

Community Forest subcommittee takes another baby step

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TEANAWAY – Thursday, June 23, a subcommittee working under the umbrella of the Teanaway Community Forest Citizens Advisory Committee met at the armory building in Ellensburg for the fifth time to continue work on a cattle grazing management plan.

Although subcommittee members still appear to be united in their goal to identify ecologically sensitive areas and to restore the watershed as prescribed by the Yakima Integrated Plan –at this stage of the process it is clear it is too early for the group to come to a consensus on how to do it. Why?

No smoking gun?

Subcommittee member **Jim Halstrom** said, “I haven’t yet seen a smoking gun,” implying to date the subcommittee lacks the blanket of evidence that would – in a perfect world – positively identify every single one of the critically sensitive areas in the Forest’s 55,000-acres where impacts from grazing cattle are as obvious as trout in milk.

Even if there were volumes of evidence collected over the 20 years cattleman **Sam Kayser** has been grazing his cattle in the Teanaway there are subcommittee members who would argue about how much of the damage was due to

grazing cattle.

Said range rider **Bill Johnson**, “People and roaming [ungulates] are impacting the watershed, too: deer and elk, campers, bikers, hikers, ATV users, RV users, snowmobilers and landowners.”

Still, without empirical evidence or funding to get the work done in the time-frame allotted, the subcommittee appears to be cornered and left alone to approach the challenge from another direction.

Maps: a good place to start

At last Thursday’s meeting Department of Natural Resources project manager **Eric Winford**, Fish and Wildlife expert **Jeff Burnham** and NOAA scientist **Sean Gross** handed out color-coded maps they and others had produced with GIS mapping software.

The maps and the effort it took to produce them have been characterized as a significant baby-step toward the goal of framing a starting point for the management plan.

Said Winford, “These maps show areas we could protect sensitive areas by fencing-in or fencing-out the cattle, but by no means are these maps to be considered perfect or final, nor should we proceed in our discussion under the assumption that fencing is the only tool at our disposal.”

Gross agreed.

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