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← NEIGHBORS IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK (see inside) →

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Full Weather Report on page A2

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HI 56°/LO 36°

**FRIDAY**  
HI 57°/LO 36°

**SATURDAY**  
HI 54°/LO 38°



**NORTHERN KITTITAS COUNTY TRIBUNE**

COMMUNITY



CATTLE GRAZING in the Teanaway was paused this year and that became the topic of a roundtable discussion with state legislators. This photo taken during the 2015 roundup in the North Fork Teanaway.

N.K.C. TRIBUNE/File photo

Grazing the Teanaway here to stay

by **Jim Fossett**  
NKC Tribune reporter  
(written before his retirement)

TEANAWAY – Grazing cattle in the Teanaway Community Forest’s North Fork Teanaway was paused this season to give the land a rest and a chance to heal after one of the region’s worst droughts in history. The pushback that decision got after unpredictable wet weather patterns turned the grazing area in the North Fork into a lush, green ecosystem was resolved in a civil, positive way according to attendees, by way of a recent meeting with TCF state agency managers (DNR and WDFW), a host of stakeholders, and Ellensburg cattleman **Sam Kayser**, the grazing lessee for the past two decades or more. The result: grazing will return next year, and in fact will remain as an important state-mandated facet of the TCF as a working forest.

First, the decision to pause was made according to the scientific data collected in the field and according to a plan for making that decision created and approved by the TCF Advisory Committee and its Grazing Subcommittee.

After some pushback about the communication and outreach associated with the decision-making process, Representative **Tom Dent** and Senator **Judy Warnick** called a meeting to talk things over.

That meeting was originally scheduled for January, but the catastrophic snowstorm on Jan. 6 got in the way. Finally, in August, all the stakeholders were able to meet in person, together in one room. Here below are outtakes from that meeting from Dent, DNR’s **Larry Leach**, cattle grazer Sam Kayser, and WDFW’s **Mike Livingston**.

**Mike Livingston**  
WDFW Regional Director  
“I appreciated the opportunity to meet face-to-face with Rep. Dent, Sen. Warnick, and livestock operator Sam Kayser to discuss grazing on the Teanaway. It was a productive meeting for sure.

“We discussed how DNR and WDFW are working to balance the five goals the state legislature gave us when they created the Teanaway. The focus of those five goals is (1) watershed health, (2) working lands (e.g., logging and grazing), (3) recreation, (4) fish and wildlife habitat, and (5) robust community involvement.

“We do our best to be transparent in our deci-

sions and, at the same time, recognize there’s always room for improving communication.

“Going forward, the state team will continue to use scientifically based approaches and community input to achieve the state legislature’s vision for the Teanaway Community Forest.”

**Rep. Tom Dent**  
WA House of Representatives  
“At the Aug. 23 meeting, communication was the key. “We scheduled the meeting in the first place to talk about communication leading up to the decision to call for a season of no grazing in the North Fork, to give it a rest, and to explain some of the decisions that were made around grazing.

“To my satisfaction, I was pleased everybody was up front with questions and the answers. Nobody tried to hide or bail out, or anything else. It was good stuff.

“The meeting was actually scheduled in January, but remember that big snowstorm? That was the reason I cancelled the meeting because it was obvious, we weren’t going to get everybody there, and I didn’t want to do a ZOOM meeting. This issue called for a face-to-face, in-person roundtable.

“Because there was a lot of hard work for Sen. Warnick and me to get done through the legislative session in progress at the time, so I just wasn’t able to get everybody together again. Nonetheless, on Aug. 23, we had everybody there, so it was well attended.

“Grazing isn’t going away in the Teanaway. That’s the deal. Why?

“Number One, the TCF is a working Community Forest and grazing is a tool to keep a working forest working, and Number Two, the last thing we’re going to do is let the Teanaway burn from wildfires. Grazing is a tool to help prevent and pushback on wildfire. So, I don’t see grazing going away without a major war. Okay? So, grazing is not going away, because it works. And the Teanaway is a place we’ve proved that it works.

“In grazing areas where there have been wildfires, the fire didn’t spread. It went pretty slow. In areas where the forest was not grazed, it really took off and began to climb the trees using ladder fuel. Grazing can really help reduce wildfire risks.

“I want to make a couple of comments about the Aug. 23 meeting.

“Absolutely it was a posi-

tive meeting. We sat there and it was all about communication. Everyone in the room participated at some level.

“There were good questions that got answered, and that’s something I really work hard on, because I know if we can bring people together and get them in the same room, not on ZOOM, in the same room face-to-face, that we can find some answers. After we looked each other in the eye we realized we have more in common than we do not.

“We came together. That’s what happened. I can’t say enough about the engagement of all the participants. That helped us arrive at a positive outcome for all.

“Guided by the TCF Grazing Management Plan the Community Forest Advisory Committee approved, the managing agencies and the scientists in the field came to their decision to pause grazing for a season because the criteria check they used to make that decision supported the call for a pause. And all that came out in the meeting.

“The only hiccup in the decision-making process was that there wasn’t as good a communication as we believe there should have been. And that’s what the meeting was for, to bring people together and open communication, realizing there were mistakes made and we needed to figure out how to fix them. If there was no problem, we wouldn’t have had to have a meeting, right?

“So, the outcome was: hey, we made a few mistakes with our communication here, but we’re going to fix that. And everybody left with a good frame of mind, the right frame of mind.”

**Larry Leach**  
DNR Assistant Regional Mgr.

“What the TCF Grazing Plan calls for is for us to monitor the range throughout the summer. That’s what we did last summer in 2021. Based on our measurements, we saw the numbers hitting the trigger points, so we tried to move the cows around the forest, something Sam Kayser worked hard at doing. To help him out, we’ve invested tens of thousands of dollars in range fencing.

“So, we’ve been doing our best to implement this Grazing Plan, and I feel our effort has been very transparent and that a lot of people have had input into that. Actually, it was Sam who gave us several great ideas that were incorporated in the Grazing Plan, and his input is based

on his years and years of experience running cows.

“Last year with the terrible drought we had, the grass just didn’t grow, and even though Sam voluntarily put fewer cows out last year, the range just didn’t hold up to the grazing like anyone would have hoped.

“Based on what’s written in the plan that was developed and approved by the Community Forest Advisory Committee, we opted to, since the leases were up for renewal this year anyway, not to graze the North Fork for one year, in favor of getting a year’s rest so that the range could recover.

“Certainly, in November 2021, we couldn’t have predicted the wet spring and summer we got in 2022, but we couldn’t wait to make the decision, otherwise grazers competing for the lease wouldn’t have had time to plan and adjust.

“Across the state, we just can’t make last minute decisions, so we always try to do our grazing leases early, meaning advertise in the winter timeframe, so people have time before cattle turnout to react to what happens with the lease auctions.

“And to be clear, there was nothing about predicting the future considered when we made the decision to pause grazing this year.

“The decision was based on what we measured on the ground according to the TCF Grazing Plan we are operating under. Our measurements in the summer of 2021 said we needed a rest, a pause on grazing in 2022. So, we ran our measurements by the Advisory Committee. There was a debate, and from that debate came an agreed upon consensus to follow the science and the plans criteria, meaning to pause grazing this year.”

Leach said data collected in the field is reviewed quarterly by the TCF Advisory Committee.

“So, to challenge the science,” he said, “you’re challenging a lot of people’s intelligences and they’re not all state agency people.

“I would mention that in the group of those who agreed on a pause, was range WDFW ecologist, **Jeff Burnham**, one of the most brilliant scientists I know.”

Leach went on to acknowledge the pushback on the decision.

“We’ve gotten a lot of questions, but most of that came out of the rumor mill. Unfortunately, some people are get-

ting a slanted story, but thankfully, once we explain the facts, everyone I’ve talked to understands and agrees the pause in grazing made sense.

“Bottom line, our decision was based on what the TCF Advisory Committee-approved Grazing Management Plan tells us to do. And in this case, with the pause on grazing, and with unexpected help from the wetter weather, the grazing range recovered and healed itself in just one year, a good thing for rivers and streams, the forest, and the range.”

**Sam Kayser**  
TCF Grazer

“I believe the concerns of attendees at the Aug. 23 meeting were discussed and satisfactorily answered.

“Communication and outreach surrounding the decision to pause grazing this year was an issue, and it was one of the concerns resolved in a productive, positive way.

“To me, at that meeting, communication improved, and I believe it will continue to improve. The two managing agencies demonstrated their accountability for more than just grazing, logging, fish, recreation, and the community.

“I would also say that we know the managing agencies are in a glass bubble that makes accountability to all stakeholders and special interest groups a complex challenge. They’re under a lot of scrutiny to see how the state’s first state-owned Community Forest is going to work with two agencies managing it. I think they’re under more scrutiny than anywhere else in the state.

“One of the most important things to come out of that meeting included learning how much everybody loves or values the TCF, and that a balance between interests can be achieved, as long as every stakeholder and special interest group understands nobody is going to get everything they want and that they all have to compromise a little. That’s big. Everybody has to learn to compromise a little.

“Judy and Tom have toured the area on horseback with me to see how recreation is impacted in the area. So, they’re well aware of the impacts of recreation, but they’re also well aware that a working forest can produce income for taxpayers – and that’s one of the obligations stated clearly in the state’s five goals for the Teanaway Community forest: to promote and preserve it as a working forest, too.”

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