

Squaw faces community opposition to expansion

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

Squaw Valley CEO Andy Wirth knows how to stay calm under pressure.

Since coming to Squaw in 2010 to lead the resort in its “next phase of growth,” Wirth made the decision to buy Alpine Meadows, the ski resort just south of Squaw. He introduced a plan to link the resorts with a gondola next to the federally protected Granite Chief Wilderness. Wirth’s plans for Squaw Valley include a substantial increase in residential and overnight housing, new bars and restaurants and a 108-foot-tall, 90,000-square-foot “mountain adventure center.”

Costs are difficult to estimate because the project will be built over 25 years by developers who will buy rights to the land from Squaw, Wirth said. Squaw Valley’s goal is to bring more skiers to the mountain, not make money from real estate, he added.

More than 300 people and several agencies commented on an environmental review of the project, and most were critical, said Tom Mooers, executive director of Sierra Watch, a nonprofit that has been a leading critic of Wirth and the project. The Placer County Board of Supervisors will eventually be asked to sign off on the project.

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