

## Oquirrh ski resort still a possibility

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For years, tales of a mystical skiers' paradise tucked deep in the Oquirrh Mountains captured the fancy of Utahns.

Then late in 2007, Kennecott Land, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto Ltd., announced it was going to turn fable into reality by building a west-bench Shangri-La of its own, although no timetable was provided.

Now, in the midst of a recession, some sure things seem less so, although Kennecott Land president Don Whyte remains optimistic about bringing downhill skiing to the Oquirrhs.

"I've been up to the area where we think there's some potential, and it looks good," Whyte reassures. "We have three years of (snow) studies right now ... and it does look like there's enough snow."

It will still take a couple more years to complete the study work needed to reach a final conclusion on viability, he said. But don't expect him to be a Whyte knight for the project if it's not in the numbers.

"I certainly hope the day comes when I'll be able to ski on a ski hill up there. My gut is that it's economically viable, so I think it's just really a question of when," the avid heli-skier said.

"Capital infrastructure costs to start a ski hill are pretty substantial, however," Whyte acknowledges. "So you want to start something like this when the (economic) ramp is going upwards."

From a technical standpoint, earlier concerns that there might not be sufficient variety of conditions to create a good skiing experience have been allayed by industry experts.

"I'm told there's the right mix of terrain — expert vs. intermediate vs. beginner. There's also more than enough topo in terms of grade change," Whyte said, his civil-engineering background shining through his charcoal-colored suit.

"You need something memorable, something people can point to and say, 'Hey, that's really tough,'" Whyte muses. "Like one of the hills I grew up skiing on (in Canada). When you rode that lift, it meant you knew how to ski, because there wasn't an easy way down."

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