

Commissioners support study on Mission Ridge

By MIKE JOHNSTON *senior writer*

Kittitas County commissioners on Tuesday contributed \$4,500 toward a study to explore the feasibility of developing public access to the Mission Ridge ski area via a route through the Naneum or Colockum creek valleys northeast of Ellensburg and over the Wenatchee Mountains.

The funds will go to the Economic Development Group of Kittitas County that is attempting to raise \$25,000 to match a \$25,000 matching grant earmarked for the study from the state Department of Community, Trade & Economic Development.

Commission Chairman David Bowen said possibility of access to the back side of the popular Mission Ridge ski area from Interstate 90 and through Kittitas County has been discussed for several years by locals. The study is an attempt to find out if it is even possible.

Debbie Strand, Executive Director of the Economic Development Group, said the group has requested contributions from other sources, including the city of Ellensburg. She said the state matching grant is for up to \$25,000, but the study may not cost as much as a full, \$50,000 allocation.

The project, if feasible, has the potential of boosting winter-time tourism in Kittitas County, with visitors to the ski area traveling to the Ellensburg area, she said.

"The need is to determine if the concept is, at least, feasible, given environmental factors and land ownership patterns in the area of the project," Strand said.

The concept includes a large parking area at the base of the hills to Ellensburg's northeast and, possibly, an aerial tram taking skiers to the back side of the ski area and back.