

OUR VIEW: Local control is best for cedar grove

By Steve McClure, for the editorial board

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Securing a signature on a lease agreement between Latah County and the Idaho Department of Lands is an important step forward when it comes to the cedar grove on Moscow Mountain.

There hasn't been too much doubt that the county was ready to step into the fray after the Nature Conservancy announced earlier this year it wouldn't renew its lease on the 300 acres of forest. The grove's value is hard to quantify, certainly, but we know it shouldn't be measured in board feet.

The steps that come after the lease are equally important, and the active participation of people at the local level will be critical to the long-term success of what should be the county's next park.

The Nature Conservancy stepped in almost 10 years ago to preserve the area, where cedars dating back between 600 and 1,000 years provide a place like no other.

The Nature Conservancy, though, always viewed the lease as a short-term gig to give local residents a chance to find a solution. Now it's our turn, and the county commissioners are looking for a long-term deal that likely will include swapping some agriculture land to preserve the cedar grove. If that plan comes together, the commissioners indicate they'll work with local organizations to determine the best way to open the area up to the public.

That's going to be part of the challenge.

The balance between public land and private land has been an issue on Moscow Mountain, with residents struggling to keep the more destructive elements from tearing up private property. The gene pool can run a bit shallow sometimes, and there are those folks who can't figure out that a fence is an indication the property owner doesn't want people tearing up a path with a four-wheeler.

Those issues will need to be addressed if Latah County turns the cedar grove into a public park.

There's serenity among the trees, and that's one of the reasons local supporters have fought so hard to preserve the cedar grove.