

LOOKOUT: Permit Envisioned Year-Round Recreation Area

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argued about that from the start.

"It didn't seem right," he said. "I wasn't trying to get rich. When I was running a public recreation facility, and I was supposed to pay the government for doing it."

Premmer put in a backstopped campground with electric outlets for 49 cars behind the chalet—caddis, shower houses, barbecues, picnic tables, garbage containers and dump station.

He renovated the chalet interior, where Archie Landin, a former chief of Lookout, ran an excellent restaurant. (Last May Landin left to run a restaurant in Superior, Wis.)

The campground attendance grows and might have built to 10,000, Premmer said, but overriding problems spoiled it.

In his two years of operation, Premmer said, his operational losses a \$130,000 and expenses putting the area in shape if he ran down came to \$100,000. He sold off the other main equipment for \$20,000, leaving \$88,000 in red ink.

Lookout's snow-making, added in the '60s, brought out another difficulty. The area has a lot of rock, which makes well-drilling expensive and hinders slope grading.

Premmer steadfastly refused to pay the land-use fee. Last spring the government served notice on him to clear the land of his buildings and equipment by Nov. 1. "In no way did I try to run Lookout again," said Premmer.

He offered to sell Lookout's physical plant to the city for \$70,000, and that's what the council was voting on. To some it looked as if Premmer was doubling his money since the purchase price was \$24,500. By Premmer's figuring the sale would have left him \$100,000 in the red, if not more. He said he can sell to others (a Canadian ski area) for a better price.

Said Wayne Smetanka, U.S. forester in the Virginia office, "We're not happy that we're obliged to close the Lookout operation and see a quarter of a million dollars go down the drain."

Is anybody happy? "I think a few are," said Smetanka. "A lot of ski-area stockholders. Lost money. There's some bitterness. Some think the community will be better off."

Smetanka is not one of them. "The Forest Service would be delighted to see any kind of a skiing operation go in there, from a rope-tow on up," he said.

There had been suggestions and rumors about "land exchange," that different parties, the county, the nearby city of Mountain Iron, were trying to arrange a land swap with the Service for Lookout. Nothing came of it.

"We would have considered it," Smetanka said. "We'd be obliged to. Of course we'd have to take a close look at the kind of recreational facility that would be coming in."

Applied of criticism calling the Forest Service rules "inflexible and antiquated," Smetanka said, "That raises my hackles."

He said that the special-use permit granted Premmer in December 1968 allowed him to "plan, construct, operate and maintain a year-around recreation area including a restaurant, ski slopes, lifts, tow, a dog lodge, a conference hall, clothing and equipment rental and sales, a trailer camp, general outdoor activities, the development of educational displays and other improvements and such other facilities consistent with the above, as may be approved by the Forest Service."

"That seems fairly all-encompassing," Smetanka said. A motel or even an amusement park of sorts would have been well within the realm of possible Forest Service approval, he added.

Nobody on the fence or on either side of it sees any chance of Lookout's survival in its present

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from Alderman Mitchell Sore said, "It's a local ski hill. Nothing more."

Students from the junior college volunteered to help out if the city would take over. Joe Greig, president of the Chamber of Commerce, revisited a time when the hill offered ski. It's still there stripped of its present equipment, might start from scratch and become a community asset.

"I had hoped the city would take Lookout over," he admitted. "Presumably, I did feel it would also have been a lot of a burden, but no more so than the parks and the city golf course, which breaks even on paper but I've sure costs them something."

Herb Premmer suggested that a city philanthropist might solve everything.

Philanthropy, like light-

ning, might strike any where, of course—maybe even farther south.

Sugar Hills (Grand Rapids, Minn.) for example. It has been suggested that \$2 million or \$3 million could move enough Sugar Hills dirt with heavy mining equipment to pile up 700 to 1,000 feet of vertical rise.

"Everybody has got a scheme to get the world right," said Will Rogers. "I can't remember when it was ever right. There has been times when it was right for you and you and you, but never all at the same time."

Lookout mounters need not be altogether dissatisfied. Twelve miles eastward (closer than most Twin Cities ski areas to most Twin Cities slopes) is Giant's Ridge, between Brainerd and Aurora, Minn.

Giant's Ridge opened several years after Lookout. Its vertical (400 feet) is, in Minnesota, second only to Lutsen. It has a long intermediate slope with "bar" and a steep racing slope with rope-tow. It has a chalet and overnight lodge.

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