

Board of Commissioners Meeting
January 7, 2010

Present: Commissioner Mark D. Davidson
Commissioner Steve McClure
Commissioner R. Nellie Hibbert

Call To Order

Chairman Davidson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. with all three Commission members present.

MERA Trails Unit Timber Management Plan Proposal Continued

The plan was presented at the Board of Commissioners meeting yesterday and a proposed starting point was developed.

Commissioner McClure stated that during the process of purchasing this property there were some assurances made to the grant agencies. Anything that is done has to be subject to the assurances that the County gave to those agencies. The other thing that the Commissioners did was publish a community comment in the newspaper that talked about what the County would do if the property was purchased. He feels that those commitments that were made to the public have to be considered in this decision. The last point in the community comment was sustainable timber resource management practices throughout the property. The County looked at purchasing the timber on MERA but the County could not get there without excessive risk. He explained that he has to look at the management plan that was requested that the Commissioners use and see if it coincides with the management role the County stated they would have in the beginning of the process. He stated that he does not think this plan fits those criteria. He feels that he has to honor the commitment the Commissioners made to the community when the purchase went to the voters. He is willing to discuss the plan and changes that could be made to address the criteria.

Commissioner Hibbert stated that she did make a commitment to the voters and she feels that the document presented is restrictive. She believes that the land needs to be managed for the benefit of the unit, the County and the users.

Commissioner Davidson stated that he met with Hanley Jenkins, Planning Director, and they came up with some goals and objectives that the County can accept and it will be a compromise with the plan that is being presented.

Hanley Jenkins explained that he went directly to the management plan as it was presented to the Board of Commissioners. He looked at the list of the goals, objectives and criteria that were in the management plan and identified the parts of those that would meet the goals, criteria and objectives of the County's prior

commitments. The first goal is altered to read, "To provide sustainable forest management with opportunities for high quality, safe recreation such as hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, birding, cross country skiing, and designated motorized routes." He explained that what has changed in the first goal is sustainable forest management was added and the use of recreational use opportunities has been expanded to recognize that Owsley Canyon and Igo Lanes are designated routes. The County made a commitment to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department that MERA will be open for motorized purposes. The goal was originally focused on non-motorized recreation.

Commissioner Hibbert stated that grazing is not a part of the first goal. Hanley explained that he was trying to focus on the timber management element but he does not think there is anything to prevent the County from adding grazing to the first goal. Commissioner Hibbert explained that she could accept it if grazing was added to the goal because by the omission then it could be perceived as eliminated. Commissioner Hibbert recommended to have the first part of the statement read, "To provide sustainable forest and livestock management..."

Hanley explained that the second goal in the management plan was eliminated and the third goal was kept the same. The second goal recommended for the Commissioners approval states "To provide diverse habitat based on mixed age classes or forest overstory that provides habitat for the many native species of wildlife found in the forests of this region." Hanley explained that the third goal reads, "To provide a site for research in areas such as silviculture, botany, ornithology and fire ecology." The last goal states, "To serve as a destination for field trips for local schools and universities."

Commissioner Hibbert asked why fire ecology was kept in the third goal. Hanley explained that the function is for research and fire ecology could include risk from wildfire as well as prescribed fire. When it states fire ecology he thinks it is both for protection and a risk from wildfire.

Hanley then moved onto the objectives of the Board of Commissioners management plan. The first objective states, "To manage the forest to promote uneven-aged, multilayered stands with old growth qualities and with mixed species composition." That was the first objective that was in the management plan. The second objective states, "To use multiple treatment methods to promote and maintain forest health in prescribed areas and to manage for fire resilient structure and species composition." The third objective reads, "To protect and restore water quality in riparian areas." This is also the same objective that was in the management plan. The fourth objective was the fifth objective in the management plan which reads, "Non-forest openings should be managed for weed control and re-establishment of native species." The fifth objective was the sixth objective in the management plan and states, "Provide opportunities for community involvement in forest maintenance."

Hanley explained that there are eight criteria. The first criteria is new from the proposed plan. The first criteria states, "A primary requirement for long term sustainable forest management will recognize economically sustainable timber harvest practices." Hanley stated that there was reference in the management plan about entries for harvest. The entries should be done on an economical basis. The second states, "The largest most vigorous trees will be retained in general."

Commissioner Hibbert suggested that the term "as conditions warrant" be added to the end of Criteria number 2. Commissioner Davidson stated that he didn't have a problem adding that wording to the criteria.

The third states, "Small trees in overstocked areas may be selectively removed." The fourth criteria states, "Trees with poor vigor or damage from insect or disease attack may be selectively removed." The fifth states, "Some snags that do not present a safety hazard will be left standing for wildlife habitat." The sixth states, "Scattered groups of small trees that do not create dangerous fuel ladders will be retained to provide canopy level diversity and hiding cover for wildlife." The seventh states, "Long-term timber management strategies shall be considered. In some situations, in order to recruit large diameter, old-growth trees, the harvest of larger Ponderosa Pine may facilitate both economic and ecological objectives, while releasing and capitalizing on growth potential of younger trees." The eighth criteria was left as it was in the management plan which states, "As the stands move toward larger diameter classes, tree spacing should be increased over time."

Commissioner Davidson stated that he doesn't feel a great deal of ownership in this revised version of a management plan. His intent was to create a document that he felt met the Commissioners criteria and would give the citizen group a document to use for raising funds to purchase the timber. This is merely a starting point to begin a conversation about what the County wants to see in a management plan for MERA.

Commissioner Hibbert explained that she didn't see anywhere in the proposed plan that the ultimate decision on action on Mt. Emily is left to the County Commissioners. She would like to see the revised version state that the Commissioners have the final decision dealing with MERA.

Commissioner Davidson explained that he would suggest that the Commissioners not accept the management plan proposed but instead adopt the new goals, objectives and criteria to be the management plan for MERA. These goals, objectives and criteria would be applied to the entire recreation area and not just the Trails Unit which the proposed plan is suggesting. Commissioner Hibbert stated that she does not want to have a separate management plan for

one but wants to have a broad based approach to management. If something is adopted it will apply to the entire area. Commissioner Hibbert suggested that the management plan be run by foresters that know forestry practices.

Commissioner Davidson agreed that the Commissioners have people from Oregon Forestry and other professionals to use as consultants to review the County's management plan.

Commissioner McClure stated that he does not think the document that is adopted for the Trails Unit can be universally used for the rest of the MERA units.

Commissioner Hibbert stated that she believes some of the goals, objectives and criteria that are in the new document can be used for all of the units even though some do not apply.

Commissioner Davidson stated that one of the important aspects of the management plan is the first criteria. It explains that the Commissioners are going to have economically sustainable timber practices. The County needs to manage the area in a financially responsible way that creates a positive cash flow to support the maintenance and development of that recreation area. He does not want the property to become a burden on the County's budget rather than an asset.

Commissioner Hibbert explained that the County is developing something that is going to last beyond the current Commission's tenure. She knows that time is an issue to have this plan completed but she is fearful that if the plan is made without further investigation it will tie that County's hands for generations. Commissioner Hibbert stated that she could accept this new revised management plan much easier than she could the original plan that was presented.

Commissioner Hibbert stated that she would like for the County to develop one document for the management of the entire Mt. Emily area.

Hanley thinks that in order to come up with goals, objectives and criteria for the entire area it would be a much larger task that would take a lot longer time period. He doesn't think the deadline can be met that is being imposed to come up with that kind of a document. There is more diversity throughout the entire piece of property than in just the Trails Unit. The treatments that will be proposed for some of the other units would be substantially different than the treatments that would be proposed for the Trails Unit because of the way they have been harvested in the past. The ability to develop a management plan would be based on the product that is left after Forest Capital removes 2/3 of the timber value on the remaining portion of the property regardless of whether the trees on this unit get purchased or not. For the County to try and guess what that management

plan is going to be before the harvest is risky. He thinks the Commissioners should focus on the Trails Unit only at this time recognizing that the County is still in the process of developing a management plan. There will be a specific forest management plan for the unit but that is going to take longer. With the new revised management plan that is in the process of being developed he was trying to provide enough assurances to give the community that is interested in pursuing funding some direction from the Board of Commissioners but yet not commit the County to something that would be contrary to the commitments that have been made or prevent the County from developing a management plan for the property in the future.

Commissioner Hibbert asked how this revised plan would fit into the entire management. Commissioner Davidson stated that if it had to do with the motorized uses all of the non motorized uses would be left out of the plan and would talk about more specific types of motorized recreation. Hanley stated that it may not be that these list of goals, objectives and criteria are contrary to the goals, objectives and criteria for the other units but it will not be inclusive of other objectives for the other units. Some of the other units will have different timber management than the Trails Unit. Hanley explained that the Commissioners are being asked only to consider the management of the Trails Unit at this time.

Commissioner Hibbert asked if sustainable harvest is a term that is used in the industry and if there is a definition of what that means. Hanley stated that question needs to be answered by a forester.

Commissioner McClure pointed out that in criteria three and four it states that small trees and overstocked areas may be removed. He explained that implies that it gives the County permission to remove those. He asked if that was the right wording for the criteria. Commissioner Davidson asked if he wanted to change the word may to shall. Commissioner McClure asked if the word may limits what the County's objective is which is to provide sustainable forest management. Hanley thinks that these criteria are elements that can be implemented to carry out sustainable forest management. This is explaining to the public that these are elements that the County will implement in carrying out the forest management plan for the Trails Unit. Hanley thinks that if the word shall is added it will limit what the County can do.

Commissioner McClure asked if an objective could be added that would say the County would remove other trees that would meet the criteria of a sustainable forest management plan. Commissioner Davidson asked if it could state, "Trees shall be harvested that meet the criteria for long term sustainable forest management" Commissioner McClure stated that he would feel much more comfortable with that statement. Commissioner McClure does not want to make a commitment that the only trees that will be considered for harvest are diseased

or small trees. Commissioner Davidson stated that he thinks that is addressed in some of the other criteria.

Commissioner Hibbert stated that this stand of timber is there and in good condition because of past management practices. For the County to say they are not going to manage the timber there is a potential of diminishing what that piece of property is.

Commissioner Davidson stated that the harvest that Forest Capital is going to execute on the Trails Unit he doesn't believe is in line with Boise Cascades past management practices. He believes that there is language in the goals, objectives and criteria that talks about harvest and removing other things other than brush or doing thinning. This document is just a starting point and can be changed in any way the Commission feels necessary.

Hanley stated that criteria seven can be altered to meet the explained objectives that Commissioner McClure mentioned. It could read, "Long-term timber management strategies will implement a long-term sustainable timber harvest plan. In some situations, in order to recruit large diameter, old growth trees, the harvest of larger Ponderosa Pine may facilitate both economic and ecological objectives, while releasing and capitalizing on the growth potential of younger trees." Hanley explained that it would make it clear that harvest is a part of the management of the timber.

Commissioner McClure asked if it will be put in the goals, objectives and criteria some place that the management decision will reside with the County Commissioners. Hanley stated that a ninth criteria can be added to read, "Union County will retain management decision making authority."

Commissioner Davidson asked the other Commissioners if they would like to have this document re-drafted and then review it again. Commissioner McClure stated that he would like to do that.

The meeting was in recess for twenty minutes.

Hanley presented the Commissioners with a revised draft of the goals, objectives and criteria for the MERA Trails Unit. Commissioner Davidson asked if there were any further modifications to the document.

Commissioner Hibbert stated that under criteria number three it states that small trees may be selectively removed and she thought the statement, "and other trees for sustainable harvest" would be added to that criteria. Hanley stated that he would correct criteria number three to add that wording.

Commissioner Davidson stated that he would like to have "all" added in front of management in criteria number 9.

Commissioner McClure explained that on the criteria he would like it clearly understood that Union County is not limited to only specific trees for harvest.

Commissioner McClure stated that the County committed to having sustainable timber management practices for the entire area. He thinks that commitment to the voters has to be kept.

Hanley explained that the Commissioners are being asked to develop this document under today's situation which is that all of the timber value is there that was there and then some when the property was purchased.

Commissioner McClure stated that one of the commitments that was given to the community was that the County would meet assurances that were given to the granting agencies.

Commissioner Davidson stated that he doesn't know what it would hurt to add a statement that explains the commitments that were made to the community.

Hanley draft a new number one goal to read, "To honor community commitments providing sustainable resource management and meet financial grant assurances." The other goals would just move down so there would be a total of five goals.

Commissioner Davidson recessed the meeting until 2:30 p.m. to have the draft re-typed.

Commissioner Davidson called the meeting back in session. The final drafted document was reviewed by the Commissioners.

Commissioner McClure moved approval of MERA Trails Unit Union County Board of Commissioners Goals, Objectives and Criteria as negotiated. Commissioner Hibbert seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Davidson stated that some of the opponents were concerned that Boise Cascade would lose out on the timber and jobs would be lost if the timber is purchased. He does not believe that to be correct. He has spoken to John Warness at Forest Capital and if the community is successful in raising the funds it does not change Forest Capital's commitment and obligation to Boise Cascade. They will still have to supply them with the same volume of timber. He would like to thank the authors of the stewardship plan that was presented to the Commissioners. He also thanked the citizens that have asked for the time to raise the money and their efforts.

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Commissioner Hibbert appreciates the effort that was put into the stewardship plan. Her goal is to make sure the County is a good steward of the land. She believes they are headed in that direction. She believes the goals, objectives and criteria can be used as a template for a future management plan.

Commissioner McClure stated that he believes it is very important to stay with what the County told the voters they would do. The land is an asset to the community.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:07 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Wilhelm