

Glenda Wiles

From: Russ Lawrence <russworks@outlook.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 24, 2017 12:49 PM
To: Ravalli County Commissioners Office
Subject: Collaboration group
Attachments: Collaboration committee letter Jan 2017.docx

Glenda,

I have attached a letter to the commissioners regarding the proposed collaboration group. Could you please see that they each get a copy of it?

Thanks!

Russ

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January 24, 2017

Ravalli County Commissioners

Dear Commissioners,

I feel that the collaboration group you have proposed is entirely misguided, and will result in many good people spending a great deal of time, to no good purpose. Further, I expect that the County itself will spend far too much time and resources on this effort, with little or no ultimate benefit to the public.

The reasons I reject the premise of the group are simple. Public lands within the county are largely administered by the Bitterroot National Forest, on behalf of all 300 million U.S. citizens. The National Forest Management Act (and subsequent directives) spells out exactly how those citizens may weigh in on forest management issues affecting their land. That includes those citizens who live here in Ravalli County; there is no need for county government to hand-pick a small group of people to represent the 45,000 citizens of Ravalli County. We are perfectly capable of making ourselves heard, as any Forest Service decision-maker can tell you.

Of course, Ravalli County as a government entity has an interest in resource management issues. If a timber sale will increase usage of a particular county road, I encourage you to work with your road department staff to present your legitimate concerns to the agency; if Forest Service actions impact public safety, your very capable Sheriff's office will advise you; in case of overlapping jurisdictions or questions of law, the County Attorney is there to advise you; and so on. With capable department heads and county staff, there's no need for an outside committee.

Further, such a collaborative group will have no standing – the County is only one voice among many when it comes to the management of state and federal lands. In any case, the Board of County Commissioners will retain the right to act contrary to the group's recommendations, regardless of how well-balanced and informed they may be.

Commissioner Burrows suggested, in the Bitterroot Star, that the group might also "be able to comment meaningfully on any kind of project proposed in the county that could have potential impacts." I reject that idea utterly. In such a case, every citizen in the county should have an opportunity to comment, and

those comments should have equal or greater weight than any cherry-picked collaboration group.

Instead, I suggest that the Board of County Commissioners begin the hard work of preparing a new countywide Growth Policy, one that provides for the kind of meaningful public input you seem to seek – only from all of us, not just from your designated collaborators. Ravalli County continues to grow with no meaningful plan or other guiding document, leaving citizens and developers alike with no clear guidelines for what's acceptable. The lack of such a document, and an unwillingness to listen to informed citizen comments, has led the county into expensive mistakes. Let's fix that first, and not waste time meddling in issues that rightfully pertain to other agencies.

Sincerely,

Russ Lawrence
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