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Future of Ski Area Topic at Groups' Meet

ONTONAGON — The future of the Porcupine Mountain ski area was the central issue at the meeting of the Ontonagon County Tourist Association and Chamber of Commerce Thursday evening at the Shamrock Dining Room. Association President Edwin Hokans Jr. opened the discussion by urging everyone to speak up with their opinions on the Porkies.

Rudy Saari, association member and former operator of the concession at the hill, stated that Holiday ski area in Bergland is presently on the verge of realization, with a large financial investment in Ontonagon County and he felt that it should be permitted to get on its feet before any second big privately operated hill is established in Ontonagon County. This opinion was also echoed by June Aho, area resort owner, and other members of the association.

Donald Pattison, association member, on response to a question, said he felt the association's obligation is first to the people of the area, including future generations, and he would be interested in hearing how the county residents feel. He also noted that the second obligation is to hear what the operators of Holiday Mountain have to say, since they have already spent a great deal and will be spending more money on that enterprise before its opening next December.

Present at the meeting were Joseph Calabro, Cecil Rowe and Clarence Hoeff of Oceanside Properties and Holiday, who informed the tourist group of their feelings on the private development of the Porkies at this time.

Calabro read a letter sent to him April 20, 1961, by John O. Wernham, U. S. Forest supervisor, formerly of Ironwood, in response to Calabro's application for a use permit to begin a ski hill in the Bergland area that year. The letter reads in part: "Under the average snow conditions in all the lake states, there is doubt that there will be a sufficient influx of skiers over the next few years to warrant establishment of another major ski area. A Bergland hill development (which is now under construction as Holiday Mountain) would give competition to the Porcupines, Indianhead, White Cap and Brule. These areas are more or less in their infancy and some need a few more years to build up a larger business and improve their facilities. We might be discriminating unnecessarily against them if we allow the Bergland Hill to be developed in 1961."

Calabro went on to detail the expenditures already made at Holiday and the future commitments of Oceanside in the Bergland area. Calabro stated: "We are only asking for the same consideration that Indianhead was given in 1961, that of giving a new major ski area, still in its infancy, time to build up its enterprise."

Calabro went on to state that he felt Ontonagon County could not accommodate presently the influx of skiers that would be the result of two private ski hills in the county. He noted that the area has accommodations for 1,500 now and that is nothing compared to the needs of 3,000 skiers who would require lodging if both areas were immediately developed. Other association members echoed Calabro's sentiments and continued that if large crowds of skiers came to the area as a result of two major hills, and were unable to be accommodated, it would create dissatisfaction among the clientele, sending them away unhappy with the area, not to return this same way again.

One Ontonagon member noted the recreation industry is only successful when visitors return year after year, bringing more tourists with them, and a dissatisfied skier will not return.

The manager of Holiday further said he did not feel that the Porkies were in competition with private ski areas, that one-third of its users were local skiers and that Holiday Mountain would help the Porkies attendance by bringing more skiers to the Ontonagon County area. Calabro said if his organization is forced to abandon temporarily Holiday to concentrate on the Porkies, they would do so, as he feels two privately operated ski hills in Ontonagon County could not operate successfully.

Ed Hokans Sr. pointed out that although he agrees with Calabro, it must be noted that it is the Conservation Department that will decide if the hill is to be leased and the association can only use what influence it has to acquaint the department with the feelings of the residents of the area.

President Ed Hokans Jr. noted that the concession lease for the Porkies is up this year and may prove a problem for the department in finding an operator for the concession. Calabro and his colleagues noted that if this proves a problem, Oceanside could pick up the concession lease. The membership stressed its approval of the Conservation Department constructing a chair lift in the Porcupine Ski area, and determined to write to the department thanking it for its cooperation in this matter.

On hand at the meeting were representatives of groups in White Pine and Bergland and they essentially stated the same opinion, that the Porkies for the present should stay in state control. They noted that the young people of the area are able to ski often because of the lower rate there and families of moderate income can spend more time skiing together.

Cecil Rowe of Holiday stated his group is attempting to carve a giant operation into the Bergland area and needs the help of the entire region. He said an airplane ride over the Holiday ski terrain will exhibit how much has been done already. He noted that at one time the manager of Indianhead Mountain in Ironwood stated that the only thing holding Indianhead back was a lack of accommodation in that area and he pointed out that Holiday has a real problem as they have even less.

Rowe asked this question: "If

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