

Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI)

Spout Springs Ski Area

Umatilla National Forest



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Introduction

The Umatilla National Forest would like to offer a unique opportunity to provide services at Spout Springs Ski Area (Spout Springs). This Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) invites submission of concepts that would enhance Spout Springs while maintaining the unique historic experience of the area. The Forest seeks proposals from individuals, governmental, and quasi-governmental agencies, as well as non-profit or for-profit organizations and educational institutions. Creative responses to this request may accommodate a single management entity or multiple entities. Responses received will help the Umatilla National Forest consider options for future management of the Spout Springs Ski Area.

This document is not intended as a formal offering for the award of a contract or for participation in future solicitation. The Forest reserves the right, at its sole discretion to: withdraw the RFEI and/or use the ideas or proposals submitted in any manner deemed to be in the best interest of the Forest Service, including, but not limited to, the undertaking of the prescribed work in a manner other than that which is set forth herein. The Forest likewise reserves the right at any time to change any components, concepts, or approaches of the RFEI. All costs associated with responding to the RFEI are the sole responsibility of the respondent and any such costs shall not be reimbursed by the Forest Service.

Spout Springs Mountain Resort

Downhill and Nordic opportunities have drawn skiers to the Tollgate area of the Blue Mountains since the 1930s. The present-day Spout Springs location was selected in the 1940s for its accessibility and reliable snowfall. In the 1950s and 1960s, United States national ski team athletes trained on the Spout Springs ski jump, which was located near the eastern edge of the ski area. Whitman College athletes also trained at Spout Springs during an era when they were a dominating force on the collegiate ski racing circuit.

Spout Springs has a vertical drop of 530 feet, with 13 downhill runs that are accessed via two fixed-grip double chairlifts. A portion of these runs are illuminated for night skiing. The nordic system within the permit area boasts more than 20 miles of trails that range from beginner to advanced difficulty. The base area features two large chalet-style buildings that serve as the main lodge and rental shop. These buildings harken back to an earlier era of downhill skiing and are a primary component of Spout Springs's historic appeal. Although skiing is the focus at Spout Springs, past owners have also promoted mountain biking, hiking, and other forms of summer recreation.

Spout Springs is located near the summit of the Blue Mountains on Oregon State Highway 204 at an elevation of 4,920 feet. The ski area receives approximately 130 inches of snow per year on average. Passenger vehicle parking for the ski area is accommodated at two large roadside Sno-Parks. One of these Sno-Parks lies within the Spout Springs permit area and has historically been managed by the permit holder in partnership with Oregon Department of Transportation.

The Sno-Park on the opposite side of State Highway 204 is outside the permit area and is managed through a Memorandum of Understanding between Forest Service Region 6 and Oregon Department of Transportation. As part of the dynamic Tollgate community, the Sno-Parks at Spout Springs are utilized by snowshoers, snowmobilers, and nearby cabin owners in addition to ski area patrons.

Forest Description

The Umatilla National Forest is located in the Blue Mountains of southeast Washington and northeast Oregon. It covers 1.4 million acres of diverse landscapes and plant communities. The Forest has some mountainous terrain, but most of the Forest consists of v-shaped valleys separated by narrow ridges or plateaus. The landscape also includes heavily timbered slopes, grassland ridges and benches, and bold basalt outcroppings. Elevations range from 1,600 to 8,000 feet above sea level. Changes in weather are common, but summers are generally warm and dry with cool evenings. Cold, snowy winters and mild temperatures during spring and fall can be expected.

Visitation

This information is included so that interested parties have the basic visitation information that may be desired when considering a business opportunity. Data is largely taken from National Visitor Use Monitoring findings, which occurs every five years across the Umatilla National Forest.

Visitor Trends

The number of visitors to the Forest has decreased over the last 10 years, from an estimated 272,000 visits in 2009 to 195,000 in 2019. However, the 2019 figure represents an increase from the 2014 survey, which estimated 168,000 visitors.

Dispersed recreation and hunting are both very popular on the Umatilla National Forest, and there were an estimated 170,000 visits to general forest areas in 2019. However, downhill skiing remains consistent as a notable “main activity” on the Forest, meaning that the survey respondent entered the Forest solely to participate in that form of recreation. In 2009 and 2019 downhill skiing was the second most popular main activity, while in 2014 it was third.

The majority of visitors to the Umatilla National Forest come from local and regional communities. In 2019, 65% of respondents had traveled 75 miles or less to reach the forest, while only 16% traveled more than 100 miles. In 2009, 73% of respondents had traveled 75 miles or less, while only 11% had traveled more than 100 miles.

Spout Springs is within one hour of the communities of Elgin, Summerville, Imbler, La Grande, Union, Cove, Pendleton, Milton Freewater, and Walla Walla. The Tri-Cities area of Washington, which has approximately 300,000 residents, is less than two hours away.

During the Covid pandemic winters of 2020-21 and 2021-22, many families chose to recreate closer to home rather than take destination vacations. Anecdotally, this led to dramatically increased visitation at downhill and nordic ski areas throughout Oregon and Washington. Due to this being a very recent disruption of average trends, no data exists to quantify precise visitation changes. Any post-pandemic visitation forecasts are speculative.

Spout Springs Visitation

Spout Springs has been a cornerstone of the local ski scene since the 1950s. Although Spout Springs doesn't have the size or varied terrain to become a destination resort, its accessibility and casual atmosphere made it popular among families and beginners in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington. Over the years, Spout Springs developed a reputation for consistently attracting low-to-moderate visitation numbers from people in the area who desired an inexpensive, low-commitment downhill skiing experience. With the recent surge in ski popularity, a revitalized Spout Springs could attract new skiers as well as others who currently travel equivalent distances to Ski Bluewood or Anthony Lakes.

The facilities at Spout Springs include the lodges, chairlifts, and lighting systems. The lodge contains a bar area and a commercial kitchen. The rental shop is well-stocked with downhill skis, snowboards, and nordic skis. Additionally, there is a multi-story caretaker's hut and several small outbuildings. The maintenance history on these buildings is unknown. A qualified applicant will be responsible for completing any needed updates on the structures prior to an initial ski season and performing routine maintenance thereafter.

As stated above, Spout Springs has primarily been a winter destination, but past operators have explored the idea of developing mountain bike trails and other features that would attract users during the summer. The Forest Service welcomes applicants with a four-season vision for operating Spout Springs.

Opportunity

Ultimately, the Umatilla National Forest intends to sell the existing ski area infrastructure and issue a new Ski Area Term Permit to a qualified applicant. In the interim, an entity could initially operate under a Special Use Permit for government owned facilities, until a sale of infrastructure is completed. This RFEI is intended to gauge the level of interest in those opportunities, and to guide the Agency's next steps. This RFEI is the first step, where subsequently the agency may issue a prospectus soliciting detailed proposals to be evaluated and ranked by the agency. The agency will weigh technical and financial ability of respondents to inform the Authorized Officer of legitimate interest in the opportunities. Permits will include the land area covered under the previous permit, approximately 1,413 acres, and that land will remain in Federal ownership.

The Forest is looking for an operator who will provide professional management and operational oversight for all aspects of the ski area, including but not limited to operation and

maintenance of infrastructure and equipment, physical site management, staffing, food and beverage, planning, and development.

The agency has strong interest in expanding the recreational opportunities provided at the site, and encourages interested parties to consider a full spectrum of potential four-season operations that may make the opportunity more desirable and feasible such as biking, hiking, camping, events, etc. Please indicate in your responses any potential opportunities or phased approaches to full operations that you would provide.

Prospective respondents are strongly encouraged to inspect Spout Springs in person prior to submitting a final response to this RFEI. A site visit facilitated by the Forest Service will be available to interested parties, more information is provided below.

The Forest Service does not assure, promise, give warranty, or otherwise guarantee the following:

- A profitable operation. As a condition of application, the Forest Service requires interested parties to conduct their own appraisals of the business opportunity.
- The condition to the title of the improvements. Applicants are strongly encouraged to determine the condition of title to the improvements through examination of all public documents.
- Condition of the improvements. It is up the applicant to establish the condition of the improvements.

Site Visit

The Forest Service will facilitate site visits approximately one month before RFEI responses are due. Individuals and entities wishing to attend a site visit should indicate their interest by emailing Andy Steele at andrew.steele@usda.gov with "Spout Springs Site Visit" in the subject line.

Forest Service Programs and Policies

The Forest Service authorizes use of federally owned facilities under the GRANGER-THYE ACT, SECTION 7 April 24, 1950, and privately owned ski area facilities under the Ski Area Term Permit Act of 1986.

RFEI Submissions

Submission Format

The Forest Service asks interested parties to provide notice of their interest regarding this opportunity. Please provide all information in a letter-size (8.5" X 11") format using 10, 11, or 12-point font for all text with page margins of 1" on all sides. Expressions of Interest must be submitted by electronic copy via e-mail. The electronic copy must be in a Microsoft Office program or a PDF file that allows for copying and pasting of text. Any page with proprietary or

confidential information must be noted with a disclaimer, however applicants should be aware that proposals are broadly subject to public disclosure pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (5 USC § 552).

Please email submission to: andrew.steele@usda.gov with the subject "Spout Springs RFEI Submission." RFEI submissions are due by Sept. 1, 2022.

Submission Criteria

Please provide the following in your expression of interest:

1. **A cover letter** expressing your interest including your name, company or organization, and contact information (phone, address, email address).
2. **Concept.** Please address:
 - a. The type of use proposed. Explain how this use supports the purpose and mission of the Umatilla National Forest.
 - b. A description of planned improvements.
 - c. Any additional information or considerations relevant to the proposed concept or experience.
3. **Business and Financial Considerations.** Address the nature of any partnerships proposed, including the roles and responsibilities of each entity in the proposed use. Describe the cost of planned improvements and your funding source for these improvements.
 - a. If a permit is issued, a fee will likely be charged. The fee can be for items such as: covering the administrative costs for administering the permit, function similar to rent for utilizing a facility, or fund commensurate share of maintenance.

Proposals should not be contingent upon the availability of Forest Service funds.

Questions about the RFEI

Interested respondents may submit questions regarding this RFEI by email to: andrew.steele@usda.gov

Questions can be submitted until Sept. 1, 2022. Answers to all questions will be provided within five (5) working days. All questions and answers will be posted publicly on the Umatilla National Forest website at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/umatilla/recreation/wintersports/recarea/?recid=57043&actid=89>.

Disclaimer

This document is not intended as a formal offering for the award of any legal authorization. Participants should not assume they will receive any preference in connection with any future solicitation should they choose to submit materials in response to this RFEI. The Forest Service reserves the right, at its sole discretion to withdraw or

discontinue the RFEI in whole or in part; use the ideas or materials submitted in response to this RFEI in any manner deemed to be in the best interests of the Forest Service, including, but not limited to, the undertaking of the prescribed work in a manner other than that which is set forth herein. The Forest Service likewise reserves the right, at any time, to change any components, concepts or approaches of the RFEI. All costs associated with responding to the RFEI are the sole responsibility of the respondent and any such costs shall not be reimbursed by the Forest Service. The Forest Service will not return materials submitted in connection with this RFEI. All materials submitted in response to this RFEI shall become the property of Forest Service. The Forest Service shall retain use of the ideas or materials submitted in any manner deemed to be in the best interests of the Forest Service, including, but not limited to, the undertaking of the prescribed work in any manner. The Forest Service likewise reserves the right, at any time, to change any components, concepts or approaches of the RFEI. All costs associated with responding to the RFEI are the sole responsibility of the Applicant and any such costs shall not be reimbursed by the Forest Service. Forest Service assumes no liability for the accuracy of the information provided in this RFEI.