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By Matthew Thomas

## niseko news *tracking down local stories*

### Native trees inspire master plan groundwork

**SILVER birch trees casting dark shadows on a white, snowy background.**

That's the artistic inspiration for patterns on the road, footpaths and driveways as part of the master-planned facelift of Hirafu's main street—a development that is sure to further Niseko's growth as an international ski resort.

Scheduled for construction in 2011, the master plan for Hirafu-Zaka Street is influenced by Niseko's world-famous snow and native Shirakaba trees.

Besides the groundwork, other aspects of the revamp will also be influenced by Niseko's environmental and cultural setting.

Riccardo Tossani Architecture has been commissioned to design the project, and Tossani said the master plan would transform Hirafu-Zaka from a road to a place to which people would flock.

"The banding of dark paving against a light background across the street and sidewalk and into driveways, patios and public squares will create a sense of open space more akin to a village piazza than just a traffic thoroughfare," Tossani said, describing the unique design as 'zebra-like stripes in the snow'.

"It will be a space for people and social gatherings, rather than just cars, and will also mean the village is kinder to pedestrians and visitors."

Tossani said the design referred to Niseko's 'great



ARTIST'S IMPRESSION... Japan's silver birch trees casting shadows on the snow (below) inspired the Hirafu masterplan.

natural beauty', and would include contemporary additions of banner poles, street furniture and a logo design.

The project also consists of underground power lines, road and sidewalk heating, and landscaping. Custom-designed street furniture will be placed throughout the street, including light poles, directional signs, benches, kiosks and bus shelters.

The implementation of the Hirafu master plan is expected to be completed by the winter of 2011.



SANS SNOW... Niseko is a mountain biker's dream, about to get even better with plans for MTB trails, a BMX track and wakeboard park at Hanazono (below).

### A resort for all seasons

**A STATE-OF-THE-ART bike and wakeboard park will be the centrepiece for Hanazono's year-round sports, adventure and activity resort, set to open this summer.**

Up to 5km of cross-country mountain-bike tracks, trails and jumps, plus freeride terrain, along with a BMX-style 'pump' arena and a skills development area, will be built at Hanazono to cater for beginner to advanced riders.

Hanazono says the currently unnamed park will be the only purpose-built bike park in Hokkaido, and one of few in the whole of Japan.

The bike park was designed by local mountain bike enthusiasts Martin Tse and Paul Butkovich.

"The park has real scope to expand, and the opening will be a milestone for mountain bike facilities in Niseko and Japan," Tse said. "This is Stage 1 of a potential three stages if all goes well."

A wakeboard park will also be built at the foot of the mountain in a lake near the 308 clubhouse, boasting a hi-tech cable system with boxes to ride up on to.

Features are already being built for the bike and wakeboard park, with the official opening day slated for

June 26 this year.

Marketing director Nigel Abbott said that by expanding the resort, Hanazono had made a significant investment in Niseko during the summer.

"Our key objective is to create a year-round resort, and we know that what we're doing is going to put Niseko on the map during summer," he said.

"Our focus at this early stage is on the Japanese market, then we'll move on to other Asian groups like Hong Kong and Singapore, and follow up later on with a wider international demographic."

Abbott said other plans for Hanazono in the summer included summer tubing, 'Euro-bungee', rafting and a 'Spider Web' climbing wall.

A bag jump that is already running this winter will be kept open for the summer, offering a 'dry ramp' for skis and snowboards, and a jump for bikes.

For those who prefer things at a slower pace, the transformation of Hanazono will feature flower gardens to beautify 308, arts and crafts, golf, eco-walks, day tours and a kids' centre.

Abbott said Hanazono was currently in talks to make Hanazono home to Niseko Cycle Week this summer.

