

Spotted owl debate may block resort expansion

ASHLAND (AP) — Rogue Valley residents trying to keep the Mount Ashland ski area from closing are angry at an environmental group's appeal of the ski area's expansion plans.

"It makes me sick," said Greg Williams, an Ashland city councilman and member of a steering committee trying to keep Ski Ashland Inc. operating.

"For an out-of-town group like this who feels they can overwatch us, it just makes me sick."

The Oregon Natural Resource Council has filed the sole appeal against the U.S. Forest Service's final environmental impact statement for the expansion.

The steering committee and local leaders want the ONRC to withdraw it.

The expansion plan, released in July, would allow development on the mountain's north side. The details satisfied local groups and the city of Ashland, which debated the plans with the Forest Service for eight years.

But the ONRC asserts the expansion would disturb important spotted owl habitat protected by a federal court injunction. Cutting new ski trails, which would be like a prohibited timber sale, would disrupt a vital forest corridor between the Coastal and Cascade mountain ranges that is important to the entire Northwest, ONRC spokesman Wendell Wood said.

"This is more important biologically than a nesting site," he said. "This area is key to holding together the whole ecosystem."

REGIONAL BRIEFS

Medusa lays eggs

NEWPORT (AP) — Medusa, a Giant Pacific octopus cloistered at the Hatfield Marine Science Center since February, has begun laying eggs in her observation tank.

Staffers at the center are fascinated, but they're also worried.

For an octopus, the mommy track is fatal.

In the wild, a female octopus generates an enzyme during the egg-laying process that flattens her appetite. She stops eating after laying her eggs, tends to them until they hatch, and then dies.

"She started laying eggs about three weeks ago. It was on a Monday," said Jim Deakin of Waldport, a center volunteer. "It generally takes about two weeks for them to complete their laying cycle."

So far, Medusa inexplicably continues to eat. "She ate Monday," Deakin reported. "We always feed her one crab, four times a week."

It takes about six months for fertile eggs to hatch, but scientists believe Medusa's eggs may not be fertile.

Deakin is hopeful, but aquarium director Rob Sparks is confident the eggs are infertile.

"They've been there probably two weeks. We should be able to see some development and cleavage of the eggs. We're not seeing that. All we can see now is the yolk sac inside the

egg," Sparks said.

Downs appeal denied

SALEM (AP) — Convicted child killer Elizabeth Diane Downs' newest attempt at getting a new trial has failed.

Marion County Circuit Judge Duane Ertsgaard on Friday turned down her request for relief, said Phil Lemman, a spokesman for Attorney General Dave Frohnmayer.

Downs claimed she had ineffective legal counsel at her trial and while appealing her convictions. But Ertsgaard said her lawyers exercised valid judgments and that she failed to prove her contentions.

Downs was convicted in 1984 in Lane County of the gunshot murder of one of her children and of attempting to murder the other two. Her convictions have been upheld.

She had filed a petition for post-conviction relief, a method permitting convicts to seek new trials by raising issues such as inadequate legal assistance.

Downs has a right to appeal Ertsgaard's decision to the Oregon Court of Appeals.

She has been serving a sentence of life plus 50 years. Lemman said 10 years will be taken off of the sentence because of a separate ruling by Ertsgaard.

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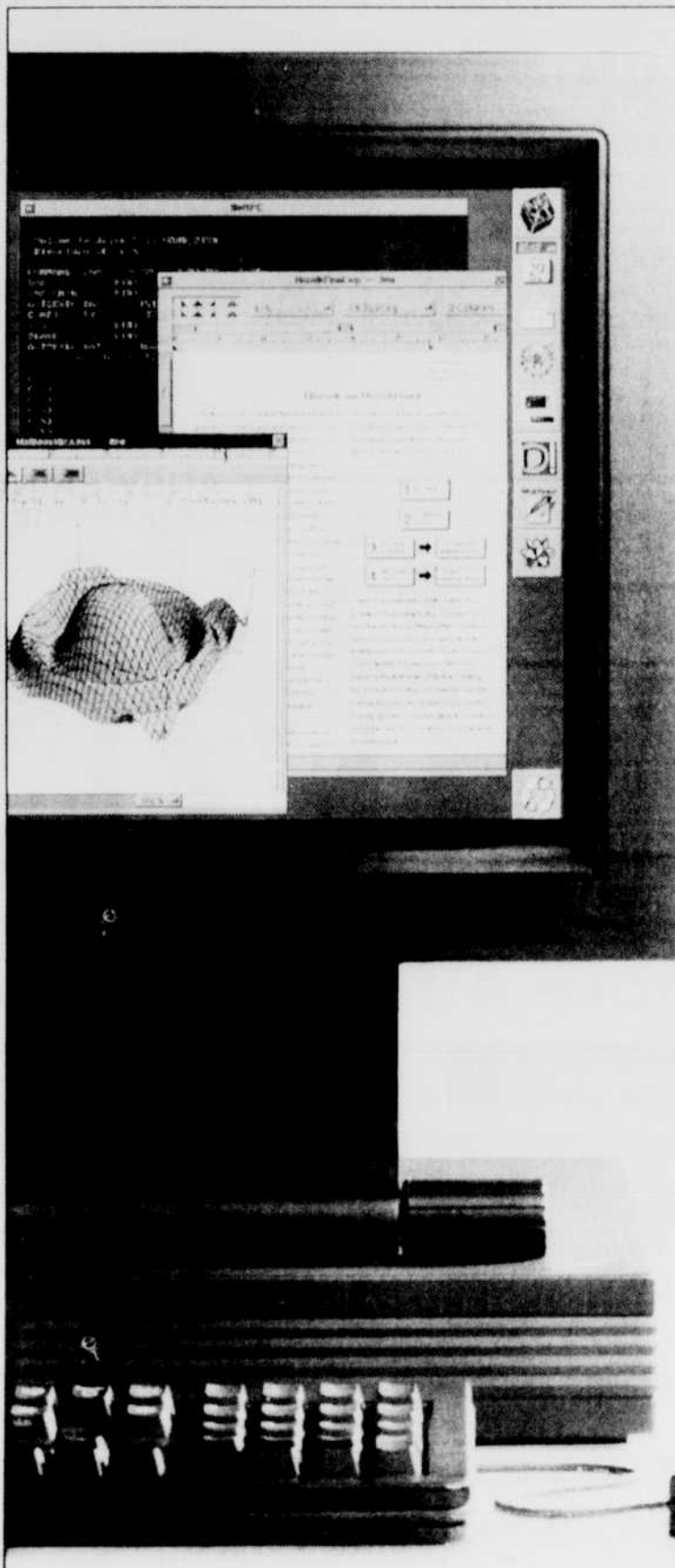
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