

Collaborative promotes forest restoration

The prescribed fires touched off southwest of Sisters last week are representative of the kind of work the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project is built to promote.

The Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project aims to restore local forests to a healthier, more resilient condition through science-driven restoration projects. The Collaborative is comprised of a volunteer stakeholder committee of 19 community members representing land management agencies, tribal groups, the timber industry, environmental nonprofits, recreational and tourism interests, scientists, government officials, and wildlife specialists.

Rod Bonacker of Sisters is part of that steering committee.

“The conversations that are had there are very open and very science-focused and they really forward the mission of forest restoration and fuels reduction,” he said.

The Collaborative plays an active role in community education about the need for active forest restoration — and in lobbying to get the funds allocated to actually do the work.

“The Forest Service can’t lobby for more funding for forest restoration and fuels reduction,” Bonacker said. “But the Collaborative can — and has.”

The Collaborative seeks to promote safer communities, and improved wildlife habitat, and to protect water resources. By promoting forest projects, they seek to grow opportunities for jobs working in the forest, while protecting local economies from the often devastating effects of disruption from wildfire.

Dave Stowe has been a part of the Collaborative for a dozen years, through his affiliation with the Sierra Club.

“I grew up on this forest and I’ve loved it my whole life,” he said. “And my family has lived on this forest for generations before me.”

Stowe didn’t like a lot of the changes he was seeing on the forest as the area grew, and he sought a way to engage effectively in protecting and enhancing the landscape he loves. The Collaborative seemed like a place to do that.

Initially, he said, “it wasn’t much fun.” There was a lot of the traditional head-butting between environmentalists and loggers. But gradually, simply through the process of working together, relationships developed, and common goals emerged.

“It was extremely challenging at the start,” he said. “It went from that to having

really great relationships with all these different members of the community... you start to trust people and see their point of view.”

Bringing together people from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, and working with people at the cutting edge of forest science, the Collaborative was able to move onto a wide swath of common ground.

What that common ground amounts to is a pretty simple proposition, Stowe notes: Whether you want to work in the woods, ride your bike, hike, fish in the streams and lakes, “the common ground in all that is, you need a healthy forest to do that in.”

Defining what a healthy forest is requires a deep understanding of the science, which Stowe feels he has received.

“The decisions we make in the Collaborative are deeply science-driven, which I really appreciate,” he said. “I’ve learned a ton in this Collaborative. I’m a richer person for it and I have a better understanding of the forest.”

For more information on the Collaborative and its work and how to get involved, visit <http://deschutescollaborativeforest.org/>.

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City of Sisters bulletin

By Cory Misley
City Manager

The City of Sisters is celebrating its 75th anniversary of incorporation this year.

Over the decades, there have been many topics and issues that have created conversation, and sometimes controversy, in the community. Fortunately, the people here and now in Sisters are willing to come together for vibrant discussion, putting the bigger picture above their perspective and interests, acknowledging the challenges of balancing many factors and constraints.

Most notably are those at the City who volunteer to be elected on City Council or appointed to a City committee. There are several dozens of these community members dedicating their time to shape Sisters through countless past and current projects.

Over the past few years, the City and numerous other community partner organizations have reached out to hear how we can best shape the future of Sisters. It was a year-long planning process in 2018/19 to create the Sisters Country Vision led by the Vision Action Team consisting of 31 members.

The vision we created for ourselves is “the overarching aspiration for this place we call home. Incorporating input from participants across the community, it reflects the ideas and words of Sisters Country residents themselves — and their intentions for a more prosperous, livable, resilient, and connected community.”

It includes 20 strategies, five per focus area, that were thoroughly developed, vetted, and ranked by the community. Under “Prosperous” there is the strategy

Forest Service Property Development: “Facilitate the development of a masterplan on the U.S. Forest Service property that is compatible with the community’s character and identity, combining mixed-used commercial, residential, and recreational facilities that anchor and define the community, create new jobs, and provide housing options.”

Balancing factors and constraints, there has been progress towards that strategy. To get a good sense of where the community is going refer to the strategies in the Vision as the Vision Implementation Team (VIT) continues to work together to further those community priorities through action items.

Everything is more complicated than it seems and often it is not easy to understand. The people that make up the organization at the City of Sisters want to educate, engage, and empower the community — we work in public service for those reasons.

The ongoing Comprehensive Plan Update that started last fall is incorporating the Vision and other community feedback into the City’s overarching legal planning document. It is the “teeth” that allows us to manage and

shape growth.

It is too simplistic to say either pro-growth or anti-growth. We must plan intelligently for the community we want tomorrow and pull the levers within our control. Among other things, we cannot defy the state’s land-use planning system, and Sisters does not exist in a bubble immune to a global pandemic creating “Zoom towns.”

I enjoy working in Sisters for a variety of reasons. One reason, especially in the political culture lately, is that the distance between constituents and representatives is measured in feet and city blocks, not hundreds or thousands of miles. Unfortunately, some do not see the value of that distinction. I can say confidently that the City is made up of people who are welcoming and want to help. We offer invitations to participate and proactively engage to the best of our ability. The reality is if you want to get involved you can, and it is as simple as calling me if you want to learn more about anything related to the City.

I may not have all the answers, or tell you what you want to hear, but I will always have an open, honest, fact-based conversation, and thank you for your input.



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