

The Mt. Emily Trails Unit Dilemma

CURRENT FACTS

#1 Union County bought the Mt. Emily Recreation Area land and what timber remains after Forest Capital Partners removes 2/3 of the volume.

#2 A 2/3-volume cut is acknowledged by everyone to be an INDUSTRIAL level cut, not a sustainable cut.

#3 Union County is receiving no money from FCP harvesting!

#4 FCP has marked the biggest trees for removal since it's the most efficient method of getting the volume out.

#5 After the FCP logging, the area will have lost its essential character developed uniquely for over a century.

#6 There will be annual MERA expenses- including fire protection currently at \$4949 and county taxes of \$2170 for a total of \$7119.

#7 MERA's annual income from grazing is \$3,800.

#8 The county MERA account is presently a negative \$12,717.

#9 After FCP's industrial cut the area will need about 25 years of recovery before it will support a sustainable cut.

BACKGROUND

The Commissioners tried to secure outside funding to buy more of the trees at the time of the land purchase but were unsuccessful and decided not to go into debt. With the severe downturn of the economy and timber market, that turned out to be a wise financial move. However FCPs industrial logging will remove the potential for sustainable forest harvesting for decades. That is the future for all 3700 MERA acres.

THE COMMUNITY FOREST OPTION

A community forest management plan has been written for the 550 A Trails Unit that includes the archery range and encompasses the lower SE corner of MERA (the South 1/3 of the non-motorized area). This is the heart of non-motorized recreation because of it's gentle topography, grand trees and proximity to town. For this reason it has been referred to over the years as 'the trails unit'.

DUAL PURPOSES OF THE COMMUNITY FOREST PLAN

#1 Raise over \$500,000 in private funds to GIVE to the county to buy out FCP's interest on the Trails Unit before the trees are cut.

#2 Enable the county to continue honoring its commitments to the voters for multiple use on MERA.

The stewardship plan had to be specific enough to appeal to individuals, organizations and government granting agencies. So the details needed to be addressed in order to assure both the county and the donors that things were understood and agreed upon. This required an intense, dedicated and united effort as evidenced by the detailed information contained in the plan. It is available in full at www.mtemily.org/docs. Everyone realizes management must meet broad prior commitments made by the county to the public.

This plan recommends harvesting, primarily in the areas not logged recently and in scattered areas planted by Boise Cascade 15-20 years ago. Money from this community forest harvesting would go directly to the County MERA account to help cover management expenses. According to the plan, trees that have out-grown spacing for optimum growth and health, should be thinned now. If the majority of the big trees aren't taken out the unique characteristics of the Trails Unit would be retained and the County would have a continuing source of future revenue.

The plan was written by knowledgeable professionals using sound forest practices science based on data from timber stand exams conducted in December, 2009. A list of the authors names and qualifications is available in the Trails Stewardship Plan at www.mtemily.org/docs. Adopting this working document would minimize subjective language and define future sustainable harvesting.

To raise funds to buy the trees, there has to be agreement and commitment to a real management plan based on best forest science. The commissioners retained the right to choose what trees are logged

INTENDED OUTCOMES

The intended outcome of the Community Forest Plan and the subsequent fund raising would be WIN/WIN/WIN/WIN. The Trails Unit would retain its majesty and appeal. The county would have an immediate infusion of funds into its MERA account. Future conflicts would be minimized. And as an extra bonus, a large non-motorized recreation group that has felt marginalized in the MERA process would become energized in support of future MERA efforts.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

In a recent Observer poll 78% of respondents favored turning the Trails Unit into a community forest. This represents only the beginning of the kind of involvement and support the Community Forest could enjoy if the County Commissioners would adopt the Community Forest Plan.