

OUR VIEW:

Cedar grove deserves state park protection; old-growth trees on Moscow Mountain are too precious to lose

Steve McClure, for the editorial board
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The idea of a state park in Latah County has some appeal. So does the notion of protecting several hundred acres of old-growth cedar trees.

County commissioners could keep the conversation going by lending their support to a move that would make 296 acres on Moscow Mountain a state park.

Supporters of the plan made their case to Latah County commissioners Wednesday, and members of the Moscow Mountain State Park Campaign present a compelling argument.

The group is asking county commissioners to help sponsor legislation that will create a state park on Moscow Mountain, preserve the trees and establish a citizen advisory group. It's an idea that definitely warrants discussion by the Legislature and Gov. Dirk Kempthorne.

The idea has been kicked around before, in 1990, but never materialized.

Now, with advocates of the old-growth cedar that stand tall on the mountain looking for a means to protect the land, its time has come.

The land has been leased by the Nature Conservancy since 1996, but the organization has announced it will end its agreement with the state Dec. 31. Since the Legislature will wrap up its work in a couple of months, it's time to get moving.

There are a number of questions that still need to be worked out, many of which are the same problems that have faced private landowners on the mountain for years. If the goal is to protect the land for responsible use by the public, there needs to be a plan that will address the bozos who haven't been all that responsible when they rip through private property on the mountain with their uninvited ATVs and random target practice.

Those concerns shouldn't derail support for a state park in the county, and those concerns shouldn't inhibit the county or the state from moving forward with this proposal.

Moscow Mountain has been enjoyed by area residents for a long time. Designating a portion of the mountain as a state park will allow Latah County to share this regional treasure with the rest of the state.