Cliffs deal lets building resume

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Golf course redesign to cut stream impact satisfies environmental groups

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The Cliffs Communities and environmental groups said Thursday they had reached an agreement that calls for a redesign of the Tiger Woods golf course near Asheville to reduce its impact on mountain trout streams.

In exchange, the groups will abandon legal challenges to wetland permits issued by North Carolina's Department of Environment and Natural Resources. That will allow major construction to resume on the High Carolina golf course, said Cliffs founder and chief executive Jim Anthony.

Work on the course had slowed while the environmental concerns were addressed, he said.

The Southern Environmental Law Center, on behalf of the Western North Carolina Alliance and Trout Unlimited, had filed a court challenge to the permit issued by state officials for the original golf course design.

Officials at the regional

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CLIFFS

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nonprofit center said the agreement reduces the golf course's impact on headwater trout streams by almost half — from 3,132 linear feet in the original design to 1,655 linear feet in the revised plan.

The original design included extensive underground piping of trout streams, the officials said.

D.J. Gerken, senior attorney at the SELC, said the agreement mitigates the project's impact on North Carolina's mountain headwaters that "are so vital to aquatic life and downstream communities."

"We are pleased with the outcome, and we applaud The Cliffs for their willingness to work hard to address our concerns," said Julie Mayfield, executive director of the Western North Carolina Alliance.

Woods said in a statement the new routing affects the overall length of the course, now 7,300 yards from the back tees, or slightly shorter than originally proposed.

It may take longer to walk between the tees and greens, but the course still will have the views and varied landscape of the Blue Ridge Mountains, he said.

"I'm looking forward to getting back there to check on construction," Woods said.

While Cliffs officials initially were disappointed with the environmentalists' opposition, Anthony said two of the Travelers Rest-based company's core beliefs "are being a good steward of the environment and being a good neighbor."

"So, if folks in the community still had an issue with our development plans, we wanted to try to meet with them to see how we could relieve their concerns," he said.