

WILDHAVEN: Land may be donated to U.S. Forest Service

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in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.” The area would likely be open to hunting.

Johnson does not expect significant changes in how the property is treated and that part of the donation involves “making sure that the conservation values of the property are maintained.”

That is no comfort to Mark and Leslyn Grape, who have served as onsite caretakers for the property since 1998. They were given 90 days notice in March that they will have to leave the property, where they have lived in a stone cottage called Nature House, hand-built by the original donors Gil and Vivian Staender.

“Not only will we be losing our home of two decades, but Wildhaven as we know it will become public domain and cease to exist as it has for decades, a private property, established as a preserve and meant to protect the old-growth junipers, flora, fauna and all of the animals that reside here,” Mark Grape wrote in a lengthy essay to *The Nugget*. “All of the mothers who birth their children on the preserve, all of the wildlife that has been safe for decades, will now be threatened by the encroachment of the public. The elk, bobcat, deer, badger, coyote, turkey, rabbit, ground squirrel, chipmunk, owl, nighthawk and many other species will be vulnerable to man’s gun. I have come home to a young male mountain lion laying up against the front of the Nature House watching the birds in the birdbath and have looked into the eyes of a two-year-old lion standing only feet away from me through a thin pane of glass. In both instances, I did not see savage beasts with bared fangs; I saw innocent, curious, young cats. All of these children of mother earth have only known safety here.”



PHOTO PROVIDED
The 160-acre Wildhaven Preserve is home to a variety of local wildlife.

Johnson said that the Grapes “have been great people to work with. They’ve done a great job taking care of the property.”

In his letter, Grape asserted that the transfer of the land to the Forest Service violates the intent the Staenders had when they donated the property to TNC in 1983.

“We are well aware, as many others are, that neither Gil nor Vivian would have approved or allowed this transfer to occur,” Grape wrote. “It would have angered Gil and broken Vivian’s heart and if they had still been alive, they would have surely contested it. They did not want Wildhaven to be in the hands

of a public entity, that’s why they gave it to the TNC.”

On that point, Johnson, he and TNC respectfully but strongly disagree with the Grapes.

“We strongly consider the intent of the donor,” Johnson told *The Nugget*.

He said that TNC talked to Staender in 2014 (he died in 2016) and that Staender was aware of the possibility that TNC would donate the land to the Forest Service.

“We directly asked him if he was comfortable with transferring the property, including the building he built, to another conservation organization or agency,” Johnson said.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Nature House was built by hand by Gil and Vivian Staender. It has been the home of the Wildhaven Preserve caretakers, Mark and Leslyn Grape.

The transfer is not yet underway, but Johnson said it is not too far off — and likely would be completed within

this calendar year. “If it’s going to happen, it’s not years down the road,” he said.

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