MINERAL KING



A Planned Recreation Development

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COVER PHOTO:

MINERAL KING VILLAGE ... A focal point in the master plan for the development of Mineral King is this completely contained Village, nestled in an alpine setting. Buildings will be situated in a pattern dictated by natural land contours and appropriate structural relationships.

- MINERAL KING -

On the site of the old, decaying mining town of Mineral King will rise a new self-contained village bearing the same name. Imaginative in concept and contemporary in design, this carefully planned development will create one of the world's major outdoor recreation facilities in a spectacular valley of the California Sierras. Free of cars and skillfully blended into the alpine setting, Mineral King and its attractions will provide wholesome enjoyment for thousands of American families.

Where Is Mineral King?

Mineral King, as part of the Sequoia National Forest, is located in that portion of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of south-central California known as the "High Sierras." It is 55 miles east of Visalia, California, 228 miles northeast of Los Angeles, and 271 miles southeast of San Francisco. It is bordered on three sides by the Sequoia National Park.

What Is Mineral King?

Mineral King is a unique combination of eight alpine bowls or basins surrounded by mountains up to 12,400 feet above sea level, and all tributary to the spectacular Mineral King Valley. The Valley, itself, is about 2 miles long and seldom over a quarter mile wide, and its floor is slightly over 7,000 feet above sea level - nearly twice as high as the better known Yosemite Valley. The waters originating in the alpine basins, and forming the small stream in the valley, are the headwaters of the East Fork of the Kaweah River.

Mineral King can be reached by a low standard road during the summer which connects with a State highway near Hammond, about 25 miles to the west. Part of the road runs through the Sequoia National Park. During winter, Mineral King is inaccessible. In the valley there is an old store, post office, and resort, a packer-outfitter station serving visitors to the undeveloped country behind the valley's guardian peaks, more than 60 private summer homes and some primitive campgrounds and picnic sites. There are a number of mining claims and there is considerable evidence of "early-day" mining activity.

The Current Situation

- No work has yet started in Mineral King.

- The California Division of Highways is committed (and finances are in sight) to building an all-weather, limited access road to Mineral King.

- The Secretary of the Interior has approved the construction of that road through Sequoia National Park, subject to precise on-the-ground location and construction standards that will protect National Park values; and

- on-the-ground location of the road and construction standards have been substantially agreed upon by all agencies concerned. Much of the highway will be located along the brush-covered slopes well above the river. No Giant Sequoias will be jeopardized.

- Walt Disney Productions has submitted a Master Plan to the Forest Service for the development of Mineral King into an outstanding yearlong National Forest recreation complex. The Plan has been approved.

- A permit to begin construction and to eventually cover operation has not been granted. However, a term permit will be issued as soon as the first part of the road is under contract. This is expected by midsummer.

- Beginning with the Master Plan and continuing through every subsequent more detailed plan, each plan and even each supporting blueprint - area-by-area, site-by-site, facility-by-facility, and structure-by-structure - is subject to Forest Service approval (and/or veto). In the same vein

- all construction will be under Forest Service administration. And when completed

- the total operation of the recreation area by Walt Disney Productions will also always be administered by the Forest Service.

Some Historical Highlights

In the late 19th Century, Mineral King was active as a typical western mountain mining community. Prospects were bright for rich strikes in gold, copper, silver, and lead, and at one time there was a bustling community of 500 people. But like many such areas, the veins were not as rich as had been hoped and the mining activity soon came to a virtual standstill, except for a few of the most optimistic prospectors.

After the miners left, Mineral King still held many attractions for the residents of the hot valleys of interior California. To them it was their favorite place for camping, hunting, packing, and many other mountain related vacation activities. A number built, or converted,abandoned mining shacks into summer homes, many of which are still used.

When the National Forest System was established in the California Sierras, Mineral King became part of the Sequoia National Forest. It has been suggested that it be included in the nearby Sequoia National Park. This step has not been taken because of its mineralization and associated developments - normally considered as nonconforming with National Park standards.

From the beginning of the growth of the interest of Americans in skiing, and the development of accessible mountain areas to accommodate that interest, winter sports experts who have visited Mineral King have been unanimous in agreeing that the challenging slopes of the eight closely related alpine bowls, and the relatively high elevation of the valley floor, itself, combine in such a way that together they offer the potential of being one of the finest winter sports areasin the country - if not in the world.

But there has been one major problem: the lack of adequate access. The present seasonal road must be replaced by a year-round access road before the potential of Mineral King can be realized.

Forest Service winter sports specialists have long been fully aware of the latent possibilities in Mineral King. So when faced with the rapid growth in skiing activity, which began immediately following World War II, and the relative lack of adequate skiing facilities, they tried to do something about it.

In 1949, the Forest Service issued a prospectus inviting proposals from private developers for Mineral King's development. As has been the case in other National Forest Ski Areas, this was with the understanding that all aspects of the development and the subsequent use of Mineral King would be subject to continuing Forest Service approval and administration. There was considerable interest in the prospectus, but, finally, no proposals were made. The problem of access, of building a 25 mile all weather road, was too much to surmount.

Interest in the possibility of such a development remained high, however, and in 1953 Congressman Harlen Hagan headed hearings in Visalia to consider all aspects of it; to consider what should be done and to explore how to accomplish it. The area's development was supported from many directions ranging from local county officials to the Superintendent of the Sequoia National Park, and the Sierra Club. Still, the matter of the all-weather road remained the unmovable road block.

Despite this, interest in skiing continued to pyramid. The Winter Olympics were held further north in California at Squaw Valley on the Tahoe National Forest. And the State's existing facilities became even more crowded and the pressure for new ones became even more insistent.

Finally, in February 1965 the Forest Service issued a second prospectus inviting proposals for the development of Mineral King as a year-round National Forest recreation area. Interest was high again and this time there were six responses, four of which were fully imaginative proposals meeting all of the prospectus's qualifications. In fact, two of them were so outstanding that they were carefully studied at all levels in the Forest Service, and by the Secretary of Agriculture personally, before it could be decided which offered the most in eventual public benefits - the key criterion in the selection of all permittees serving National Forest visitors.

On July 16, 1965, the California Legislature added the Mineral King Road to the State Highway System.

In December 1965 the proposal of Walt Disney Productions was selected as the one which would best capitalize upon Mineral King's outstanding recreation potential, and do it in such a way that the result would be most compatible with the valley's uniquely spectacular alpine environment.

In January 1966 the Supervisor of the Sequoia National Forest granted to Walt Disney Productions a 3-year preliminary permit. The permit authorized the company to make surveys and plans for the development of a winter and summer operation meeting the minimum requirements of the prospectus of February 1965. The preliminary permit provided that a 30-year term permit for the development and operation of Mineral King would be issued following the end of the preliminary permit if --

- the plans as submitted had been approved,
- a contract had been awarded for a significant part of the necessary all-season road, and
- funds had been programed for completion of the road within 5 years of the award of the first contract.

In December 1966 the Economic Development Administration approved a grant of $ 3 million to the State Highway Commission because of the economic importance of Mineral King's development to the area and to the State.

Late in 1966, the National Park Service, acting under the Wilderness Act of 1964, held public hearings to consider its recommendations that certain parts of the Sequoia National Park be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. In structuring these wilderness proposals and responding to understandings which had been reached by local Forest Service and Park Service officials before the Forest Service's 1965 Mineral King Prospectus was released, a corridor was left between two recommended Wilderness units to accommodate that part of the planned Mineral King road which would have to go through the Sequoia National Park.

In many respects the public hearing which had been planned to consider wilderness proposals in the Sequoia National Park became a hearing on the desirability of developing Mineral King in the Sequoia National Forest, especially on that part of the access road through the National Park which was necessary to make the National Forest development possible.

It is true that following the release of the Forest Service Prospectus, there had been some who questioned the Forest Service plans. Most of these were those who had for years enjoyed the valley as it is, especially those who have maintained summer homes, and who were apprehensive over the changes they could visualize. They were supported by those who consistently oppose any further development of the mountain areas of the West.

The National Park Service Wilderness proposal hearings gave those resisting development of Mineral King an opportunity to buttress their opposition by emphasizing what they characterized as the danger of the violation of National Park standards which would come as the result of the improvement of the access road through the National Park.

Many of those objecting to the Forest Service plans for Mineral King and/or the road, and the organizations to which they belong, have long been among the most vigorous supporters of the country's wilderness movement. This is probably why many, on the basis of little information or misinformation, but who have consistently supported the wilderness movement, jumped to the conclusion that the development of Mineral King, in effect, must be a violation of wilderness values. Based upon this information, the objectors to Mineral King's development picked up considerable support throughout the country, and soon the issue was being taken to members of Congress and high officials in the Executive Branch for resolution.

Initially, the Secretary of the Interior was dubious over the proposal of the Forest Service, and it was not until special studies had been made showing conclusively that the road was the only feasible access, and he was assured by the Secretary of Agriculture that the possibility of pollution and environmental deterioration could be controlled that in December 1967 he agreed to permit the road to be built. He did it with the understanding that the formal authorization would not be granted

however, until the California Division of Highways, working with the Park Service and the Forest Service, had developed a way to make sure that it could be built without in any way jeopardizing National Park values - including the Giant Sequoia trees of the area - or without inducing erosion, sedimentation, or pollution.

These three agencies have spent a great deal of time working together on the ground to develop a highway plan that will meet these stringent requirements. Substantial agreement has been reached.

While working on its planning of the road, the California Division of Highways has held two public hearings. As might have been expected, these hearings, too, in some respects developed into hearings on the Forest Service plans to develop Mineral King.

As soon as Walt Disney Productions received its preliminary permit, it started an aggressive study and planning program. A permanent team was established in the valley, particularly to study its weather and snow patterns, and especially its avalanche hazards. Other teams of experts were sent to study successful ventures of a similar nature, not only in the United States, but all over the world. Conversely, many experts have been brought to Mineral King and to the Company's planning headquarters in Burbank. They included hydrologists; geologists; soil scientists; winter-sports planners; ecologists; water rights specialists; flood control, construction, and sanitation engineers; architects and landscape architects; foresters and resort operators; etc.

In total, the Company has spent over a half-million dollars in making basic studies, surveys, and planning efforts; all looking forward to determining how best to spend the $35.3 million it has committed itself to invest in developing the outdoor recreation potential of Mineral King.

Concurrent with the beginning of the Company's planning effort, the Forest Service assigned an experienced recreation expert to work full time with the Company's planners. He has had the assistance, when needed, of the full range of the Forest Service's technical support staff.

As a result of these efforts on the part of both the Company's and the Forest Service's planners, on January 8, 1969, Walt Disney Productions submitted for consideration of the Supervisor of the Sequoia National Forest its Master Plan for the Development of Mineral King.

By letter of January 21, 1969, the Forest Supervisor notified the Company that the plan was approved with the understanding that the approval is "subject to changes and further refinements as ways are found to improve it, and site development plans and detailed structure plans are yet to come." The Forest Supervisor's letter went on to tell the Company, "The 30-year term permit authorizing construction and operation to begin will be issued as soon as the State Division of Highways issues the first contract for the improved Mineral King access road. We expect this to take place within the next 6 months."

Some Questions Which Have Been Asked On

Forest Service's Plans To Develop Mineral King

Why Develop Mineral King At All?

- It is needed, to meet rapidly expanding public demands for this type recreation, as revealed by continuing State and Forest Service studies for the past two decades. It is in full accord with the new California State Plan (1968) for Outdoor Recreation.

- It is feasible, as supported by six bidders responding to the prospectus.

- These much needed public recreation opportunities will be developed by private capital.

Why The Disney Company?

- Disney in response to the Forest Service public invitation (prospectus) made the best of six proposals in terms of guaranteed public benefits.

Still, Why A Mountain Disneyland?

- It will not be a "Disneyland!" Walt Disney probably expressed the difference best, when he said "Disneyland is entertainment; Mineral King will be outdoor recreation; developed primarily for families; and in full keeping with the environment."

- It will be a mountain recreation area of the finest quality, developed - and used - according to Forest Service approved plans and wholly in harmony with its superlative surroundings.

Why Turn Public Property Over For Private Profit?

- The public needs the development, almost desperately.

- As planned, Disney productions is willing to develop the area with private money according to plans approved by the public agency responsible (the Forest Service).

- They will provide (under continuous Forest Service surveillance) $35 million worth of recreation facilities for use by the public.
- The public will still own the land, and
- The public will gain the much needed recreation opportunities
- The prices charged visitors will be subject to Forest Service control, and
- There will be a $35-million dollar private facility on all pertinent tax rolls
- The economy of central California will be significantly improved.

How Much Land Will The Disney Company Control?

- It will not really control any. It will have
  - Under a 30-year term permit permission to use a maximum of 80 acres upon which to erect most major facilities, and
  - Under an annual permit it will be permitted to construct lifts and trails throughout about 13,000 acres, but this does not preclude other uses of that area by compatible National Forest activities.
- The village will occupy 35 to 50 acres
- The parking structure will occupy 4-1/2 acres
- Less than 400 acres - or less than 4% of the total area involved - will be affected by construction or development of any kind.

What Is The Authority Of The Forest Service To Do This?

- Acts of June 4, 1897, and March 4, 1915, as amended, and June 12, 1960
- This authority has been delegated to provide for
  - Approval of the Master Plan by the Regional Forester
  - Issuance and administration of the permit by the Forest Supervisor.

Is The Forest Service Qualified To Make Such A Decision? Yes. Is This A Forest Service First? No.

- No, it is definitely not a Forest Service first. The Bureau of the Budget reports that the Forest Service already administers 72 percent of all concessions on Federal recreation lands and 75 percent of those with investment over $1 million. Total investment on such National Forest concessions is already well over $100 million worth of resorts, lodges, stores, and other service facilities.

- Nearly 200 well-known winter-sports areas have been similarly established all or part on National Forest lands, such as Mt. Hood (Timberline), Snoqualmie Pass, Crystal Mountain, Mammoth Mountain, Vail, Aspen, Sugar Bush, Mt. Snow, Alta, Sun Valley, Caberfae, Heavenly Valley, Alpine Meadows, Stevens Pass, Squaw Valley, etc.

Why Invade A Wilderness To Make A Ski Area?

- It is not a wilderness - It could never meet Congressionally established wilderness standards.

- There has been a road into Mineral King Valley since the 1920's.

- The valley contains 60-odd summer homes; some campgrounds; an old store, and resort and post office.

- Mining claims and signs of old mining activity are common.

- And, it will not be strictly a ski area. While it will be one of the best ski areas in the country - and probably equal to any in the world - it will really be developed for year-round family use. Sixty percent or more of its use will be in the summer.

How Can One Be Sure The Disney Plan Won't Ruin The Valley - That A Good Job Will Be Done?

- Every plan will be approved by the Forest Service, both general overall plans and the detailed plans; on a site-by-site and facility-by-facility basis.

- All construction will be administered by the Forest Service, and when completed

- All operation will be under Forest Service supervision, including such details as the prices charged.

- An experienced Forest Service recreation expert was assigned in the beginning to work with Disney full time. He is assisted by Forest Service foresters, soil scientists, ecologists, hydrologists, naturalists, engineers (both construction and sanitation), architects, and landscape architects (from the organization employing more practicing landscape architects than any other organization in the world).

- To help make its judgments properly, the Disney Company first had a 3-year permit to develop a Master Plan.

- The Company has already spent over $1/2 million in special studies (all over the world as well as in Mineral King) and plans based on them.

- This should be remembered - the Disney firm is first and foremost a maker of motion pictures. Its success depends upon its public image. It is not likely to put that image in jeopardy by risking a miscue at Mineral King.

- The principal planning guideline - both for the Company and the Forest Service - is to protect the resource while developing it, and do it in complete harmony with the surroundings.

- There will be no development at Mineral King beyond, or out of harmony with, the natural ecological limits of the undeveloped valley, and

- The permit will require that every code - State and Federal - must be adhered to rigidly.

What Will Be The Size - The Capacity - Of The Development?

- Road: 900-1,200 vehicles per hour each way

- Parking: 1,800 cars first year - 3,600, 1978

- Pillows (beds): 1,505 initially - 3,310, 1978

- Eating: 1,300 seats first year - 2,350, 1978

- Lifts: 22 lifts and gondolas

- Skiers: 5,000 in 1973; in 1978, 8,500

- Slopes: 2/3 of capacity for beginners and intermediates

- Runs: Some as long as 4 miles with a drop of 3,700 feet
- Employee housing: 580, 1973; 740, 1978
- Use projected: 1978, 986,000 visitors (60% summer and "non-ski season")

How About The Alpine Village?

- It will be on the present site of the old store, post office, and resort
- It will take between 35-50 acres
- It will be built to an "American Alpine" motif reminiscent (but not a copy) of European mountain resort communities
- It is planned, and will be built, to be fully in harmony with its surroundings
- It will have lodging of several kinds as well as different kinds of restaurants, convention facilities, swimming and skating opportunities, gift and other convenience shops and complementary recreation opportunities
- There will be no cars. They will be kept in a special sub-level parking facility below the entrance to the valley (and completely out of sight from it). Guests will be taken to the village from the parking facility by an electric cog-assisted railroad.

What Will Be The Local Economic Effect?

Economic Research Associates, a well-known private consulting firm, has made some projections on the benefits that it expects to accrue to the State of California as a result of the development of Mineral King:

Upon its planned completion

- Walt Disney will have invested $35 million.
- Secondary investments (i.e. homes, apartments, motels, service stations, etc.) in the Tulare County gateway cities will total $22 million.

- Secondary retail sales generated by new employment will have added on an additional $104 million, and jobs, payrolls, and purchases will have brought in an additional $100 million.

- Each year thereafter

    - expenditures at Mineral King and in the Tulare County gateway cities will be $95 million annually.

    - retail sales will average $23 million

    - secondary sales will average $18 million

    - payrolls will total $13 million

    - taxes from payrolls will be $2 million for the State and $1-1/2 million for Tulare County

    - fees to the Forest Service will be $600,000 annually, of which 25 percent will be returned to the counties in which the Sequoia National Forest is located.

By 1986 new tax revenues from gasoline sales, income and property taxes will be in excess of $48 million annually.

Within 15 years of the completed development of Mineral King there will have been a total expenditure in investments, payrolls, retail sales, etc., of ONE BILLION DOLLARS.

What Will Be Returns To The Government?

- $26,000 fee per year has been paid for first 3 years of the temporary permit

- Expected annual income to Government

    - $600,000 annually, when finished. This will come from

        - a 2% fee on all gross receipts except on uphill devices.

        - a 3%-8% fee on gross receipts for uphill devices according to sales-investment ratio. It graduates, starting at

- 3% on sales up to 60% of investment, and climbing to

- 8% on sales at 100% of investment or over

- And all fees, under the terms of the permit are subject to review and adjustment every 5 years

- Prices charged visitors will be subject to regulation by the Forest Service.

Will Not The Development of A Road To Mineral King Violate The Valley?

No. There is a summer road into Mineral King now, and there has been for many years. It was built at a time when the understanding of what a road can do to landscape amenity values and associated water values was not nearly as sophisticated as it is now. The Mineral King plan calls only for replacing this long-established seasonal road with a road useable year round. The replacement road will be located, planned, and built with a full appreciation of esthetic values and a fully up-to-date understanding of soil stability, erosion, potential, and sedimentation and pollution factors.

Will Not The Development of Mineral King Result In A Water Pollution And Contamination Threat To The Unspoiled River Which Now Flows Out Of Mineral King Through The Park?

No. The watershed from which the East Fork of the Kaweah River now flows is currently subject to heavy summer recreation use; a use that is continually growing. The 60-odd, long-established summer homes in the area depend upon simple pit toilets with all of their attendant contamination hazards. Many of the campers and picnickers using the valley do not have even this advantage.

This current use will be replaced by the use to be served by the Mineral King development, and the Mineral King development will go forward only upon complete assurance that all of the sewage generated in the valley will be handled by the most completely modern sewage-collecting and treatment systems that can be designed. The Nation's best skills will be called upon. No system will be installed or used until it has met every criterion and standard set by both California State health authorities and the Federal Water Pollution Control Agency.

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These same high standards will be insisted upon throughout the valley's use. The Forest Service is determined that the handling of sewage at Mineral King will be second to none. It has no reservations that this aim can be achieved.

Will Not The Construction Involved Result In Inevitable Silt Pollution And Serious Damage To The Quality Of The Water In The River?

No. Modern highway engineers and landscape architects know how to build roads and develop and use recreation facilities without causing accelerated erosion. There has never been any consideration of any other approach to the development of Mineral King. Allegations that the road cannot be built, nor the valley developed and used, without undue erosion, are without basis.

In terms of human pollution and contamination and accelerated erosion and sedimentation, the development of Mineral King will be so planned and administered as to make sure that the water values of the East Fork will not be impaired. This is true in terms of purely esthetic considerations, and it is true in terms of the fishery and other natural resource values. In fact, a comparison of the present situation and changes which can be expected without the valley's development, and the care that will be assured with its development, make it reasonably certain that the net result of the development will be to guarantee the maintenance of the present water values, and possibly a significant enhancement of them.

Are There Not New Transportation Alternatives On The Horizon Which Make The Road Unnecessary?

All possible alternative access possibilities have been thoroughly explored. None shows any promise in any way of being economically feasible. Even the most promising, with every possible advantage, would, if installed, result in a service that could be afforded by only the very wealthy, and this would be contrary to the plan's basic objective - outdoor recreation opportunities which can be enjoyed by families at a reasonable cost.