

Citizens group forms to protect McCall area endowment lands

A citizens group has formed to “conserve and protect” state endowment lands in the McCall area.

The Payette Endowment Lands Alliance originally formed to place a full-page ad signed by more than 650 people that appeared in The Star News on July 20.

The ad opposed a proposal by Trident Holdings of Boise to trade 28,000 acres of state endowment land for timber land in northern Idaho.

Trident Holdings withdrew its proposal to the Idaho Department of Lands in July, but the state land board ordered a long-term management plan for state lands around McCall. That plan is expected to be finished by the end of the year.

“We felt it was important to organize and give citizens an effective voice in advocating for protection of these lands,” said Deb Fereday of McCall, one of the organizers of the Payette Endowment Lands Alliance.

“The idea of privatizing these lands led us to organize this group,” Fereday said. “We realized how vulnerable these lands are, both ecologically and politically.”

Seek Collaboration

The group will seek to collaborate with the land board and others to find ways to generate revenue for the state and comment on management while protecting the McCall area lands, she said.

The McCall area endowment lands are located south of Upper Payette Lake, on both sides of the North Fork of the Payette River and Payette Lake, east to Little Payette Lake, Lake Fork Creek and down the east side of Long Valley through the west face of Jughandle Mountain to Paddy Flat Road.

The lands provide rich wildlife habitat, public access to lakes and rivers, recreational opportunities and protection for the Payette watershed, group spokesperson Julie Manning of McCall said.

The group recognizes the land board has a constitutional mandate to manage the lands for maximum long-term gain for public schools, Manning said.

“Because of its mandated fiduciary responsibility, the state faces certain unique challenges managing these lands,” she said.

“However, we feel the trust responsibility provides some discretion and flexibility, and it’s important for managers to consider the broader social, economic, and environmental benefits of these lands for the McCall area and the public,” Manning said.

Historical Uses

The state has historically managed the McCall-area lands to accommodate recreation, hunting, fishing and camping, as well as

ecological considerations, water quality and aesthetics, Fereday said.

“We feel the land board recognizes that keeping the lands ecologically healthy is crucial to their long-term value and we want to support that,” she said.

The group recognizes the primary importance of water quality and the health of the lakes, especially as

pressure builds for more development, Fereday said.

“As the world faces dire environmental challenges heightened by climate chaos, we need to be vigilant and protective of what we still have,” the group’s mission statement said.

Write to pelamccall@gmail.com for information on the Payette Endowment Lands Alliance.