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Mount Shasta: a 'Trail Town'

By Tim Holt

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What do you do with a ski park where there's no skiing? Where there's been minimal snowfall for three of the last five seasons?

"It's clear that smaller resorts like ours are going to have to make some changes," says Mount Shasta Ski Park General Manager Richard Coots. "Right now we're looking at developing an attraction-based, year 'round resort."

What Coots and the resort's new owners are looking at is weddings and corporate retreats, live music, and mountain biking. They've already put in 25 miles of mountain biking trails. They offer scenic chairlift rides in the summertime and may at some point offer something similar to what amusement parks offer: coaster rides on rails down the slopes.

The town of Mount Shasta already has a history of reinventing itself as economic conditions change – remember those lumber mills? Another major transition may be in order if climate change puts a major dent in winter recreation.

"With the variability of recent winter seasons, it would be better to spread out tourist traffic so it's year 'round," says Logan B. Smith of the Siskiyou County Economic Development Council.

Smith is currently looking into the economic benefits of expanded recreational opportunities in the Mount Shasta region, especially with regard to trail development. This is part of a new push not only to develop more trails, but to lure recreational tourists to those trails – and to local hotels, shops and restaurants.

Mount Shasta Mayor Kathy Morter is one of the leading proponents of this idea, touting its economic benefits, and also the health benefits to local residents of increased trails and trail awareness. Plus, she notes, maintaining those trails can be a way for more folks to get involved in their community.

Morter, Smith, Barry Price of the Mount Shasta Trail Association, and other organizations, are teaming up in a brand-new effort to market Mount Shasta as a “Trail Town.” The Pacific Crest Trail Association has just launched a “Trail Town” pilot program and has chosen Mount Shasta to be its first officially designated “Trail Town” because of its proximity to the PCT and already existing community support for PCT hikers. During initial “Trail Town” meetings there’s been talk of providing a shuttle between the trail and Mount Shasta, and getting local merchants to offer discounts to hikers.

But PCT officials, as well as local organizers, emphasize that the “Trail Town” designation aims to draw attention to all the hiking opportunities in a given area, not just the PCT.

Organizers have already picked a date, July 21, for a “Trail Town launch party” to promote the idea. Details are still being worked out, but one possible feature of the event would be guided hikes of trails in the area.



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