

MERA Public Meeting 1/29/08
Transcribed by Linda Carter

I. Welcome & Introduction
Nellie Bogue Hibbert

Nellie Bogue Hibbert: I would like to welcome all of you to this occasion tonight, we welcome the presenters, the coalition, those of you that are interested in this process and interested in the Mt Emily Recreation Area that we are here to discuss. We wish to especially express our appreciation to the National Guard for providing this facility to us free of charge. We can't tell you how much we appreciate that. As a courtesy to our presenters and to the neighbor which you sit by we ask that you turn off your cell phone. There will be several presenters this evening; they will be a self introduction as they take their turns to present.

Most of you do have a copy of the agenda. There are copies being made available as we speak. If you have comments or suggestions we hope that you will indicate those on the bottom of your questionnaire. We would like to collect those and make those a method of evaluating what the comments are tonight. We also would ask that you have those comments back to Hanley in his planning dept by Feb 15. Please hold your verbal questions until after the presentations. Following that, there will be a narrator, that will be Judge West, and he will take your questions and answers. But again, we will ask that you hold those until all of the presentations are done.

Now I would like to turn this presentation over to Bart Barlow of the Mt Emily Coalition. He will be our first presenter.

II. History of Property Use & Ownership
Bart Barlow

Bart Barlow: Thank you, Nellie. Thanks to everyone for coming here tonight. I know that the weather is not great and we all have busy schedules. But you have made it a priority to be here. Regardless of why you are here, pro, con or just here to ask questions. Thanks for coming.

I do want to thank, once again, the Oregon National Guard, Major Sheehy, Dominick Coats and Brian Dean. They saved us over \$400 by reserving this facility for us, that's awesome. I also want to thank Forest Capitol Partners. We would not even be here, we wouldn't have an opportunity to buy this property if they had not sat down with us and really negotiated in good faith for this. They could sell this property tomorrow for a much higher price than what they have offer to us. They have willing buyers so thank you all so much for this opportunity. Also, the Union County Commissioners. This has been a long two and a half year process. The Commissioners have been hesitant to jump in with both feet. They have made a big case for the fact that this is a public process. We are not going there until we hear from the public and here's the public, and you're all here, that's great. I'm really thankful that they are willing to give us this opportunity.

The Coalition... way to numerous to list. People that walk into a meeting, write a \$700 check and walk out and say 'good luck'. The public, who has helped out, dug in with both feet. I don't need to name names because not one of you people did that to have their name in the newspaper or on the radio, you did it because it was something that you really believed in.

The Observer, especially Billy R and Ted Kramer. Their job, I believe, is to get the word out to the public if there are issues and ideas out there. They really hit it for us. It is because of them that I think a lot of you are here. You read it in the newspaper and so we do have a great opportunity.

Mt Emily Recreation Area (MERA) coalition who is it?

Its Eastern Oregon ATV, its Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, its Turkey Federation, its mountain bikers, its skiers, its runners, its recreation groups. Its people that believe in the Mt Emily area, it means more to them than just another 3600 acres somewhere. We have agency cooperation and help here. You couldn't imagine. Enlisting the help of the Wallowa National Forest, Oregon Fish and Wildlife, State Parks is huge. Those people deal with conflicts, issues all the time. They are great people to sound ideas off of and stuff. They attended most of our meetings and were very helpful and for that, we are thankful.

What are we doing here tonight?

This is really information sharing. We are here to tell you everything we know about MERA and the coalition. We are here to try to share with you the information we have so you are at the same level we are at in terms of understanding.

Hanley is going to talk with you about options that are available. Other presenters will talk about financing, so on and so forth. I'll talk to you a little bit about history and the area in general. The last hour is reserved for you. Once you understand where we are at, the knowledge level we have, you'll be able to ask questions. We know there are a lot of question out there and those are important to us. And, please fill out the questionnaire.

So, what is it that keeps ATVers, wildlife people, skiers, runners, dirt bikers, mountain bikers in a group for two and a half years? Yeah, we had some knock down drag outs, nothing really bad, though. We came up with a goal and the goal was essentially what guided us. It was our mission; it was the glue that held us together. And, that was that we really want to see this area as a showcase of natural resource management. We want it to be showcase of timber management, grazing, water quality, a recreation area, wildlife habitat, all the things it provides today, forever. And, I say forever and there may be some people who don't really believe that, but this property is for sale. People have money, lots of money. It's a beautiful piece of property and thankfully Forest Capital gave us a chance at it. It won't be around very long. So, this is the goal for MERA, it is what has guided us. It's what our management practices are based on.

How did we get here? A couple of years ago we realized that it's pretty clear Mt Emily is going to be for sale. It does not fit in to a timber products type company's long term goals, it's too accessible to the public, it's too close to town, it's too highly conflicted, so on and so forth. It's not the kind of piece of property that a company in the business of managing timber lands really wants to be in. It was going to go away and that need, that desire is what really pulled us all together initially.

So what did we do? We researched, we reviewed, we discussed, we looked at every option we think reasonably available to acquire this property. We have looked at every funding source known to man. We've gone to grant meetings. We've discussed options among coalition members. We have traveled and presented grant applications to State Parks. We think we have worked really hard on this. We prepared a feasibility study and the feasibility study had to also be a management plan. We did an appraisal on the land and a timber appraisal and we developed a bunch of options that Hanley will talk with you about, that are acceptable to, hopefully, the buyer, Union County, and the seller, Forest Capital. We think we have done our homework to get to this point but we need for you to weigh in on that.

So... What are we really talking about tonight? We are talking about trust, support and opportunity.

Support is that, we need to know, if it's important to you that we save this property.. Do you think public access to this property, timber management, long-term resource management, elk habitat. Do you think those are important? And, if Mt Emily is part of that, then we need to hear from you tonight.

We need trust. I have to tell you we don't have a signed check from anybody, but we have grant money lined up; we have opportunities lined up. And, I'm telling you once the property is anchored there are a lot of funding sources out there that we have not even tapped yet to make it work to make it better than what it is. Until the property is anchored until someone owns the property and can sign on the dotted line for those options they don't exist, they are all on telephone calls, they are all on email, the money is really out there. So, if you give us a chance we are really going to make this work. The money is there; the support is there.

I read a psychology article a few months ago. First off, I have to tell you that I'm not a psychologist or anything; in fact, I'm at the other end of the spectrum. My wife and mother saved a lot of money not sending me to a psychologist; they knew right out front that it was hopeless. But, I did read this article and it was both enlightening and alarming! They hooked wires to people brains and did all kinds of crazy things. I wasn't one of them, by the way, I would have volunteered probably, but.... What they found out was 55% of American's make decisions on important issues based on who is presenting it, what group presents it. That shocked me and what I'd like to ask for tonight is that: If you don't like me and if you don't like Union County, what ever it is that might turn you off on the surface, please don't go there. Please dig into this, get the facts, ask a lot of

really hard questions because that is why we are here tonight. Respond to your questionnaire and tell us what you really think

Don't end up in that 55% that say "I don't like the county; I don't like Bart Barlow; I don't like anybody else." Please just dig into the facts and what ever you come up with at that point, we know is real.

That's the Mt Emily recreation area; it's pretty awesome. Nobody that drives by on the free way doesn't think that that's public land; that that's a great area to go play in. It's something that we have been really lucky in the past. We have been able to play there and enjoy it. Time has come to step up to the plate.

Hanley you are next.