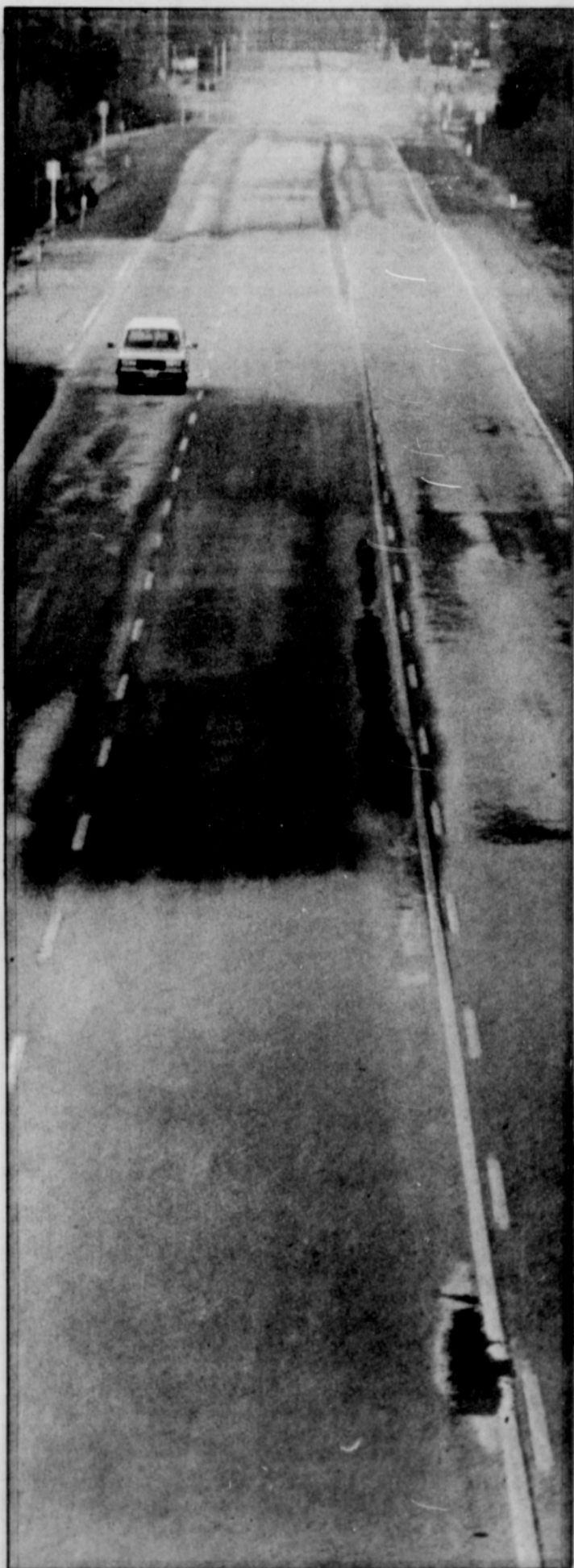




# Snow drought dries up business on Mt. Hood



by KAYE BARTON BAKKE  
Post Correspondent

Owners of businesses on Mt. Hood are "looking up", both figuratively and literally, with determination and a touch of desperation.

Like midwestern farmers who scan the skies for signs of moisture, tourist-dependent businesses on the mountain are looking for indications of snow.

But optimism is the word. In the same breath that they express anxiety, most of them predict that the situation is short-lived.

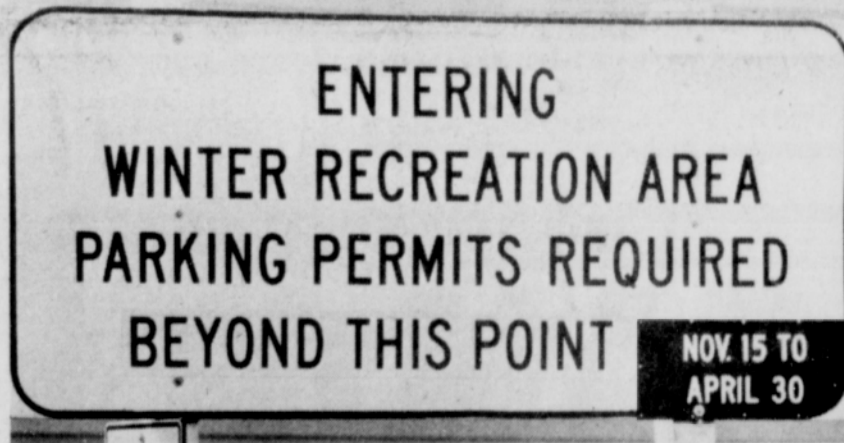
"The situation" is a three-week spell of record warm weather which has stopped snowfall and left ski slopes bare. The result, according to Rick Scott, manager of the Hoodland branch of the Clackamas County Bank, is that "business is almost at a standstill."

Scott said that many of his clients' livelihoods depend upon wintertime business. "My customers all are anxiously awaiting snowfall," he said.

Scott estimated that business for the ski resorts on Mt. Hood is "basically off 100 per cent except for Timberline, and they're down 25 to 30 per cent from last year."

"The situation is not good," he said. "The ski area has lost any opportunity to have an excellent season."

Scott said it would require heavy snowfall within the next couple of weeks to avoid a repeat of the



disastrous 1976-'77 season on the mountain.

Scott pointed out that it is not only the ski resorts which are affected by the lack of snow. "The grocery stores, ski attire shops, equipment rental shops, taverns and bars are all involved in some way."

But he pointed out that some businesses might benefit from the spring-like weather on the mountain. "Restaurants always enjoy the lack of snow," he said. "Their patrons are able to get out to them better when the weather is mild."

Kurt Mezger, owner of the Chalet

Swiss restaurant in Welches, agreed. "We have been busier than hell," he said. "Business has been as good as last year or even better."

Mezger explained that the skiing trade is "really the icing on the cake" for his business. He said his clientele are primarily middle-aged Portland residents.

"My business is 75 per cent turn-around from the greater metropolitan area — mostly people in their forties, fifties and sixties," he said.

"When they see there is no snow in the foothills, they love to make the

drive up here. When there is snow, they stay home."

Mike Copper, assistant manager of the Hoodland Thriftway at Welches, echoed Mezger's assessment. "For us, nice weather draws as many people as snow does," he said, although he acknowledged that the absence of skiers had a "noticeable" effect on business.

J.J. Fox, who operates a service station and towing service on Highway 26 near Alder Creek, told a different story. "My business is certainly down," he said. "I'd say it's down about one-third from last year."

Fox said his business is largely dependent on through traffic. "Since I'm right here on the highway, tourists make up most of my business, and there's a lot heavier through traffic in the summer," he said.

"In the winter, it's good from one hunting season to the next and in ski season," he continued. There is usually a maximum of one week to 10 days between peak periods. "But this time, it's been two or three weeks since I've been busy."

Verla Rogers, manager of the Wemme Branch of the U.S. National Bank, pointed out that business slowdowns touch every life within a community.

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The slopes of Government Camp usually are covered with snow in January, but Summit lies bare now (top). As the snow disappeared, so have the tourists who usually flock to the mountain in winter. Now, traffic is rare on U.S. Highway 26 (far left). A more typical winter day in January, a Timberline class, was taken last year (left). Timberline has remained open thanks to the year-round benefits of the Palmer chairlift.

photos by Mark Floyd