

TRAILS: Opponents put a condition on willingness to sit down

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this situation is not currently ripe for a collaborative discussion and/or negotiation.”

The failure of the process to launch demonstrates how fraught the issue has become for people on all sides. It is clear that there was no agreement even as to what participants in the process were supposed to be discussing.

“Given the deeply held positions parties hold on this issue and the challenge in creating a clear, accurate line of communication, Oregon Solutions Network proposed a discussion facilitated by the Oregon Consensus program,” Mills wrote. “This proposed single meeting was intended for parties to gather in a neutral forum to build mutual understanding about their concerns and interests and explore what if any next steps might make sense.

“In exploring this approach, Oregon Consensus

had been asked by trail opponents to converse with trail supporters to see if they would be willing to meet with opponents with the agreement that all alignment options would be on the table.

“Proponents agreed to meet with all options on the table, not just their preferred south side alignment ending at Black Butte Ranch (BBR). Upon reporting this back to opponents, a new condition was made that opponents would not agree to meet unless the option for a trail that ended at BBR was off the table.”

For some, that condition is emblematic of a rejectionist unwillingness to even sit down and talk. But trail opponents take issue with Mills’ perception.

“It’s not that we were unwilling to come, but we were talking two different languages again; we’re reading different playbooks,” Susie Werts told *The Nugget*. Werts was “a lead objector” in the original Forest Service effort to come to a resolution on a proposed trail.

Werts noted that opponents were put on edge from the start by a launch meeting hosted by Deschutes County Commissioner Alan Unger with an invited guest list that did not include any of their representatives.

“The process was never truly neutral from the start and more of an effort should have been made to level the playing field,” Werts wrote in a response to Mills.

She notes that, while the collaborative process was supposed to bring options to the

table, Sisters Trails Alliance President Chuck Humphreys — who was not to be part of the Oregon Consensus meeting — continued to lobby for the original alignment of the trail, starting in Sisters and ending at Black Butte Ranch, where homeowners had raised concerns about privacy infringements.

“... to lobby for the exact same trail placement, while we were working to define the collaborative process, was undermining and broke the fragile trust we were all working to establish. This is when our conditions for meeting changed,” Werts said.

Isolde Hedemark, a BBR resident and ardent opponent of the original trail proposal, told *The Nugget*, “I had emailed (Sisters District Ranger) Kristie Miller last year and offered my participation in discussions to maybe bring a new, supported project to the Forest Service for consideration, as was the desire of the Forest Service. The opportunity to finally discuss an alternate trail location that did not terminate at Black Butte Ranch sounded promising and exactly what many full-time and part-time BBR residents offered as a compromise solution. Unfortunately, Michael Mills could never offer a statement from the STA that a new, supported project was on the table for discussion.

“When this fact became evident to me, I could no longer volunteer to participate in the process...”

Humphreys told *The Nugget* that he understood the proposed Oregon Consensus

meeting to be an “interest-based” discussion where proponents and opponents could air their interests and concerns and understand each others’ position. This would serve as a starting point toward finding a solution to the issue.

He told *The Nugget* that he did not believe there was any constraint on anyone advocating for what they hoped that solution would be.

“We always fully supported Oregon Solutions’ efforts to facilitate a respectful discussion of each side’s interests regarding the proposed trail,” he said. “We’re very sorry that this has been unable to happen so far, and we remain open to such a meeting.”

So, as has been the case throughout this now three-year-long conflict, both sides were talking past each other — and Oregon Solutions felt it could not gain traction and pulled out.

Mills would not hazard

an estimate of how often the Oregon Solutions process collapses like this.

“I would have to query my colleagues before I could guess at a percentage,” he said. “There are times when we are not able to move forward due to the lack of resources for the process and/or the project. With the availability of resources, more often than not, we find a way to proceed further.”

He also noted that “should conditions change and key individuals decide to meet to discuss their interests and views without conditions relating to a trail, if asked, we would look again at how we might be able to help.”

Regardless of Oregon Solutions involvement, it appears that the issue will remain in play.

In response to a query from *The Nugget*, Humphreys noted

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CLASSIFIEDS

Zoning and Comprehensive Plan Designation: Sun Ranch Residential District.

Applicable Criteria: Sisters Development Code (SDC): Chapters 2.13 Sun Ranch Residential District; 3.1 Access and Circulation, 3.2 Landscaping, 3.3 Vehicle and Bicycle Parking, 4.1 Types of Applications and Review Procedures, and 4.3 Land Divisions.

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