

Naneum land's recreational use scrutinized

By MIKE JOHNSTON senior writer

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More than four years after state government acquired 71,000 acres of private timberland north of Ellensburg, efforts to plan for recreational use are under way.

State Department of Natural Resources officials invite the public to an informal, 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday open house to start what they called a comprehensive planning process.

The meeting is set for the Hal Holmes Community Center in Ellensburg and includes a presentation to the audience and public comments at listening stations, according to a DNR news release.

A similar session is set for the same time on Thursday at the Wenatchee Convention Center in Wenatchee.

The Naneum Ridge State Forest includes 71,000 acres 20 miles north of Ellensburg in Kittitas County and 60,000 acres on the other side of the ridge in Chelan County.

Naneum Ridge forest currently has no developed facilities such as campgrounds, DNR officials said, but it does provide attractive and diverse recreation interests such as hunting, fishing, horseback riding, hiking, snowmobiling and driving on the state's "green dot" road system.

Recreation use is expected to steadily increase in the Naneum Ridge State Forest planning area, and the DNR indicated it wants to plan for the future of the area with a long-range view of 20 years.

DNR planners said the state agency is developing sustainable recreation plans for several areas it manages, combining more recreational opportunities with protecting sensitive environmental areas. Plans are developed with extensive involvement of local recreation groups, such as the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club, and the general public, the DNR said. Many of these groups also volunteer to help maintain trails and campgrounds, and clean up heavily used areas.

Coming together

Two years prior to formal dedication of the Naneum Ridge State Forest in early June 2008, DNR and California-based Western Pacific Timber negotiated a land exchange that netted 61,000 acres of new state trust land mostly north of Ellensburg, which combined with an existing checkerboard of DNR lands.

The final agreement traded 20,970 acres of state trust lands scattered in mostly small parcels across 15 counties for 82,548 acres of mostly forested land belonging to Western Pacific Timber in Kittitas, Chelan and other counties.

Much of the land had been mingled in a checkerboard pattern with DNR trust land, creating management challenges for both parties and complicating public access, wildlife habitat management and forestry on the land, according to officials.

The consolidation of the lands greatly improved those management areas and paved the way for better recreational planning, said DNR officials.

The Naneum Ridge area is in the middle of migratory routes and spring and fall ranges for both the Yakima and Colockum elk herds, state wildlife officials indicated.

The exchange consolidated state trust land in the central Cascades into three main forest blocks, including the new state forest.

The consolidation allows DNR to manage contiguous landscapes as opposed to dozens of parcels that are isolated from each other.

If you go

What: Naneum Ridge State Forest recreational planning open houses

When: 7-9 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Hal Holmes Community Center, 209 N. Ruby St.

In Wenatchee: 7-9 p.m. Thursday at the Wenatchee Convention Center, Orchard Exhibit South Room, 121 N. Wenatchee Ave.

Note: The first part of each open house will be a brief presentation on the planning process. Following the introductory presentation, the public will have the opportunity to speak.

Naneum land info

Online:

www.dnr.wa.gov/RecreationEducation/Topics/RecreationPlanning/Pages/amp_rec_naneum_rec_planning.aspx

Call: DNR Recreation Planner Dana Leavitt at 360-902-1606 or

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