

IN OUR VIEW

Striking an access balance

By DAILY RECORD EDITORIAL BOARD

One of the more challenging questions to resolve with the Teanaway Community Forest is the question of allowing motorized vehicle access.

The Teanaway forest was owned by Boise Cascade for many years, and then the American Forest Land Co. It was purchased by the state of Washington in 2013 as part of the Yakima Basin integrated water management plan. Motorized use was prohibited when the land was in private hands, but the land had pretty open access. With little enforcement, people did use vehicles on the property.

The Teanaway Community Forest Advisory Committee has been discussing the issue as it works on a recreation plan for the next 10 to 15 years. The group's next meeting is from 3 to 7 p.m., June 8 at the Putnam Centennial Center in Cle Elum. Recreation planning will continue over the next several months.

A state-owned community forest is a new thing so there is an opportunity to craft solutions on public access that could possibly be used elsewhere if and when similar situations arise.

The goal should be the limited and controlled motorized access that provides an opportunity for people with limited mobility to enjoy this publicly owned asset while preserving a non-motorized experience for people coming to the forest specifically to traverse the forest on foot. A road to a scenic view location or some sort of destination is a possible idea.

Most of the forest should be free of motorized use. While traditionally people drove dirt bikes and ORVs on this property it wasn't legal. There are other forested areas in the Upper County where this use is allowed. Looking at the fact that we have paid for this property, the question becomes what is the best way to enhance that investment. Strictly from the perspective of value, land where people can escape the trappings and intrusions of modern society will become more scarce and of higher value.

It is likely that generations from now, if the Teanaway Community Forest experience can maintain a level of serenity, people will see the \$104 million purchase price as an amazing investment. There is the argument that people will come to the Teanaway Community Forest if motorized use is allowed and those visitors will have a positive economic impact on the communities. The same thing can be said for people coming to the Teanaway Community Forest because it does not allow motorized access. If all of the Teanaway Community Forest becomes a dirt-bike track, it will discourage other users from visiting the forest.

Motorized access will have an associated cost. Obviously, paved roads or trails require construction and maintenance. If it is unpaved access there is cost there as well or else the trails degrade. There also is the fact that the amount of trash in areas where motorized access will be allowed will expand exponentially. Hikers may leave trash, as well, but they carry far less of it in their backpacks than people do in their vehicles.

The Teanaway is a beautiful location. The Teanaway Community Forest is an incredible opportunity to preserve this asset for generations to come. Finding balance in types of access allowed will be a challenge, but working to achieve that goal is worth the effort.

DAILY RECORD