

**TRAIL:** A reboot of the process has a ways to go yet

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seeking a clearer indication of community support.

Unger volunteered to seek out that community support, an effort which in itself proved controversial. Oregon Solutions Network, which specializes in conflict resolution, stepped away from a process it had tried to initiate this spring to restart a community discussion on the concept of a paved trail, citing an inability to bring all parties to the table.

Unger proceeded on his own, seeking input on the trail.

“My records indicate that of the 1,200 entities that voiced an opinion about the trail, 256 people and organizations stated their support via email/letter to me,” Unger wrote in his letter to Miller. “I received emails/letters from 86 people in opposition to the proposed path. The positive letters stand out by the strength of their content and the civility of their discourse.”

Unger noted that the majority of correspondence he received, both pro and con, came from Black Butte Ranch property owners.

The letter details Unger’s outreach and concludes that, “I believe a strong majority of Sisters Country residents

and businesses want you to start a new Environmental Assessment of a paved trail connecting Black Butte Ranch through the public forest to the City of Sisters.”

Unger noted that some opponents of the trail softened their opposition or indicated approval when talk turned to a trail running along the north side of the highway. Unger told *The Nugget* that he does not personally favor such a configuration because it “doesn’t connect communities ... and because of that it’s not going to have the same values — but we should consider it.”

He told *The Nugget*, “I don’t think it’s for me to say what configuration the Forest Service might bring forward in the future... That will be brought up and worked through in the EA process.”

The EA process is lengthy and detailed.

If the proposal to reopen the process is accepted, the next step would be to conduct the environmental assessment (EA), which can take anywhere from a year to two-and-a-half years to complete. Miller indicated there is no money in the 2015 budget for an EA and it is on the list for 2016 but is unfunded.

Miller told *The Nugget* that she must find funding and she would also like to set up a series of open houses so the public can provide input on what they’d like to see in a trail.

During the EA, process, all appropriate specialists are consulted regarding the impact of the project, including hydrologists, timber, heritage, fisheries, and wildlife. If it is determined there will be a significant impact, then an environmental impact statement must be completed, which is a more detailed, time-consuming, and expensive process than an EA.

The Forest Service proposes an action, based on purpose and need. There is then a 30-day period for public comment, during which time possible alternatives may be identified.

So Unger’s letter is really only the beginning of the beginning of a possible reboot of the proposal for a trail.

Unger said he appreciates citizens’ willingness to weigh in.

“I thank them for their time and energy to outreach to me and give me their thoughts,” he said.

*(Reporter Sue Stafford contributed to this story.)*



PHOTO PROVIDED

The master will visit Sisters for a haunting literary (and culinary) evening.

**POE DINNER:** Event includes a community dinner

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