

Economic Benefits of Conserving the Recreational Opportunities and Drinking Water at Cooper Spur are estimated to be in the millions.

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MT. HOOD, OR—The economics consulting firm ECONorthwest released a report this week quantifying the economic value of the environmental services provided by a protected Cooper Spur area on Mt. Hood. According to the study, protecting the clean water, old growth forest and historic backcountry recreation area has a present value of at least 10 million dollars. The lands at issue are the subject of a land exchange between the US Forest Service and Mount Hood Meadows and are part of wilderness bills that have passed the U.S. House of Representatives and are pending before a Senate Committee.

These economic values were not considered in the land appraisal conducted by Steve Hall as part of the trade of land by Mt. Hood Meadows in Cooper Spur for land in Government Camp. The land trade is but one part of the larger set of public benefits and economic values that would be promoted by the historic agreement for Cooper Spur. The Cooper Spur Wild & Free Coalition commissioned the economic analysis of the value of the historic settlement that has been included in Wilderness legislation. The coalition includes groups like the Mazamas and fourteen additional recreation clubs, local residents groups from around the mountain and conservation groups who have been working to protect special places as part of the larger Mt Hood Wilderness effort (www.cooperspur.org).

In the report ECONorthwest found that the present value of protecting water supply, backcountry recreation experience and old growth forests had a present value of at least 11 to 16 million dollars. The report focused on a few key value components provided by the proposed land trade. Furthermore, the report emphasizes that it did not account for additional, hard-to-measure values including the high value migration corridor for deer and elk, and the value of spotted owl core habitat land.

According to Ernie Niemi of ECONorthwest: “The prior appraisals are important, but we must keep in mind the larger picture. When examining the economics of the historic Agreement for Cooper Spur, we found a present value in the millions for preserving the clean water, wilderness and old growth forests, and unique backcountry recreation on the North side.” Russ Pascoe Coalition Chair stated: “We asked experts to look at the economic value of this land trade as it relates to the business community and public for preserving clean drinking water, wilderness, old growth forests, and backcountry recreation on the North Side. This study provides additional evidence of a fair and equitable land trade between Mt Hood Meadows and the National Forest Service that will benefit tax payers immediately and in the long run.”

According to recent coverage in The Oregonian, Congressmen Walden and Blumenauer believe the historic settlement would save taxpayers million of dollars in costs to provide infrastructure for development of the more environmentally sensitive Cooper Spur area. For instance the state is facing a bill of over \$20 million this month to repair water damage to existing roads that serve the area. Similarly, the report by ECONorthwest accounted for the value of the benefits from permanently protected and restoring 1,000s of acres of mature and old growth forest on the north side of Mt. Hood.

Robert Smith, of the Mazamas, said, “We believe it is important to ensure equal value in the appraisal process but we must acknowledge that there’s greater public value being realized in the trade. The historic agreement offers land of equal value, and while an auction may obtain hard dollars it would not yield protection for the unique and valuable high-elevation forests at Cooper Spur.”