

Group begins to talk about motorized use

By **TONY BUHR**

staff writer

Community members are beginning to talk about use of Jeeps, dirt bikes and other motorized vehicles in the Teanaway Community Forest.

Many residents in the Upper County have a long history of enjoying the views and natural landscape in the Teanaway, but after a certain age people are incapable of hiking to those same destinations, said Gary Berndt, a former Kittitas County commissioner. Some have discussed the possibility of one or two roads being allowed for motorized use through the forest, he said.

"At my age if you gate off all the roads and everything is foot or mountain bike, what about us old timers who want to have a picnic, or there is a view or some sort of thing?" Berndt asked.

Teanaway Community Forest was created when the state purchased land formerly owned by the American Forest Land Co. in 2013 as part of the Yakima Basin integrated water management plan. It is the state's first community forest, and an advisory committee has only just begun looking into the potential for motorized access in the Teanaway, said Larry Leach, Department of Natural Resources Assistant Regional Manager. The committee is creating a recreation plan and is four months into a 10-month process.

Teanaway/from A1

"So that's what are the things we need to be conscious of as we're planning recreation opportunities?" Leach said. "And that is wildlife habitat, unstable slopes, water, neighboring land owners."

RECREATION PLAN

In May, DNR published an environmental suitability study that investigated the impacts of different recreational activities within the Teanaway, Leach said.

DNR found that everywhere within the forest was suitable for motorized access to various degrees, he said. Some places had moderate suitability and others low suitability depending on their impact to endangered

species, in particular spotted owl and wolves.

"But maybe the elk calving area where there is a short period of time where we wanted to be conscious of the calves," Leach said. "But the rest of the year it is just fine."

At this point, the advisory committee is considering dirt bikes as the only allowed motorized use, he said. The planning process is preliminary and the committee probably won't discuss motorized use for several more months.

"The impacts are vastly different when you're looking at a single track trail versus a double track trail," Leach said.

COMMUNITY USAGE

Berndt used to be on the Teanaway Advisory

Committee when he was a county commissioner. He understands that motorized vehicles can damage public land and wants agencies to be careful and responsible about allowing access.

"I do understand that urban roads are very difficult and very expensive and when you improve them, it gets more expensive and more difficult," he said. "Because you can't just tear it up, you can't do that."

Berndt also realizes he isn't the only person with interest in the Teanaway Forest. A lot of people have expressed personal desires for their own projects they would like to see accommodated.

"One lady wanted an alpaca trail for that kind of an animal," he said.

There is an argument to keep motorized use to Forest

Service trails south of Interstate 90, Berndt said. The Forest Service has a large trail network for vehicles.

COUNTY SUPPORT

A few weeks ago the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners discussed supporting motorized access through the Teanaway Community Forest.

Commissioner Laura Osiadacz said Upper County residents have a long history of using Teanaway-area trails for motorized travel. The discussion might involve having access at certain points to certain trails, she said.

The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Service might be interested in connecting one or two of their trails to ones in the Teanaway, Osiadacz said. But the Teanaway

Community Forest would have to take the first step before either organization came to the table.

Commissioner Paul Jewell said it is important to remember that motorized access was never allowed in the Teanaway Community Forest or on the land now owned by the Nature Conservancy. People ignored the no trespassing signs.

"Now there is more enforcement on the property which I think is causing more of the concern," he said. "I fully anticipate that we would support some sort of motorized access. It just depends on how that will take shape."

If people could enjoy the public lands through motorized access it might be beneficial to the local economy, Jewell said. People

could spend the day in the Upper County while driving around.

"I would like to see people able to head into Cle Elum eat lunch, fuel up and head out," he said. "Then come back and eat dinner. That would be great."

The only problem he sees is negative interactions with hikers and bikers who want to avoid motorized traffic. Some people are trying to get away from urban environments and enjoy nature, and don't want to run into a vehicle.

"There is also a crowd that likes to hike and doesn't want to have a two-stroke coming around the corner with guys in helmets, throwing rooster tails of mud and rock as they're trying to get the hell out of the way," he said.