

On-hold ski village might move forward

A smaller size and a land exchange could energize the Wolf Creek project.

By Judith Kohler
The Associated Press

A proposed ski village in southwest Colorado that was besieged by lawsuits and then put on hold after federal officials agreed to redo an environmental review could be getting new life.

Developers behind the proposed resort at the base of the Wolf Creek ski area are exploring a possible land exchange with the U.S. Forest Service that would steer construction away from wetlands and ski runs.

They're also looking at scaling back the size of the development on the land owned by Texas billionaire Billy Joe "Red" McCombs, co-founder of media giant Clear Channel Communications.

Developer Clint Jones of Austin, Texas, is meeting with Colorado elected officials, the Forest Service, environmentalists and area residents to gauge support for some of his ideas, which still need Mc-

Combs' go-ahead.

He and business partner Hal Jones — who isn't related — took over the project for McCombs after the first environmental analysis was shelved.

McCombs' former representative, Texas developer Bob Honts, had become a lightning rod for opponents who said the project was too big, would degrade the environment and tax the services of Mineral County, home to fewer than 1,000 people.

"We would certainly like to get support from the local communities," Clint Jones said Friday.

He appears to have won conditional support from Davey Pitcher, president of the Wolf Creek ski area, which he manages on national forest land about 250 miles southwest of Denver.

Pitcher said in a written statement last week that he would support a land exchange between McCombs and the Forest Service to realign the development.

Pitcher called the new proposal a big improvement "in terms of wetland protection and less interference with skiing."