

# Park protection eyed for cedar grove

By DAVID JOHNSON  
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MOSCOW -- The Latah County commissioners Wednesday agreed to promote the potential for a state park atop Moscow Mountain that would include preservation of a grove of ancient cedar trees.

Commissioner Paul Kimmell, at the urging of Moscow Mountain resident Mark Solomon and others, said he will visit officials in Boise next week and float the concept of a park as a way to ensure the future of the cedar grove.

The commissioners balked at taking any formal action at this time, agreeing other options for saving the grove might arise. The trees, some of them around 1,000 years old, Solomon estimated, are located on about 60 acres within a 296-acre parcel of state endowment property.

For the past decade, the Nature Conservancy has leased the entire acreage for \$6,000 a year and thereby ensured the future of the cedar grove. But the lease is about to end and Solomon said state park status might be the best way to make sure the area remains intact and the trees are saved.

Solomon said Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne has close ties to the property, since he was married near the cedar grove. The governor also has proposed new state park legislation that might provide an avenue, plus the financial wherewithal, to establish the park, Solomon said. At the least, he suggested, a proposed park atop the mountain would raise public awareness of the rare old-growth cedar grove.

"I think we'd be missing an opportunity if we don't work on it this year," Solomon said.

Brett Bennett, of Bennett Lumber Products, said he'd support a state park or some other way of preserving the property as long as his company's concerns are addressed. Bennett Lumber owns timber ground on the mountain, some of it adjacent to the endowment property.

Bennett said his company is faced with year-round problems from recreationists who drive motorized vehicles on the mountain, often causing damage to roads and tree plantations.

"Bennett Lumber doesn't want to see those big trees cut," Bennett said, adding the trees are so old they wouldn't make good saw logs and the value is much more intrinsic as they stand.

Kimmell, who has been researching the state park potential, said a bit of caution is needed. "We need to be careful what we create here, because we don't want to love it to death."

Commissioner Jack Nelson agreed. "I guess we need to decide if a state park is the route we need to go."

Possible land exchanges between the state, perhaps Bennett and a third party were also

discussed.

Wayne Fox, a Moscow resident and bicycle recreationist, said a state park on the mountain might become a "node" within an expanding network of bicycle trails in northern Idaho, bringing a measure of economic growth to surrounding towns like Moscow, Potlatch, Princeton, Troy and Deary.

A similar attempt to establish a state park 10 years ago failed, Solomon said. Roger Kechter, spokesman for the Idaho Department of Lands, said the state has no intention of harvesting the cedar trees and "would love to have someone else own that land."