

Meadow north of Selma cleared for wildlife by Oregon Hunters Association

Some 24 members of the Josephine County Chapter of Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) spent Saturday, Jan. 10 cutting and clearing brush and trees from Butcherknife Meadow in the Siskiyou National Forest north of Selma.

The project is part of a multiyear effort to improve forage for big game and other wildlife in Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

"Our goal is to clear about 200 acres of meadow habitat each year to enhance big game forage," said Brett Loper, OHA chapter president, of Grants Pass. "We gave \$5,000 for the project last year and are contributing another \$5,000 for 2009."

Grasses and herbaceous flowering plants found in

meadow habitat are a major food source for a variety of wildlife species, especially deer and elk. But as time passes, conifers and shrubs begin to encroach on meadows and will eventually convert them to forest habitat. To keep the meadows open, they need to be cleared of trees and brush then maintained with controlled burns every three to five years.

For the Jan. 10 project, OHA volunteers cut encroaching brush and conifers, accumulating 64 piles that the U.S. Forest Service will burn. Last year, OHA helped USFS open nearly 300 acres of meadow at Waters Creek, also near Selma.

Healthy meadow habitat is important for wildlife.



Photo provided

"These open, grass meadows make up only about 1 percent of the forest, but

they get very heavy use by deer, elk, wild turkey, grouse and other wildlife species,"

said David Austin, supervisory wildlife biologist for the Wild River and Siskiyou

Mountains ranger districts of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

Meadow habitat enhancement projects have been conducted in Siskiyou National Forest during the past five years. Besides OHA, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife have been working with USFS on the meadow projects.

OHA is the state's largest pro-hunting organization, with more than 10,000 members and 25 chapters statewide. Its mission is "to provide abundant huntable wildlife resources in Oregon for present and future generations, enhancement of wildlife habitat and protection of hunters rights."

Land-use activist Sommer seen by some as presenting 'poorly developed' arguments

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

On Monday night, Jan. 12, the Cave Junction City Council denied a request by Merlin resident and land-use activist Holger Sommer to waive an order by the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) to pay approximately \$7,500 in legal fees.

For Sommer, the denial was simply the latest in a series of local battles regarding land-use issues.

During the past few years, Sommer has maintained a constant presence before the Josephine County Board of Commissioners, as well as the Cave Junction and

Grants Pass city councils. And he's stepped on some toes along the way.

Grants Pass-based attorney Jim Dole is among Sommer's biggest critics.

"He has wasted a lot of time and a lot of money on the part of a lot of people in this community," Dole said. "I just don't think it's right."

Dole has represented Copeland Sand & Gravel, defending against many of Sommer's LUBA appeals.

"The majority of his arguments are so poorly developed that it becomes extremely difficult for a lawyer to respond to them," Dole said. "I think the LUBA

members have also struggled to make sense of the points he's trying to make. In a number of instances, the law is squarely the opposite of what he says it is."

In a June 27, 2007 decision in which it ruled against Sommer and several other petitioners and in favor of Josephine County, LUBA representatives stated that "determining what to do with petitioners' third assignment of error is problematic at best."

"The argument in support of that assignment of error rambles for over 40 pages. Not only is the numbering and presentation confusing, it is nearly impossible

to ascertain what, if anything, petitioners are actually arguing in any particular portion of the brief," LUBA stated.

That same document later refers to the "often disjointed arguments that are presented by petitioners in support of this assignment of error" and



Holger Sommer (center, in dark vest) is seen during a county land-use hearing in 2008 attended by some Copeland employees. (I.V. News file photo)

County board revamps airport advisory committees

By MICHELLE BINKER
Staff Writer

Although demand has been steady from Illinois Valley residents that the Josephine County Board of Commissioners re-establish an airport advisory board, there has been reluctance to recreate past "contentious" and "unproductive" boards.

Now that the developers of a posh golf resort adjacent to the Grants Pass Airport are involved, the idea seems to have gained some traction with the county.

Commissioner Dave

Toler brought up the matter on Friday, Jan. 9.

"There is a lot of demand for it in Illinois Valley," said Toler. "I was in a recent meeting with Paradise Ranch folks, and they would like to see an advisory board out in Merlin, too."

Toler recommended that each airport have its own board, because there isn't much common ground between the two facilities.

Alex Grossi, county airports director, agreed.

"There are no similar issues, it's night and day,"

Grossi said.

Recommended composition of the board would have representatives from the chamber of commerce, businesses, airport tenants and users, a community development organization and two at-large positions, said Toler.

With admitted reluctance, commission Chairman Dwight Ellis said he'd be willing to try again. He stated that past committees had been unproductive and contentious because they were loaded with people who wanted the airport for their own specific

uses. "You have special users out there who what this to be their own private playground and recreational airstrip," said Ellis.

With an open door policy, Grossi said that he gets "good input from people," but that the constraints of his operation don't permit him to please everybody.

"Because (the airport department) is an enterprise fund and it has to be operated like a business" said Grossi, "I can't do as much politically to satisfy people because I have a structure that I have to conform to, both from the feds and from managing my budget."

Toler pointed out that the county had citizen advisory committees for most every facet of its services, and their purpose is to advise the county commissioners. He felt there was no reason why it should not work for the airports. Toler also seemed hopeful that individuals filling the slotted positions would represent group rather than individual interests.

The commissioners voted 3-0 to re-establish the two boards. Commissioner Sandi Cassanelli, who is the current airport liaison, with Grossi, will work to pin down details. After county legal counsel takes a look at the bylaws, advertising will take place to fill the at-large positions.

"The onus is on you," Ellis told Cassanelli.

states that "the arguments presented in support of this assignment of error are so poorly stated and developed that the overwhelming majority of it cannot be responded to."

Bill Peterson, Copeland administrator and former Grants Pass city manager, said that the company has spent "multiple tens of thousands of dollars" fighting LUBA appeals filed by Sommer.

Josephine County legal counsel Steve Rich said that each additional LUBA hearing requires the use of staff time, and records have to be preserved and assembled, which takes "hundreds of man hours." There's also the staff time for drafting the briefs and presenting the arguments.

Rich estimates that the county has spent "easily tens of thousands of dollars" fighting Sommer's various LUBA appeals. Peterson added that every LUBA appeal has direct costs between \$3,000 and \$7,000, and comes with a series of hidden costs.

"Projects physically can't get done, or they lose money," Peterson said. "It has a tremendous economic impact." As an example, he points to Barlow Sand & Gravel, which is Copeland's Cave Junction affiliate. That company is now down to one part-time employee, Peterson said, although it used to employ many more.

"We had nine people out there," Peterson said. "It was intended to be producing aggregate to satisfy the demands throughout the county. But real people lose real jobs."

Peterson notes that with the recent economic downturn, some of those employees would have been laid off anyway, but he said that it wouldn't have happened as quickly.

"Are the appeals solely to blame for the job loss? They are not," Peterson said. "(But) It is a contributing factor, and it's a major one."

(Continued next issue. Read the entire article online at illinois-valley-news.com)

Illinois Valley Airport 'wish list' voiced

(Continued from page 7)

new facilities, current projections of airport activity, new environmental and other regulatory constraints, appropriate land use to support usage and long-term financial health.

Anderson and project planner Sarah Lucas, explained that WHPacific would produce an airport layout drawing. It will "depict the existing airport facility and graphically show the recommended improvements," and a capital improvement plan, "that will provide the airport with a method and proposed schedule for correcting identified airport design deficiencies."

Included in WHPacific's report will be a "review of historic buildings on the airport and how they may affect future development," and a discussion of appropriate Airport Reference Codes, which dictate the FAA's design and safety standards.

The role of the advisory committee, Anderson explained, is to review the infor-

mation provided and give the planners input based on their familiarity with the airport, the community and public input.

"One thing we will ask of the committee is rumor control," Anderson said noting that, "Airports can be lightning rods for one issue or another in a community, whether it is noise or environmental issues or the types of aircraft being planned for."

Among comments from the committee, Bill Gettle, owner of The Flying Machine at the airport, asserted that the current ALP has many mistakes.

Committee member Ed Russell had a slew of concerns, from the incomplete industrial park to the west and its connection to the airport, to historic and utilitarian quality of the airport for general aviation.

Don Moore, Cave Junction mayor, added that the facility is a valuable asset, but "it's terribly underused."

"If you don't have hangar space," said Moore, "you

can't bring more business to this airport."

Committee member Keith Hill pointed out that the I.V. Airport is an alternate airstrip should coastal or nearby facilities be fogged in, but suffers from lack of fuel.

"It is the one big thing that would increase tremendously the functionality of this airport," said Hill. Several in attendance indicated their agreement.

Those present spoke of a thriving airport which currently hosts private flight training, aviation maintenance and camping. They also expressed hopes of seeing the historic Siskiyou Smokejumper Base become a destination. And they underscored the need for fuel.

Three more workshops will be scheduled throughout the year.

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