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To

cc

Subject

Fwd: Request for Advice

Rick The U.S. Forest Service has released the DEIS. You are planning on holding 3-4 meetings during which comments can be submitted.

These are informational meetings only with display boards and staff standing around to answer questions. This is not what I would call a public hearing where stakeholders from both sides can present their case and their is time for open questions, etc.

Is the U.S. Forest Service only required to follow the pattern of the so called informational meeting and not the more intensive (and to my mind a public hearing with full stakeholder participation)? I'd appreciate your comments.

Rep. Tom Trail

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Tom, you are right in that these will not be "public hearings". The National Environmental Policy Act does not require "hearings" and I have been involved in maybe a couple in my 31 years with the agency. A hearing requires some stringent recording protocols and then someone must write up the transcripts verbatim. That gets very problematic if something was taken out of context or they might say later, "That's not what I really said." etc. It is far better for people to get informed and then we receive their comments in writing. That protects the person making the comments because there is less chance of misinterpretation. We do not plan to take official comments for the record at these meetings unless they are in writing. Then it is in "their" words. We find that the open house type meetings meet more needs of folks that work or are just too busy to make an evening meeting. They have a much broader time to attend and people can ask specific questions about specific parcels that might be of interest to them. It also takes out the need for grandstanding in front of a microphone which can happen as you well know. There are some who are looking for any opportunity to make a public argument and show their dislike for anything happening with this project. I have already had people who told me they were "intimidated" by people when they came to a recent meeting. They said they came to learn and wanted to ask questions, but felt they would be viewed "not on the loud side." Another who attended the League of Women voters said they had (their words) a flyer shoved in their face as they entered and felt uncomfortable about asking anything after that. When I see all the name calling and things like the "Land Take Away" term used, I see emotion and no desire to have a civil dialogue. It is also very obvious that many don't understand the NEPA process which is about getting to an informed decision. When folks don't understand a process, they often will mistrust it. I'm the one that must make a final decision in the end and I want to hear from everyone that wishes to become informed and make informed comments. Congress passed the law over 30 years ago and I plan to follow it in a manner that gives everyone a chance to learn the facts in a nonhostile environment. We plan to have the "experts" there who can discuss the pros and cons of each parcel with anyone who has questions. This whole process has saddened me because my style has always been to be very collaborative. When people draw a line in the sand and resort to the tactics I've witnessed, I have little space except to make the process more sterile. You will probably be surprised about the number of people and organizations that really support this project but are not saying anything because they know the NEPA process and that all the elements raised will have to be analyzed "before" a final decision is rendered. I would like to talk on the phone about more of this, but will be out much of this week looking for an elk.....maybe on the Palouse.- Rick



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