

Collaboration key to forest health

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

When conflicting interests arise in forest management, Forest Ecologist Maret Pajutee says that win-win solutions are still possible. Pajutee, whose 25-year Forest Service career is in its final days, spoke to a keenly receptive audience last week as part of the Sisters Trails Alliance (STA) speakers series. She dubbed her talk "Tale of Two Rivers — The Sequel — Keeping the 'Wild' in Wild and Scenic," building on earlier references to restoration efforts on the Metolius River and Whychus Creek.

She began by relating how, 20 years ago, the Forest Service asked its planners to start thinking about the landscape and its future. So, they did, starting with analysis of watershed data dating back to the mid-19th century. One of the particular concerns was the astoundingly pathetic condition of what was then called Squaw Creek, which was so oversubscribed for irrigation that the stream often went completely dry on its way through Sisters in the summer.

Two decades later, the stream has a new name and new life — the result of what Pajutee touted as collaboration. In looking at how to restore what is now known as Whychus Creek, the Forest Service recognized that "It wasn't our water, our fish, or our dams, so we had to adopt a collaborative approach," Pajutee said.

Today, Whychus Creek

once again flows year-round, and its decimated fish populations are being restored. This all came about, she said, not through the efforts of one agency or organization, but as a result of collaboration among many.

"When you think about how screwed up the Whychus system was 20 years ago," Pajutee said, "that was a really fast turnaround."

She reported that, as part of the elaborate restoration efforts, steelhead have already been recorded in a restored portion of Whychus Creek at the Deschutes Land Trust's Camp Polk Preserve, and a few have been observed in the Metolius River, as well.

Pajutee pointed out that Upper Whychus Creek and the lower Metolius River are among the few national gems Congressionally designated as "Wild and Scenic Rivers." There are only 203 such designations in the entire nation, and two of them are right here in our own neighborhood.

Pajutee conceded that the substantial growth projected in Central Oregon will definitely challenge future forest planning.

"Where is the sweet spot for development versus conservation?" she asked, before admitting, "I don't have the answer. None of us does."

She likened the Deschutes National Forest to the proverbial golden goose and showed a graphic with an admonition pleading, "Don't kill the golden goose." And that is the challenge now being faced, she said. Amazingly, use of the Three Sisters Wilderness doubled in 2015 over just

the previous year, and it had already been on a steady increase.

There are currently 1,566 miles of trails in the Deschutes National Forest, 400 of them in the Sisters Ranger District. Various proposals for new trails in the Sisters Ranger District alone would add more than 800 miles. So, obviously, the opportunities for collaborative planning are far from over. Much more will have to be done in the future to balance wilderness with the growing demands being placed upon it.

Part of that process will entail what Pajutee described as "growing new stewards." To accomplish that, the Forest Service and others are already working closely with schools to instill young people with an "attachment to the land" in the hopes of creating an emotional link to the land around us. Adults are also being educated through outreach with other organizations such as that provided by the STA forum.

There was a time, Pajutee



PHOTO BY CRAIG EISENBEIS

Maret Pajutee chats with STA board members Gary Guttormsen and Chuck Humphreys following her pre-retirement address.

said, when competing outdoor, forest, and environmental issues were viewed in a solely partisan manner. Instead, she says, opposing parties can better view each other as allies with common interests in order to seek common solutions. She hopes the days of win/lose confrontations are a thing of the past and that the concept of "mutiple-use" can make everyone winners.

As a perfect illustration, she cited an editorial headline in *The Nugget*

from last October which read "Everybody wins on Whychus Creek," which was the hoped-for resolution all along. In that way, she said, we can all be winners in the long run.

Her remarks were greeted with a standing ovation.

For more information about STA or performing volunteer work on trails or other outdoor-related projects, contact the organization at 541-719-8822 or visit <https://sisterstrailsalliance.wildapricot.org>.

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****NOTE:** Chub worked for over 30 years for major hunting-supply companies and hunted all over the world.

****Directions** Between Redmond and Bend at Deschutes Junction, turn and cross over the railroad tracks. You're on Deschutes Mkt. Rd. Go to Dale Rd. and turn east. Go to Boonesborough Ct. and turn left. WATCH FOR SIGNS!**

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