

OUR VIEW: Moscow Mt. saga a good civics lesson for everyone

Virginia Henderson, for the editorial board
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It's a great moment in Moscow history. A 300-acre grove of cedar trees growing for hundreds of years on Moscow Mountain is going to be protected.

A lot of people around here love that grove. They got worried, then got busy when they realized the trees might be in trouble. The Nature Conservancy, a national nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of environmental treasures, announced a couple of months ago it would not renew its 10-year lease upon expiration in December. That meant the trees would lose the protection that lease provided.

What would happen next was anyone's guess. The land is owned by the state, which could sell it to the highest bidder.

A handful of local people weren't going to let that happen.

About 10 years ago, people tried to get the area set aside as a state park. That effort failed. But resident Mark Solomon thought of reviving the idea as a way to preserve the cedar grove. He rustled up supporters, and the group set out writing letters, making phone calls and talking to people on the street to get signatures on their petition. They secured official support from the Moscow City Council and Latah County commissioners.

Republicans Rep. Tom Trail and Sen. Gary Schroeder also did what they're supposed to: They listened to constituents and pushed for the idea, all the while knowing funding would be a problem. The effort failed, but a clear message was sent: Latah County is serious about that cedar grove.

Finally, with some more wrangling and a strong letter to the State Land Board from county commissioners asking for help, the good news came this week. Commissioner Paul Kimmell learned of the board's go-ahead to form a four-person committee that will ensure the grove's preservation.

The county is to be commended. It pushed for this outcome, and it is willing to take on the burden of stewardship if necessary.

This is how citizenship in America is supposed to look. Ordinary people speak, elected officials listen. Equitable solutions emerge.

That's something to feel good, even hopeful about whenever we visit or pass by Moscow Mountain. Always a symbol of natural beauty, it's joined other great moments in our civic history.