

July 8, 2007

Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 83720  
Boise, Idaho 83720

Dear Governor Otter,

The Cache Peak Civic Association has been informed by Mr. Wallace Keck, manager of the Castle Rocks State Park, that the plans for the proposed "Bunkhouse" have been submitted to your office for approval. Mr. Wynn Dewsnup, a local business owner, reported to our group that he has met with you and your representative, Mr. Bob Wells, about concerns surrounding this project. At that time, he presented you with copies of a petition briefly circulated in our area (due to time constraints) which contain signatures of park visitors and local people who are against the construction of the "Bunkhouse". Our Association consists of local residents and others interested in Almo. The CPCA members would like to express our opposition to the building of the "Bunkhouse".

Our basis is very simple. The community supported the creation of the Castle Rocks Stake Park with the understanding that the pristine nature of the Castles would be protected from commercialization. The "ranching heritage" of the area would be central to the visitor experience. The local citizens involved in the planning committee and open house suggested the building of a simple bunkhouse /primitive picnic shelter in keeping with the ranching theme. In its press release of June 19, 2006, the IDPR announced that "a bunkhouse will be constructed onsite that compliments the park's rustic nature and meets the need for additional, more diverse overnight accommodations in the area." In March, 2007, Mr. Dewsnup was shown plans for the "Bunkhouse", now a unit with several private rooms with bath, a conference room, lounge with fireplace, and kitchen. This was the community's first realization of the IDPR's interpretation of "bunkhouse".

All of the providers of overnight accommodations in our community have expressed deep concern at this development. Facilities include two bed and breakfast establishments, three cabins, an inn which is currently under construction, and a "vacation retreat" whose owners intend to add yurts and other overnight facilities. Other residents expressed their interest in the possibility of adding tourist lodging. Obviously the operation of the IDPR "Bunkhouse" will be in direct and unfair competition with these businesses. Private enterprise cannot compete with tax dollars. High risk and interest costs make it difficult to make a profit without the pressure of unfair competition. At the July meeting of the CPCA, Mr. Keck stated that "We would go after every potential client that we could get". Since visitors to the area nearly always contact the City of Rocks/Castle Rocks Visitor Center to obtain information about the vicinity, the state would have an unfair advantage in advertising and booking their facility. In explaining the situation to people outside the community, the common response is "How can the government do that? Isn't it against the law?"

Mr. Keck suggested at the meeting that the main draw for the "Bunkhouse" will be its setting in the midst of the majestic Castle Rocks. While the other businesses offer scenic views, they are prohibited by law from building in the State Park. Again, unfair competition.

Mr. Keck claims that the "Bunkhouse" will provide a much needed facility for local public meetings. The Almo Outpost offers a building which is licensed for over 60 people and they have been generous in allowing the school and other organizations to use the facility without charge. The recently constructed Emergency Services Building/Firehouse has a large meeting room which is used for community meetings. This building was conceived and constructed through the efforts of local residents.

Mr. Keck has indicated that the construction of the “Bunkhouse” will “create a visitor destination and retreat”. He claims that it will “stimulate local business, and create additional economic and entrepreneurial opportunities” as people staying there will buy food and gas. He suggests a partnership with “educational or non-profit organizations” to bring people into the area for “experienced based education, conservation, recreation enhancement, or rehabilitation in outdoor setting”. The Cache Peak Civic Association believes that while the IDPR setting is beautiful and could be used for such activities, private enterprise should be encouraged to provide the services. We do not believe that it is the function of the IDPR to go into business for itself. Mr. Keck writes that “the goal of this alternative operation is not profit or return on investment, but sustainability of the facility.” In the same paper, he states that the Park would focus on “increasing park revenue to decrease dependence on public tax revenue, and to attain a more self-supporting operation overall”. In other words, the park will engage in all kinds of activities in order to bring in more money.

The members of the Cache Peak Civic Association believe that the \$1.2 million of tax money could be better spent than on the “Bunkhouse”. An interpretive center (already called for in master plans) would more fully meet the IDPR’s stated goals as a “visitor destination and retreat” and an “enjoyable facility for learning and park interpretation”. Trails could be improved and ranch outbuildings which were torn down could be replaced. Many residents would like to see the money spent instead on schools or roads. There are many possibilities.

We believe that the building of the “Bunkhouse” lodging facility is detrimental to the interests of the private sector of the Almo community. We feel that it not only competes unfairly with existing businesses but that it will hamper the development of future business. This is of great concern to residents of an economically depressed rural area.

We would appreciate a response.

Thank you.

Janis Durfee  
Corresponding Secretary  
Cache Peak Civic Association  
PO Box 164 208-824-5536  
Almo, Idaho 83312

Enclosure: Proposed Barn/Bunkhouse at Castle Rocks State Park prepared by Wallace Keck, *IDPR*  
Manager Castle Rocks State Park