

# FRUSTRATION IN THE TEANAWAY



KARL HOLAPPA / DAILY RECORD

The Teanaway Valley Unit of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area. A parking lot for public access is planned for the site.

## State land purchase creates trespassing issues for private landowner

**BY KARL HOLAPPA**  
staff writer

When Ryan Rockhill and his wife, Molly, purchased their 50-acre plot in the Teanaway in 2013, they looked forward to enjoying privacy and solitude, but hunters trespassing on their property from a recent public land purchase has shaken up their reality.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife purchased

a 215-acre plot last year that borders the southeast property line of the Rockhill's property. The department has plans for the property, called the Teanaway Valley Unit of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area. The department has demolished outbuildings on the parcel and plans to demolish the existing house and build a parking lot for public use. The land, which has frontage on the Teanaway River, also borders the Teanaway Community Forest.

Rockhill said before the state

purchased the land, there were no issues with trespassing on his property because most of the surrounding land was privately owned. The northern border of his property is shared with the Teanaway Community Forest, but the difficulty of accessing that part of the forest from public access points keeps most people away.

"There had never really been fences up," Rockhill said. "It was all kind of an unspoken agreement that everybody used the property with mutual respect as far as ac-

cess to the river and forest."

When Rockhill became aware of the state's purchase and plans to open the property for public use, he voiced concerns with the WDFW about the property line not being clearly defined with a fence. He said he was told in a face-to-face meeting with department members that a fence would be built on the property line before the 2017 hunting season. That did not happen.

More **LAND** | **A5**



## Land/*from A1*

"Just as we suspected, last fall we had multiple trespassers coming through the property," Rockhill said. "We've got pictures on our trail cameras of people walking through and actively hunting on the property."

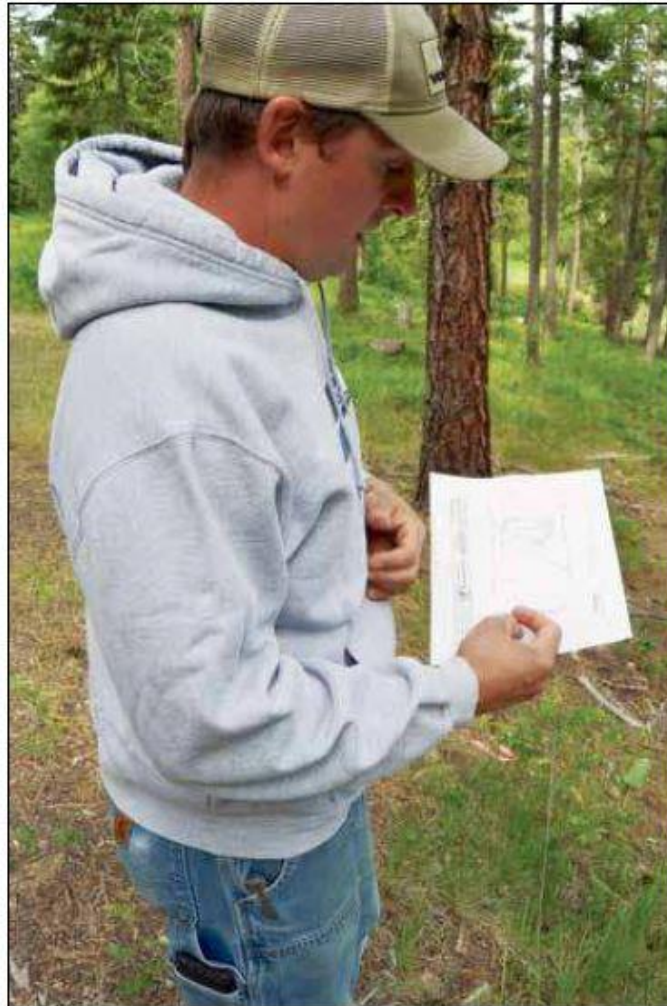
Once Rockhill became aware of active trespassing on his property, he notified WDFW and was told to contact the Kittitas County Sheriff or the Washington State Patrol.

"It didn't really seem to concern them," Rockhill said.

Rockhill posted no trespassing signs along the border with the WDFW parcel after noticing the problem. He said the department came out and helped him mark three points where hunters may cross the property line. As the season progressed, traffic in the area increased. One day while working on a fence, Rockhill said at least a dozen vehicles stopped, with some turning around in his driveway looking for access.

"Somewhere it's advertised that this land is public, and you can now use it," Rockhill said. "They have just done nothing to help explain that to the public and show them where they can and can't go."

Rockhill was told the delay on the fence construction was partially because



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Ryan Rockhill looks at a map showing his shared property line with the land owned by the state. Multiple hunters have trespassed on his land since the state purchased the parcel that neighbors his.

to a Teanaway Community Forest meeting in May to voice concerns during public comment.

"We just hit a point where we said, 'This is enough,'" he said.

STATE RESPONSE

Huffman said he believes public knowledge of the property has spread by word of mouth.

"It's not a secret that we have acquired that property," Huffman said. "We just haven't put it on our website and made all the steps we'd normally do on publicly owned land because we haven't completed the improvements. It's not really accessible because people aren't supposed to be parking on the county road and things like that."

Huffman said there will be a law enforcement presence by WDFW officers who are regularly in the Teanaway, but there are only so many officers for a large area of land.

"We encourage people, if they see anything that they don't like as far as hunting, to report that," Huffman said. "If there are any trespass issues they can call the sheriff's department and report that. The sheriff or WDFW officers can respond."

A kiosk and information about the WDFW and Teanaway Community Forest properties are planned for the parking lot, and Huffman said the department will work with neighboring property owners to put up signage so recreationists are aware of the boundaries.

"We'll do our part as much as we can to maintain the fence and the signs on

Huffman confirmed the projected dates for surveying and fence construction in the email sent to the Rockhills. He said the priority is to build the fence along that border, followed by construction of the



a cultural survey on the WDFW land was taking longer than expected. He said there was also an issue with the property boundary description on the two parcel titles not matching up. He contacted the department in the early spring of this year and asked them where the project was at.

"They've kind put the brakes on the whole thing," Rockhill said. "They keep telling us the cultural survey was the problem, now they're blaming it on the people in Olympia doing the title work and their lawyers not being able to build the fence because of those reasons. We just keep getting pushed off and pushed off and pushed off."

Meanwhile, problems continued during spring hunting season, and Rockhills noticed the memory cards were stolen from their trail cameras. They went

#### STATE RESPONSE

Ross Huffman, regional lands operations manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the cultural review was required through both state and federal funding sources. He said part of the review was related to the age of the house slated for demolition and for future restoration of the property.

"That was a pretty large undertaking," Huffman said. "It took longer than we originally anticipated to get that report going and completed to meet all of our needs. The actual process of consultation with the tribes and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation triggers at least a month-long process. That's wrapped up, so the next step is to try to get our construction crews scheduled and out there to do the work."

parking lot, demolition of existing structures on the property and further fencing along other property lines of the parcel.

"Hopefully it'll all happen this year," Huffman said. "We don't want to build the parking lot before we have the fence because that'll just encourage more people to be using the property without measures we agreed upon to help control movement of people on private property."

our property and also guide people and direct people to where the public lands are," Huffman said.

Huffman hopes getting the fence built as soon as possible will help alleviate some of the frustrations the Rockhills have had with trespassers on their property.

"We are looking forward to getting it resolved and moving in a positive direction going forward," Huffman said.



**Thursday June 14**