunnyside Inn into a year-round facility.⁵⁶ With the financial security that stemmed from achieving a four-seasons status, many of the major ski areas soon saw just how far-reaching their influence on local communities could be.

Perhaps the ultimate example of how powerful a ski area could be in influencing its community was Vail, Colorado. In what began with a primitive scouting expedition in 1959, former ski corps veteran Peter Siebert took a completely bare mountainside and in

⁵³ Rothman. "The Spread of Recreational Tourism." *Devil's Bargains*. 208.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "Sunnyside Inn 50th Anniversary Menu, Summer 1997," as cited in Rothman. "Residence Based Resorts." *Devil's Bargains*. 228.

five years transformed it into a four-star ski resort fit with a gondola, three chairlifts, and a small village at the base of the mountain.⁵⁷ While the costs of developing a previously untouched piece of land undoubtedly made Vail a risky business venture, Siebert succeeded due in large part because of his ability to dictate development at the base of the mountain. Catering to upper-middle class families, Siebert and his company Vail Associates created a faux alpine village of second homes, condominiums, and quality restaurants that fundamentally changed the nature of the ski industry. Unlike Aspen, Sun Valley, and other ski towns that came before, Vail was unique in that everything in the town depended upon the ski resort and consequently Siebert's company Vail Associates.⁵⁸

With complete control over its surrounding environment, Vail boomed in a way that no other resort had done before. By its third and fourth season, some 290,000 skiers visited the resort – 70 percent whom lived out of state. With its perfectly crafted alpine village, Vail became not just a destination ski area but a destination resort.⁵⁹

But while Vail Associates became uncharacteristically successful, the high risk involved with developing a previously untouched plot of land like theirs highlighted a growing concern within the Forest Service at the time. What should happen if a ski area struggled financially? If market forces were allowed to play out into the future, who would become responsible for the abandoned chairlifts, trails, and buildings left behind

⁵⁷ Smith, Fred. "Six Square Miles of Powder." *Sports Illustrated* (November 23, 1964). 52-62.

⁵⁸ Rothman. "Residence-Based Resorts." *Devil's Bargains*. 234.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

by an outcompeted venture? Was it within the Forest Service's right to limit competition so as to make sure ski areas could remain open and catering to the public?⁶⁰

These were questions with no easy answer, but the main way that the Forest Service was able to address them was by limiting their amount of issued permits to business ventures that could prove themselves to be economically stable enough to survive.⁶¹

This mentality within the Forest Service, coupled with the ski industry's continuing rate of growth, created an environment beginning the late 1960s that was perfect for a corporate takeover. With access to incredible amounts of capital, multinational corporations could silence the financial fears of the Forest Service while continuing to invest millions into their resorts – furthering the industry standards set by Aspen and Vail at the time. Over the course of the next three decades, corporations bought out and reshaped America's most iconic ski resorts, with Twentieth Century-Fox buying the Aspen Ski Company in 1978, the Janss Investment Company taking over Sun Valley and Snowmass, and Vail Associates becoming a corporation itself, eventually going public as Vail Resorts in 1997.^{62,63}

The impact of transformation was obvious. With the massive increases in both capital and competition that came from corporate acquisitions, ski resorts began a period of visual transformations that particularly took off in the 1980s. In a constant effort to keep up with the Joneses, most mid-sized mountains like Alpine Meadows found themselves pouring millions of dollars into new additions such as high-speed detachable

⁶⁰ Childers. "Go Build it on the Mountain." *Colorado Powder Keg*. 44.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Rothman. "Powder Aplenty for Native and Guest Alike." *Devil's Bargains*. 254

⁶³ Vail Resorts, Inc. "Investor FAQs." *Vail Resorts Management Company*. Vail Resorts, Inc., n.d. Web. 11 Dec. 2014. <<http://investors.vailresorts.com/faq.cfm>>

chairlifts, expanded snowmaking operations, larger and more lavish on-mountain lodges, and added terrain.⁶⁴

But corporate ownership of budding ski resorts across the West also took its toll in a less visible way. In America's most well-established resort towns such as Aspen, Sun Valley, Vail, and Steamboat Springs, corporate takeover acted as yet another force of colonization. Eerily similar to Paepcke's colonization of Aspen in the 1940s, the corporate acquisition of ski resorts once again fundamentally changed in the identity of these towns.⁶⁵

While improved corporate developments continued to bring in an ever-increasing demand for lodges, slopes, and chairlifts to resort towns, it did so in a way that fundamentally alienated these towns' original populations. Across the West, many ski towns found themselves fighting the same battles.

Condominium creations in Sun Valley attacked the quaint-small town feel that many locals had loved, prompting them to respond with pleas to "Stop advertising Idaho."⁶⁶

Aspenites watched helplessly as Paepcke's successor Darcy Brown stripped locals of their special discount pass privileges at the mountain, telling them "As not everyone can afford to drive a Cadillac, not everyone can afford to ski in Aspen."⁶⁷

And Vail workers complained of class disparity and a corporation that offered more amenities to tourists than locals themselves.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Childers. "Fire on the Mountain" *Colorado Powder Keg*. 124.

⁶⁵ Rothman. "'Powder Aplenty for Native and Guest Alike.'" *Devil's Bargains*. 286.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 243.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 271.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 234-35.

While well equipped to limit the on the slopes development brought by these new corporations, the US Forest Service found that it was outside its power, and perhaps its interest, to combat this trend of growing corporate elitism in the mountain villages outside of its forests' borders.

This problem, however, could not be ignored. After the arms race of development that occurred during the 1980s, the ski industry as a whole underwent massive corporate consolidation. Many small market ski areas collapsed, and the total number of ski areas in America dropped from 735 in 1980 to 509 in 2000.⁶⁹

Following this consolidation, almost all big-name ski resorts in American followed Vail and Aspen's lead, developing multimillion-dollar villages at the base of their mountains. In building these villages, ski resorts quickly realized that selling 900-square foot, two-bedroom slope side condominiums for \$500,000 was much more lucrative than selling lift tickets that ranged from \$40 to \$100 apiece.⁷⁰ While the on-the-mountain ski experience is still vital for piquing skier interest, resorts across the American West have since shifted their focus to real estate – the real moneymaker in the skiing world, as well as the travel industry as a whole.

In his 2002 book, *Downhill Slide: Why the Corporate Ski Industry is Bad for Skiing, Ski Towns, and the Environment*, journalist and vocal critic of the ski industry Hal Clifford was the first to publicly signal this transition: "Skiing is no longer an end in itself for those looking to profit from it; instead [it] has transformed into a come-hither

⁶⁹ National Ski Areas Association and RRC Associates, Inc. "Kottke National End of the Season Survey 2005/06 Final Report. Lakewood, CO: National Ski Areas Association, 2006. 17.

⁷⁰ Childers. "Fire on the Mountain" *Colorado Powder Keg*. 135

amenity to sell real estate.”⁷¹ This desire to sell real estate sets the stage for the latest fight over the integrity of ski resort towns. Modern day ski towns like Olympic Valley face much of the same threat of colonization as Aspen did back in 1945. The battle for the integrity of Olympic Valley will not fought by the Forest Service on the resort’s ski slopes – it will be won or lost by the locals who have made their homes within the valley.

⁷¹ Clifford, Hal. *Downhill Slide: Why the Corporate Ski industry is Bad for Skiing, Ski Towns, and the Environment* San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2002. 8.

CHAPTER 2 -- THE BATTLE FOR OLYMPIC VALLEY

When KSL Capital Partners sent their new colonizer to Squaw Valley in the form of CEO Andy Wirth, he was following in the same footsteps that Walter Paepcke took when he first arrived at an unfamiliar Aspen in the 1945.

Having then spent its entire 61-year lifetime under the ownership of the Cushing family, Squaw Valley was, at the time, unlike any other ski resort in the world. Equal parts country club and extreme ski bum, Squaw Valley functioned as what *Sports Illustrated* described a place “designed for a small, high-class crowd that is overrun each weekend by hot-dog-munching herds.”⁷² In short, Squaw Valley had a soul.

The soul that Squaw Valley had was a reflection of Alexander Cushing’s unique leadership style. While fierce in his petition for the 1960 Olympics, Cushing cared little for actually operating amenities other than skiing. Often describing himself as in the “uphill transportation business,” Cushing’s sole focus was building ski lifts so that the hotshot skiers of a budding Squallywood could continue to find fresh tracks.⁷³

“His greatest pleasure was lifting people up the mountain and watching them ski down,” said long-time lift engineer Hans Burkhart.⁷⁴

Cushing’s commitment to the actual skiing experience never faltered. While the village the base of Squaw was much more developed than the spartan lodge found at its neighbor Alpine Meadows, Cushing resisted creating another Vail and never developed it

⁷² Cited in Wilson, Mike. “Making a Mountain Out of a Soul Hill [All Parts] Will KSL’s Plans to Optimize Squaw Destroy It? *Unofficial Networks*. St. Petersburg Times, 14 Dec. 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialnetworks.com/2011/12/making-mountain-soul-hill-ksls-plans-optimize-squaw-destroy-real-journalist>>.

⁷³ Ancias “The Sixties” *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 77.

⁷⁴ Wilson. “Making a Mountain Out of a Soul Hill [All Parts] Will KSL’s Plans to Optimize Squaw Destroy It?”

past anything more than a regional attraction. When Burkhart suggested to Cushing that the resort might gain more revenue from an improved food service, Cushing simply replied, “We don’t know shit about food.”⁷⁵

While the rest of the corporate owned ski resorts in the West were busy transforming ski towns to fit their financial goals, Cushing was different. Rather than focus on his bottom line, Cushing invested his life into cultivating Squaw’s shaggy-snobish charm, declaring that Squaw “is not for sale and never will be.”⁷⁶

But two years after Cushing died in 2006 at the age of 92, Squaw was for sale. Short on funds and without a clear predecessor, the resort left the hands of the Cushing family and was sold in 2010 to KSL Capital Partners.

Managed by two former Vail executives Michael Shannon and Eric Resnick, KSL brands itself as a “private equity firm specializing in acquisition of under performing and under capitalized businesses and add-on acquisitions.”⁷⁷ While skeptical of corporation’s intentions, Squaw locals opened their arms to the company when it promised them \$50 million in much needed capital improvements over its first five years.⁷⁸ While the Cushing era had moved on, Squaw Valley’s spirit still burned strong – its skiers were hungry for new and improved chairlifts.

Upon taking his place at Cushing’s former chair, however, KSL’s Andy Wirth began implementing a series of decisions that stood in stark contrast to Cushing’s days in “the uphill transportation business.”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ KSL Capital Partners. “Professionals.” *KSL Capital Partners*. KSL Capital Partners LLC, n.d. Web. 12 Dec. 2014 <<http://www.kslcapital.com/professionals/>>.

⁷⁸ Michelson. "Squaw Valley Sold to Private Equity Firm." *ESPN*.

“We are in the vacation business, period,” Wirth said. “We sell vacation experiences which put us on the clock 24 hours a day for whatever that customer is seeking.”⁷⁹

The very nature of KSL’s vacation business soon became clear as Wirth implemented a series of strategic moves to bring the hodge-podge village at the base of the mountain back under private ownership of the resort. Beginning with the acquisition of the privately run Blue Coyote Sports Grille, KSL began taking over all businesses in the village by switching them to one year lease systems and then raising rent to levels that most shops and restaurants could not afford.⁸⁰

While controversial in their nature, the majority of these acquisitions went largely unnoticed until, in December of 2011, KSL ousted the region’s iconic Squaw Valley Sport Shop. After 35 of being family owned and operated, the sport shop was unable to renew its lease, prompting an outcry from across the Squaw Valley community.⁸¹

“Squaw Valley Sport Shop is an icon not only within Squaw but the skiing community as a whole,” wrote local Thomas Como. “You will be hard pressed to name a single pro who has come out of Squaw that hasn’t purchased, been supported, or frequented this establishment.”⁸²

⁷⁹ Wilson. “Making a Mountain Out of a Soul Hill [All Parts] Will KSL’s Plans to Optimize Squaw Destroy It?”

⁸⁰ Unofficial Networks. “KSL/Squaw Prices Tait’s & Blue Coyote out of Village at Squaw; Buys Blue Coyote.” *Unofficial Networks*. N.p., 11 June 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialnetworks.com/2011/06/kslsquaw-buys-blue-coyote-restaurant-squaw-valley>>.

⁸¹ Como, Thomas. “The Empire Strikes Again – KSL Capital Terminates Iconic Ski Shop - Squaw Valley Sports Shop.” *Unofficial Networks*. N.p., 22 Dec. 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialnetworks.com/2011/12/empire-strikes-ksl-terminates-iconic-ski-shop>>.

⁸² Ibid.

In addition to the ousting of the sport shop, KSL continued to make a series of management decisions that fundamentally went against Squaw's long cherished history and culture. To enhance the view from one of its sundecks, the resort cut down a series of old trees at the base of the mountain – a move one local cited as “another example of putting profit in front of what is morally right, in this case, respect for the environment.”⁸³

The company continued to frustrated locals on the slopes as well. In order to save operating costs, KSL announced that it would discontinue the creation of its half-pipe for the 2011-12 season – a feature that was vital to Squaw's young competitive freestyle skiing community.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the private equity firm decided to shut down midweek operation of its Silverado chair, choosing profit over allowing locals access to some of the resort's most aggressive terrain.⁸⁵

Rather than address the local population's growing concerns, Andy Wirth continued to circulate hype surrounding KSL's increased capital improvements – a series of improvements he named the “Renaissance” of Squaw.

⁸³ MBR Digital. "KSL/Squaw Cuts Down Old Trees in Front of KT-22 Chair." *Unofficial Networks*. N.p., 8 June 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialnetworks.com/2011/06/kslsquaw-cuts-trees-front-kt22-chair>>.

⁸⁴ Unofficial Networks. "There Will Be NO HALF-PIPE @ Squaw Valley This Year." *Unofficial Networks*. N.p., 5 Apr. 2012. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialnetworks.com/2012/04/halfpipe-squaw-valley-year>>.

⁸⁵ Wilson. “Making a Mountain Out of a Soul Hill [All Parts] Will KSL's Plans to Optimize Squaw Destroy It?”

“We’re taking every facet of this resort to the next level,” Wirth wrote in the resort’s new publication SQUAW. “New restaurants, lodges, lifts, and a vacation reservations system are only a few of the upgrades.”⁸⁶

This statement publically signaled the beginning of KSL’s colonization. In promising new lodging and vacation reservation systems, KSL was completely disregarding the local hospitality industry that had long enjoyed a prosperous symbiotic relationship with the resort. Nevermind that the valley was already home to the Squaw Valley Lodge, Resort as Squaw Creek, the Christy Inn, Olympic Village Inn, Red Wolf Lodge, the Valley View condos, the Squaw Meadows condos, and the Tavern Inn – KSL wanted to start a real estate boom of its own.

To sweeten the deal for potential investors in their real estate boom, Squaw Valley needed to be able to market itself as an international destination resort. While rich in history and steep in terrain, the resort lacked the acreage of other mega-resorts, posing the potential problem of the resort eventually reaching its carrying capacity. To solve this potential problem, KSL did not have to look very far.

In 2011, one year after KSL acquired Squaw Valley, the private equity firm bought out nearby Alpine Meadows and consolidated the two resorts under the umbrella company Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC.⁸⁷ In combining the two resorts, KSL began to chip away at many of Alpine’s long-held traditions. KSL cut ties with many of

⁸⁶ Cited in Kirkwood, Deja. "Squaw Valley to Bid for 2022 Olympics: Good or Bad?" *Examiner.com*. N.p., 7 Dec. 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.examiner.com/article/squaw-valley-to-bid-for-2022-olympics-good-or-bad#ixzz1ftya1vSn>>.

⁸⁷ Squaw Valley. "Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley Join Forces." *Squaw Valley*. KSL Capital Partners LLC, 26 Sept. 2011. Web. <<http://www.squaw.com/press-release/alpine-meadows-and-squaw-valley-join-forces>>.

Alpine's founding fathers such as Werner Schuster, and replaced the majority of the mountain's mid-level managers with new personnel that shared the corporation's vision. Over the course of the next three seasons, Alpine Meadows began to change to the point where it has now lost much of its once-unique character. Gone are Alpine's once distinct logos, lift-tickets, and website. In their place, nearly everything about Alpine has become a part of Squaw, as KSL has successfully homogenized the two resorts.

In consolidating the operations of Squaw and Alpine, KSL set the stage to physically join the two adjacent resorts into what would become the second-largest ski resort in North America – second only to Whistler-Blackcomb in British Columbia.⁸⁸ In order for this physically link Squaw and Alpine, however, the KSL must first find a way to develop on the small amount of privately held land that separates the two resorts.

While unremarkable in its terrain, the 460-acre lot that lies directly between the boundaries of Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley is now arguably the most valuable plot of land in Lake Tahoe. Known as White Wolf, the barren mountainside is owned by local ski bum Troy Caldwell who liquidated everything he owned to purchase the lot from the Southern Pacific Land Company in 1990.⁸⁹ As the sole private lot within a surrounding sea of US Forest-owned land, Caldwell recognized the strategic importance that this piece of land could one day end up possessing. His gamble paid off, and today Caldwell is now the only person who can physically join Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows into the mega-resort that KSL dreams of.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ancias "Three Tragedies, Two Fantasies, and a Work in Progress" *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 126-130.

Much to the dismay of Alpine's steadfast supporters, Caldwell has publicly stated that he is in favor of joining the two resorts via his 460-acre piece of land. But rather than sell his ownership outright to KSL for a reported \$50 million, Caldwell has stated that he will only go through with the merger if he is able to remain as a landlord so that he can personally develop White Wolf as a quasi-private high-end ski area in between the two resorts.⁹⁰

Caldwell's desire to build his own dream resort within the mix of the proposed Squaw Alpine highlights similar trends from the ski industry's colonial past. When Paepckne came to Aspen, the traditional forms of extractive labor had no more meaning under Paepckne's new paradigm, despite the fact that the town essentially looked the same. While most native workers were cast off to the side, the local elites found that they could align their interests with Paepckne's vision, a move that granted them economic security at the cost of a severed tie with the rest of their community.⁹¹

Such is the case with White Wolf today. While locally owned hotels such as Christy Inn, Red Wolf Lodge, and Tavern Inn all face threats of being displaced by Squaw's threats of increased resort lodging, Caldwell stands only to economically gain from the proposed deal. In deciding to work with KSL, however, Caldwell also runs the risk of contributing to a fundamental change in the structure and spirit of his lifelong community.

Because White Wolf is a land use issue that occurs within the boundaries of Tahoe National Forest, however, it is one of the few scenarios in which the US Forest

⁹⁰ Clark, Miles. "Will Squaw & Alpine Connect? | Exclusive Troy Caldwell Video Interview" *SnowBrains*. N.p., 20 May 2014. Web. 09 Dec. 2014. <<http://snowbrains.com/will-squaw-alpine-connect-exclusive-troy-caldwell-video-interview/>>.

⁹¹ Rothman. "Powder Aplenty for Native and Guest Alike." *Devil's Bargains*. 286.

Service plays a role in regulating KSL's potential growth. While Caldwell outright owns the land without a mortgage, he still must seek approval from both the local Placer County government and the US Forest Service before he can legally develop his land.⁹² But because an undeveloped White Wolf offers little in terms of economic or ecological services, the approval process is thought by many to be fairly lenient. While Caldwell and KSL have yet to request permits from either Placer County or the Forest Service, Caldwell has demonstrated the leniency of this process when, in 2004, he secured the approval to first construct his own private lift towers on White Wolf.⁹³

The 2004 development of White Wolf came as a shock to many locals who lived in the nearby-unincorporated community of Bear Creek at the base of Alpine Meadows. While Squaw and Alpine were under no threat of potentially merging at that time, the Bear Creek community still saw the construction of the nearby chairlift as a threat to their lifestyles. Fearing that the chairlift would bring a mass immigration of tourism to the tiny collection of mountain homes, the Bear Creek community sued Placer County.⁹⁴ Many of those same locals were also outraged that the Forest Service would allow the construction of the chairlift. As the only plot of land between the National Forest and Alpine Meadows Road, White Wolf serves as the gateway for the area's popular Five Lakes Trail. Many thought that the chairlift would bring unwanted crowds to the hiking and backcountry ski trail, effectively spoiling the Granite Chief Wilderness to which the trail led. Because Caldwell's development would secondarily impact use of the surrounding National

⁹² Tyler, Jeff. "Ski Resort Unification Cut off by Landowner." *Marketplace*. American Public Media, 18 Apr. 2012. Web. 09 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.marketplace.org/topics/business/ski-resort-unification-cut-landowner>>.

⁹³ Ancias "Three Tragedies, Two Fantasies, and a Work in Progress" *Squaw Valley & Alpine Meadows: Tales from Two Valleys*. 124-130.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Forest, they argued that the US Forest Service should play a stronger role in regulating Caldwell's developments so that the integrity of the forest is best conserved for its greatest good.

But what exactly is the greatest good? And to what extent should the Forest Service be able to regulate lands that would only secondarily impact the use of the National Forest? These are questions that have been asked for decades, for which the Forest Service has never given a clear answer. A similar problem arose in the 1970s when the Forest Service granted initial permits for the construction of both Marble Mountain and Beaver Creek in Colorado. While scientists concluded that the urbanization brought by their constructions would undoubtedly have secondary implications for the surrounding national forest, the Forest Service stood by its word that it was "not responsible for regulating growth outside the national forest."⁹⁵

In ignoring the concerns from scientists, coalitions of citizens, and even the state's then Governor John Vanderhoof, the Forest Service came to be seen by many as unquestionably pro-development in the face of private interest.⁹⁶ But this accusation is not entirely accurate. While its mandate places a higher priority on use over preservation, the Forest Service has also demonstrated that it does not completely turn a blind eye to the secondary-effects of development. Such is the case in Marble Mountain, when a series of construction-related landslides prompted the Forest Service to deny further permits to the newly established resort – reversing its earlier decision and effectively killing the newly established resort.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Childers, Michael W. "The Last Resort." *Colorado Powder Keg*. Lawrence: U of Kansas, 2012. 96-124. Print.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 108-110.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 100-101.

Without any public plans for the development of White Wolf, it is unclear whether or not the Forest Service will turn a blind eye to the possible secondary implications that construction may have on the region. Regardless, the past history of defensive actions taken by the Bear Creek community serves to illustrate the amount of power that one man has in determining the future of Tahoe National Forest. While the private chairlift that Caldwell constructed in 2004 is still standing, it is currently nonoperational and would not have the carrying capacity to effectively link Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. As such, Caldwell and KSL will have to develop their plan for a merger from scratch – a process that Caldwell estimates may take anywhere from five to seven years.⁹⁸

Regardless of if and when Squaw and Alpine connect via White Wolf, KSL has already set the ball rolling on its proposed real estate venture. As part of its quest to turn Squaw Valley into an international destination, KSL submitted a specific plan to Placer County in June of 2013 that proposed new developments on the 94-acres west of the existing village, as well as various remodifications on buildings north of the village. In addition to the already existing village, the private equity firm sought to develop 1,093 new high-rise condominium units with 2148 bedrooms, \$3.5 million timeshare cabins, and a mountain adventure center that includes 90,000 square foot indoor waterpark.^{99,100}

⁹⁸ Clark, Miles. "Will Squaw & Alpine Connect? | Exclusive Troy Caldwell Video Interview:." *SnowBrains*

⁹⁹ Coats Consulting. *Skypark: Specific Plan*. Aptos, CA: Coats Consulting, 2013. *The Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan*. Placer County, June 2013. Web. 09 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.placer.ca.gov/~media/cdr/Planning/SpecificPlans/VillageAtSquawValley/UpdatedSPJun2013/Ch1-Introduction.pdf>>

¹⁰⁰ Keep Squaw True. "The Details." *Keep Squaw True*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Dec. 2014. <http://www.3a2f2fkeepsquawtrue.org/2f23gf_3>.

Much of development would take place on Squaw's existing parking lot, leaving the day skier – a fundamental aspect of Squaw's culture – without obvious transportation options.

Outraged, the local community at the base of Squaw leaped into action and soon letters of concerned citizens began flooding the region's small time newspapers. Ranging from young professional skiers to retired doctors, the writers of the letters reflected a diverse community of people who each cared about the valley in own way. While the letters raised numerous issues regarding the proposed development's future economic and environmental implications, each letter shared a common thread – that KSL did not understand nor care to protect the valley's unique way of life.¹⁰¹¹⁰²

A survey conducted in October 2013 by Sierra Watch and Friends of Squaw Valley echoed these sentiments. Of the 330 self-selected participants, 94% replied that they were “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with the current Squaw Valley, citing natural environment, casual lifestyle, and outdoor activities as their top three reasons why. When asked what they “least like” about Squaw Valley, these same respondents identified KSL proposed future development as their number one complaint, followed by traffic and over-crowding.¹⁰³

In response to this public outburst combined with recommendations from the local Placer County government, KSL quickly changed its plan and revealed a new and improved specific plan in January 2014. Self-proclaiming it as “the Right Plan,” Squaw

¹⁰¹ Barnett, Bob. "My Turn | Dear KSL: Don't Make Squaw a 'big Box' Resort." *Tahoe Daily Tribune*. N.p., 1 Oct. 2013. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.

¹⁰² Anderson et al. "Our Turn: An Open Letter to Andy Wirth." *Tahoe Daily Tribune*. N.p., 31 Oct. 2013. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.tahodailytribune.com/news/opinion/8711883-113/ski-community-feel-valley>>

¹⁰³ Sierra Watch, and Friends of Squaw Valley. *Squaw Valley 2013 Public Survey*. Sierra Watch and Friends of Squaw Valley, Oct. 2013. Web. <<http://friendsofsv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Friends-of-SV-Survey-Results.pdf>>.

Valley patted itself on the back for listening the public as it reassured residents that they could work together towards a mutually beneficial future.¹⁰⁴

But while the new plan called for a reduction in the number of proposed condominiums, it did little to mitigate the concerns raised by the local community. In what it deemed as “the Right Plan,” KSL still proposed to build at least 750 condominium units, housing some 1493 beds, that stood as tall as seven stories high. Additionally, the private equity firm continued with its plans to construct a Mountain Adventure Camp located directly over the aquifer that serves as the main source of water for the valley.¹⁰⁵

One of the major concerns raised by locals was the proposed development’s effect on water scarcity in the region. With the valley in the midst of its third drought year in a row, locals were under the impression that was barely enough water to allow 100 more homes in the valley, let alone a possible 750 more units at the hands of the ski resort. In July 2014, Squaw Valley Public Service District General Manager Mike Geary attempted to explain this misunderstanding. He noted that while the need for water within the valley was projected to rise by 28% by the year 2040, previous estimates to the aquifer’s size were too small because the Cushing family had never allowed the district to drill wells on Squaw Valley resort property in the past. With the switch in ownership to KSL, the

¹⁰⁴ Village at Squaw Valley. "Key Changes." *The Village at Squaw Valley*. KSL Capital Partners LLC, n.d. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.thevillageatsquaw.com/project/changes/>>

¹⁰⁵ Squaw Valley Real Estate, LLC. "The Village at Squaw Valley January 2014 Specific Plan Summary of Changes." *Placer County* (2014): n. pag. *Squaw Valley*. Placer County, 10 Jan. 2014. Web. <<http://www.placer.ca.gov/~media/cdr/Planning/SpecificPlans/VillageAtSquawValley/Jan2014Update/SummaryOfChanges.pdf>>.

District was allowed to drill where it could please and, as a result, found that the aquifer was actually bigger than previously thought.¹⁰⁶

But for two local geologists, that explanation did not hold water. As a PhD student at the nearby University of Nevada, Reno, Benjamin Hatchett sounded the alarm that the district's Water Supply Assessment (WSA) had only used data from an 18-year period that included seven of the wettest year but only one of the driest years in the Central Sierra's 92-year recorded history. Because of this short time frame, Hatchett argued that the District was able to essentially cherry pick numbers so as to create an artificially inflated average precipitation in the WSA study.¹⁰⁷ Squaw Valley resident geologist David A. Brew, PhD, further echoed these concerns. A California Licensed Professional Geologist, Dr. Brew analyzed past studies on the aquifer in context with the proposed development on the relatively flat land west of the current village. As a vital location for aquifer recharge, Dr. Brew found that the proposed development could "have a severe impact on the amount of recharge to the Squaw Valley aquifer."¹⁰⁸

Another concern raised by locals was the plan's implicit stress on traffic within the valley. With the nearest airport being that of Reno, Nevada, the two-lane Highway 89 that runs from Reno through Truckee to Squaw Valley would experience crippling congestion throughout the winter weekends and holidays. Furthermore, the one road that leads from Highway 89 to the base of Squaw Valley is constrained by the geographical

¹⁰⁶ Fischer, Mark. "THE SQUAW VALLEY VILLAGE SPECIFIC PLAN: STILL MISSING SPECIFICS." *Unofficial Alpine*. N.p., 22 July 2014. Web. <<http://unofficialalpine.com/>>

¹⁰⁷ Fischer, Mark. "Local Geoscientist Challenges Squaw Valley Water Supply Assessment." *Unofficial Alpine*. N.p., 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialalpine.com/?p=5633>>.

¹⁰⁸ Brew, David A., PhD. "Would Squaw Valley Development Impact Acquiifer Recharging?" *North Shore* (2014): n. pag. 20 Nov. 2014. Web. 09 Dec. 2014. <<http://keepsquawtrue.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Dave-Brew-Aquifer-Recharge.pdf>>.

barriers of Olympic Valley and could never handle the amount of traffic that is required of an international destination ski resort.

In addressing this problem, Squaw Valley CEO Andy Wirth stressed that the creation of a destination resort would in turn give the Tahoe market the spark it needed to revamp its highway system from a 2 to 4-lane road. Wirth, who currently serves a member of the of the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority Board of Trustees, has publicly stated that in building a destination resort that attract four to five night visitors, Squaw could serve as the driving force behind the revitalization of all segments of the north Tahoe economy.¹⁰⁹

Once again, however, the chief concern raised amongst locals was protecting what they viewed as the soul of Squaw Valley. Much like the colonization of ski towns in the past, locals feared that the proposed development would result in an urbanization of their valley and a doing away with the very nature-focused lifestyles that brought people to Squaw and Alpine in the first place. With the current county government's headquarters located some 70 miles away in Auburn, California, many residents in Olympic Valley believed that their interests would not be given nearly the same weight as the possible tax revenues that the county could generate from the proposed development.

As history shows, these local were right in their premonition. Following Denver's rejection of the 1972 Winter Olympics, Colorado passed two initiatives – The Local Government Land Use Control Enabling Act and the Areas and Activities of State Interest Act – that worked together to give county governments greater control over the

¹⁰⁹ Fischer, Mark. "THE SQUAW VALLEY VILLAGE SPECIFIC PLAN: STILL MISSING SPECIFICS." *Unofficial Alpine*. N.p., 22 July 2014. Web.

planning of local public lands and anything deemed to be a “matter of public interest.”^{110,111}

The initiatives were passed with the hope of reconciling the Forest Service’s lack of concern over regulating the development of private lands adjacent to public lands. In cases that perhaps foreshadow the future of White Wolf, Colorado found that the lack of regulation of these private lands in turn promoted widespread growth of once rural communities near the state’s highly successful ski resorts.¹¹²

But county control not only failed to slow ski resort development, it often accelerated it. Eager for the golden combination of increased jobs and tax revenues brought by ski industries, Colorado counties like Eagle County too often embraced growth for hopes that the economic benefit would help revamp the county’s social service needs. But in allowing further development, these counties unknowingly accepted a devil’s bargain – the more development counties approved in order to pay for their public services, the more public services were in order to serve the county’s growing development. For many once rural areas, this became a vicious cycle of increased cost of living, exurban growth, and political shifts.¹¹³

Untrusting in both KSL’s mission and Placer County’s role in regulating development, local icon Dr. Robb Gaffney announced in April of 2014 that he was stepping down as Squaw Valley’s official skiing ambassador to the public after 20 years of service. The move marked a visible change from the status quo of corporate business

¹¹⁰ House Bill 1034 section I, chapter 106, Colorado revised statutes 1963, article 8, 1974. As cited in Childers. “The Last Resort.” *Colorado Powder Keg*. 105.

¹¹¹ House Bill 1041 section I, chapter 106, Colorado revised statutes 1963, article 7, 1974. As cited in Childers. “The Last Resort.” *Colorado Powder Keg*. 105.

¹¹² Childers. “The Last Resort.” *Colorado Powder Keg*. 105-106.

¹¹³ Rothman, “Introduction” *Devil’s Bargains*, 26-28.

as usual that was prevailing not just at Squaw, but across the West. As a respected psychiatrist in the valley, producer of *G.N.A.R., the Movie*, and author of *Squallywood: A Guide to Squaw's Most Exposed Lines*, Gaffney could have found himself, like Troy Caldwell, among the local elite that would gain from KSL's colonization of the valley.^{114,115} But rather than sever his ties to his ski community, Gaffney used his position of power to highlight the now vast rift that had grown between KSL management and the local ski community's long cherished culture.

"I am not opposed to change," said Gaffney on his resignation as ski ambassador. "I am not anti-development, and I recognize that Squaw needs drastic updating and improvement. However, I am not comfortable being linked to an organization and a process that fundamentally disturbs me at several levels."¹¹⁶

Immediately after denouncing KSL's management of the resort, Gaffney jumped on a new local grassroots effort to incorporate the ski community at the base of Squaw Valley into a town named Olympic Valley.¹¹⁷ While not explicitly against development, the Incorporate Olympic Valley (IOV) movement began as a way for locals to gain more control over land use issues in the valley. As its mission statement, IOV strives to give locals more control so that development can "co-exist in a long-term sustainable manner

¹¹⁴ Gaffney, Robb. "Speaking Up to Protect Squaw Valley: What Would Muir Do?" *Moonshine Ink*. N.p., 13 Sept. 2013. Web. <<http://www.moonshineink.com/opinion/speaking-protect-squaw-valley-what-would-muir-do>>.

¹¹⁵ Rothman. "Powder Aplenty for Native and Guest Alike." *Devil's Bargains*. 286.

¹¹⁶ Gaffney, Robb. "Gut Instinct." *Unofficial Networks*. N.p., 12 Apr. 2014. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://unofficialnetworks.com/2014/04/dr-robb-gaffney-stepping-squaw-valley-ambassador-squaws-corporate-direction>>.

¹¹⁷ Gaffney. "Speaking Up to Protect Squaw Valley: What Would Muir Do?" *Moonshine Ink*

with the beauty of [their] mountains, [their] history and character, and [their] natural resources.”¹¹⁸

“We’re all here to ski, that’s what people want to do,” said IOV board member and professional ski cinematographer Tom Day. “The last thing that people want to do is hurt the ski area, we want them to be successful so that we always have a place to ski. It’s the reason we live here.”¹¹⁹

Nevertheless KSL has fought back against the grassroots incorporation effort, creating its own counter-incorporation organization known Save Olympic Valley (SOV). Funded almost exclusively by KSL and Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, Save Olympic Valley has spent \$448,529.49 since January 1, 2014 in fighting the incorporation effort.¹²⁰ With the hiring of lawyers and PR specialists, Save Olympic Valley has disseminated propaganda questioning the proposed town’s financial viability, number of registered voters, and ability to provide adequate public services.¹²¹

To date, however, none of the accusations against IOV are anything that will not already be tested in the incorporation process itself. In order to even be considered as a potential town, IOV has had to demonstrate that it can pass numerous tests set by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) of Placer County. To date, the town has proven that it has the adequate number of registered voters in the region, and an initial

¹¹⁸ Incorporate Olympic Valley. "Myths and Truths." *Incorporate Olympic Valley*. Incorporate Olympic Valley PAC, 2014. Web. 05 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.incorporateolympicvalley.org/myths-truths/>>.

¹¹⁹ Clark, Miles. "'Incorporate Olympic Valley' Video Interview with Board Members Dr. Ilfeld & Tom Day." *SnowBrains*. N.p., 16 June 2014. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://snowbrains.com/incorporate-olympic-valley-video-interview-board-members-dr-fred-ilfeld-tom-day/>>.

¹²⁰ Staff. "Save Olympic Valley Spending Nears \$500,000 to Challenge Town Effort." *Tahoe Daily Tribune*. N.p., 20 Nov. 2014. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.tahodailytribune.com/news/13873201-113/valley-olympic-campaign-contributions>>

¹²¹ Save Olympic Valley. "Questions." *Save Olympic Valley*. Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC., n.d. Web. <<http://www.incorporateolympicvalley.com/questions>>.

financial analysis has shown that the town will be financially viable. As the next step in the incorporation process, IOV is awaiting a third-party comprehensive fiscal analysis that is set to be completed in early 2015. If it is found that the town cannot provide services equal to or better than the current county, or if for any reason the town is not considered to be financially viable, the incorporation process will stop.¹²²

“There seems to be all these peripheral questions: we’re not fiscally viable, or we don’t have qualified people, or we’re too small a town and so forth,” said Dr. Fred Ilfeld Jr., IOV board member and professor at the University of Nevada Reno School of Medicine. “We know from the advertisements that these are backed by Squaw Valley Ski Holdings and it would just be refreshing if they came out with their real reason they don’t want to the town, which probably has to do with local say over land use.”¹²³

This ongoing fight over the control of land use is the core issue surrounding the future of Olympic Valley. As locals such as Gaffney stepped up to advocate proper land management over short-term economic gain, they exposed a paradoxical dilemma within the ski industry: As a contracted company that has been granted permission to help facilitate the public’s recreation in their own lands, KSL is spending half a million dollars in their own revenue to combat the opinions of the very people they are supposed to serve. With this realization, KSL has no room to hide. Unlike the resort’s past owner Alex Cushing, KSL has no interest in running a financially successful operation that also preserves the soul of Squaw Valley – It has proven itself to be a modern day colonizer.

But while past ski towns could only watch helplessly as their cherished histories vanished in the wake of their colonizers, Olympic Valley residents have the unique

¹²² Clark, Miles. ““Incorporate Olympic Valley” Video Interview with Board Members Dr. Ilfeld & Tom Day.” *SnowBrains*.

¹²³ Ibid.

opportunity to regain control of their land. In incorporating Olympic Valley, residents could implement sound zoning principles that would ensure both long-term financial success of local industries as well as protect the natural beauty and organic ski town spirit that has made Olympic Valley one of the most unique places on earth.

CONCLUSION

As I begin my annual ascent to “Playland,” at Alpine Meadows this winter, I will face a grim reminder of the corporate reality that now threatens Tahoe’s cherished lands. Amidst the cool mountain breeze and sweet smell of pine, I will be greeted by the faint hum of electricity emanating from a massive, airport monitor-like sign on the middle of the mountain. As the latest and greatest upgrade from KSL’s \$50 million commitment to capital improvements, the sign will proudly let me know that since my last visit, KSL has decided that the name “Playland” was unacceptable, taking it upon themselves to rename the run Pacific Crest Bowl.

The change, albeit small, still hits me hard. Thoughts over the uncertainty of Alpine’s future continue to plague me as I make my way out to the distant edge of the High Traverse Trail. If KSL is able to develop as it wishes, what will become of both Squaw and Alpine’s precious ski histories? If the two connect via White Wolf, will Alpine merely become the overflow lot for all of Squaw Valley’s corporate mayhem?

These thoughts continue until I reach the end of my High Traverse. But then, feeling the warm Sierra sunshine, the thoughts stop. Gazing out at the same landscape I had first looked out at 10 years ago, I can’t help but smile. While KSL has changed the official name of Playland, the terrain still looks exactly the same – untracked powder, the kind of stuff that makes Alpine special.

As I leap over the cornice and into the bowl, I leave behind my fears of an uncertain future. While the preservation of Alpine’s culture depends upon the votes of a few hundred people over the hill in Olympic Valley, I’m okay with it. As I shift my

weight into the next turn, I can't help but feel that the ski industry's corporate takeover and subsequent real estate craze was destined to happen as soon as the Forest Service first opened up the industry to private business and market forces. And that's okay. The people of Olympic Valley see the future of corporate skiing as something that does not need to be fought, but can be shaped.

Reaching the bottom of the bowl, I take off my goggles and look out north towards the black toothpicks on the distant mountain. Rather than feel contempt for Squaw Valley and its corporate owners, I feel pride for being in the thick of the same battle as the valley's residents. While historically bitter rivals, the incorporation movement has brought the people of Squaw and Alpine together against a common enemy. In doing so, we have found that we may end having more in common than we originally thought.

While the potential for Olympic Valley to incorporate into a town is undoubtedly exciting, it does not necessarily provide a model for other ski towns to follow. Having had the good fortune of being managed by an owner who was both financially savvy and deeply loyal to preserving the soul of skiing, Squaw Valley is unique in that it had already cemented itself amongst the premier ski resorts in the West well before it experienced its first corporate takeover. Because the residents of Olympic Valley were already both financially stable and heavily invested in the fabled history and spirit of the area, they are now able to resist the lucrative temptations of corporate development and added real estate that have proved fatal to spirits of other ski towns across the West.

And yet, there is hope that an incorporated Olympic Valley can set a precedent for a new kind of relationship between ski towns and their corporate resorts. While Vail and

Aspen today serve as shining examples of the mutually beneficial symbiotic relationships that can occur between a ski resort and its town, they are each home to massive developments and more than five times the amount of people who currently live in Olympic Valley.^{124,125} If incorporated, Olympic Valley will face the unique challenge of having to protect its cherished small-town vibe while also competing within an industry that is currently driven by never-ending increases in development.

¹²⁴ US Census Bureau. "United States Census Bureau." *Aspen (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau*. United States Census Bureau, 2013. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.
<<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/08/0803620.html>>.

¹²⁵ US Census Bureau. "United States Census Bureau." *Aspen (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau*. United States Census Bureau, 2013. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.
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