

## CELL-PHONE TOWER ON PATTERSON MOUNTAIN?

A 50-foot-tall wireless cell tower with six panel-style antennas has been proposed by Verizon Wireless for placement on the summit of Patterson Mountain, a popular hiking and recreational area two miles south of Winthrop. The tower would expand Verizon coverage west of Patterson, according to the company. An informational meeting held in August brought many concerned citizens with objections that the towers would destroy 360-degree views and wildlife habitat.

Environmental concerns are based on the fact that phone and electrical conduits would be installed in a trench three feet deep and one foot wide, running for over a mile from Patterson Lake Road to the top of the mountain, which would destroy wildlife habitat. There is also concern about the tower and equipment cabinets on the summit.

The land is managed by the Department of Natural Resources, and the tower would bring in funds to DNR through a communications lease. The proposal requires a review under the State Environmental Policy Act and a conditional-use permit from Okanogan County.

Opportunities for public comment and an appeal period will be published. MVCC will post the dates on its web site. At this time, no application has been filed with the county. ■

## Climate change – is it happening here?

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Having dismissed human activity as a cause, Option 2 continues, “the commissioners... find that the climate is subject to cyclical changes caused by... natural events such as changing ocean and wind currents, catastrophic natural events such as fires...” In the Northwest, we know how “natural” fires are. We also know that forest management practices – or mismanagement practices – play a significant role.

More important, Option 2 reverses what most climate scientists believe – that, although natural cycles may play a part, “it is very likely that most of the increase [in temperature]... since the mid-20th century is due to greenhouse gas emissions from human activities..... 1950–2000 was warmer than any other 50-year period in the last 500 years and likely the warmest... in the last 1,300 years.”

The commissioners chose the least damaging option – the No-Action Alternative. Omission of any reference to climate change, however, puts the county at a

disadvantage in dealing directly with a problem that is not going away. It also puts the county at odds with state law, which requires agencies to consider whether an entity has adopted policies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions when distributing funds for infrastructure projects.

As an alternative to ignoring climate change in the comp plan, the MVCC board suggested the following:

*According to the best available science on climate change, within the next 30 years we can expect water shortages in the Methow Valley. Consequently, agriculture and new housing, particularly developments of five or more dwellings, must take account of the best available climate-change science, as represented by the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group. Housing and agricultural development must be in line with the slow-growth policy which has prevailed in the Methow, a policy whose wisdom has been confirmed by mounting, on-going climate research.*

If you agree climate change needs to be in the plan, please write the commissioners. ■

# VALLEY VOICE



The Newsletter of the Methow Valley Citizens' Council

Since 1974

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okanogan county

## The nostalgia plan

Longing for the good old days when you threw your garbage and old cars in the creek and it didn't matter because nobody was downstream? Then this is the comp plan for you – unless of course you do live downstream or next to someone.

The Okanogan County commissioners released their latest draft of the new county comprehensive plan, which should serve as a guiding document for the other county planning regulations. A huge disappointment to many who have participated in the process, the new plan discusses constitutional rights and the county's trust in its citizens to take care of existing resources. But the purpose of the plan – guidance – just doesn't seem to be there.

The current Methow Plan, adopted in 1976, gives much more specific guidance on issues ranging from wildlife habitat to economic development. Key parts of the Methow Plan include restricting commercial development to the towns (to prevent sprawl) and the importance of open space and agriculture to the recreation economy here. Most input from Methow residents during this update asked for greater protections for agriculture and the environment, wildlife habitat, dark skies, and viewsheds. The mindset behind the county document seems to be that planning direction is unnecessary.

The most noticeable changes in the latest draft are in its length – the plan has been reduced to a fraction of the original. Most neighborhood groups (citizen groups facilitated by county planning department staff and supported by \$125,000 in state grants)

who worked for months – even years – developing input would be hard-pressed to find **any** of their suggestions in the new plan. Ideas that echoed in the dozen neighborhood groups throughout the county include provisions for affordable housing, the preservation of agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, a clearing and grading ordinance to prevent erosion, clean air, clean and adequate water, open space, and quality of life. Not a trace remains.

In the Methow especially, the importance of the environment in sustaining the tourist economy, which was emphasized by the three Methow-area groups, has been

The comp plan, which began with hope for a shared community vision, has instead been a chaotic & divisive process.

omitted. Though the existing Methow plan includes many of the afore-mentioned subjects, the new county plan does not.

While the county has promised to include the two Methow plans (one for the upper Methow and Mazama, and one for the rest of the Methow) as part of the Okanogan County comp plan – they have been part of it for 35 years – there is no indication of this in the new draft, which appears to give no support whatsoever to the current protections and visions for the Methow Review District. Having a weak comp plan compromises our zoning ordinance, since the comp plan is the philosophical basis for

zoning, which is itself the foundation of the economy and beauty found in the Methow. Either the Methow plans needs to stay in place, or the new comp plan needs to be modified to reflect the values currently embodied in the Methow Review District. It appears that the county is hoping that the state will not have enough money to enforce state laws for, if the state does, this plan will cost the county a fortune in lawsuits.

If you mistake no planning for good planning, take a look at Montana, whose hodge-podge development has property owners up in arms as they find themselves powerless to protect their property from the noise, traffic, pollution, and erosion of unbridled development. The Methow Valley contributes over 40 percent of the county budget, thanks to protective zoning that has encouraged both the tourist economy and the high quality of life so attractive to residents and second-home buyers alike.

According to planning director Perry Huston, the environmental impact statement for the comp plan will be released soon. The EIS is required to compare various alternatives, but they have not been set out at this time. Public hearings on the plan will probably be scheduled for early next year. Let your views be known now.

Watch for our media campaign to mobilize Methow citizens to fight this new draft – your donations to MVCC will assist us in our fight to include long-standing protections for the Methow Valley in the new plan. And check our web site for updates about hearings, important points to address in your comments, and sample letters. ■

METHOW VALLEY RESIDENT  
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## The comp plan: Behind the scenes

In a routine read through public comments sent to county commissioners and planning commissioners on the draft comp plan, MVCC members discovered very interesting correspondence. Of particular interest was a letter in the public record, dated May 20, 2009, submitted by Jon Wyss of Gebbers Farms in Brewster. The letter restated discussions and agreements reached at a meeting among the representatives of Gebbers Farms, commissioner Bud Hover, and planning director Perry Huston.

### What happened to protections for the Methow Valley that were supported by the community?

The Gebbers letter contains the first reference MVCC has been able to find in public records to deleting neighborhood group vision statements. According to the letter, Gebbers' representatives proposed dropping all neighborhood group statements on the basis that the groups included affordable housing in some visions and, because they also supported environmentally sensitive building standards, including these visions would seem to constitute public support for these standards.

This was unacceptable to Gebbers Farms, so the letter states, "Therefore we must request that any veiled references to environmentally sensitive development practices in the subdivision ordinance be removed and question if the individual vision statements are even required to be in the appendix of the Comprehensive Plan. If they are not required a discussion should be held to determine if they are even necessary to be printed within any portion of the draft comprehensive plan."

Shortly thereafter, in the next draft, the input of neighborhood groups had been entirely dropped from the appendix. This decision shocked all who had participated (for one to two years) in the countywide neighborhood group process, established by the county to provide local guidance.

Another section of the same letter shows Gebbers' concern as to whether the Rural Medium Density designation, which would have offered a 3-acre minimum lot size, could be applied to Gebbers'

property east of the Methow River, up toward the ridgetop.

The significance of this issue was unclear until recently, when the new draft comprehensive plan was released. Rather than extending the current zoning of the Methow Review District (which has 5- and 20-acre minimums) south to Black Canyon (as supported by commissioners in June), this draft drops the entire Rural Medium Density designation, leaving only Rural Low and Rural High density. The Lower Methow is now in the Rural High Density category, with 1-acre minimum lot sizes all the way from the Methow River east to the ridgetop and beyond.

While there has been no sensible explanation offered for the change (see "Are We Really One Watershed?" on this page), the concerns expressed by Wyss on behalf of Gebbers Farms offer one plausible explanation. The letter states that their request for information on this acreage designation could be modified "if the proposed language changes and or if after reviewing the requested overlay map, it does not meet the density options available or does not meet the best interest of the land holdings owned by the Gebbers Family. Whatever density requirements are put in place along with the regulations will impact these holdings values both in the near and long term and we must ensure our development rights are protected."

Extending the zoning had been a compromise from stricter provisions recommended by the Lower Valley Advisory Committee and was suggested by large landowners in the Lower Methow themselves at a meeting with the county planner and the facilitator of the advisory group, according to those present at the meeting. This compromise had then been publicly supported by the county planning commission and Dave Schulz, the Methow's representative on the Commission.

### Who are Gebbers Farms and Jon Wyss?

Jon Wyss wears several hats, but his primary position, as a new Gebbers family member, is that of Government Affairs/ Analyst for Gebbers Farms. He is current presi-

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## THE LOWER VALLEY IN THE COMP PLAN: ARE WE REALLY ONE WATERSHED?

### The Methow Valley Sub-area: Recent changes

On June 15, 2010, a good representation of Methow Valley folks went to the county commissioners' work session on the comprehensive plan. They came away with the understanding that the Methow Review District zoning (now the same as the Methow school district) would be extended south to Black Canyon and that Sub Unit A (Mazama to Winthrop) and the Middle Methow would be allowed to maintain their own status as sub-areas within the comprehensive plan, including their own protective zoning. The recently released comp plan map makes this clear (see *Contacts and Resources* for the link to the map).

But the commissioner's November draft of the comp plan does not include the existing Sub Unit A and Middle Methow comp plans after all. And the map shows the Lower Methow with 1-acre-minimum lot sizes, even in the uplands, rather than the 5- and 20-acre minimums that the planning commission had suggested.

### Lower Methow decision reversal

At a commissioners' work session in August, attended by few members of the public, the commissioners unexpectedly reversed their previous decision to extend the same protective zoning the upper Valley enjoys to the Lower Methow as far south as Black Canyon.

At this meeting, commissioner Mary Lou Peterson said to commissioner Bud Hover regarding the zoning extension that she thought "We decided that it was not a good idea" the "last time we met." In an awkward sequence (which MVCC videotaped), Hover appears to be deflecting her question, then finally stated, "I agree with you. We won't do that." No reasons were given except that it wasn't necessary and that the previous decision had been arbitrary; planning director Perry Huston himself commented that he must have missed this commissioners' directive to leave the boundaries as is.

However, minutes of previous work sessions do not include any decision on this matter. In fact, in the session immediately preceding this meeting, there had only been a request by the commissioners to Huston for a map so that a decision could be made later.

During the question-and-answer section at the work session, when asked when this decision had been made, Hover stated that it had been made that very morning, raising the question as to whether this matter had been discussed and decided outside of a public meeting (which would be a serious issue).

It was later discovered that the map Huston delivered to the commissioners to show the

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## Climate change, the Methow, and the comp plan

According to the best available science on climate change, within the next 30 years we can expect water shortages in the Methow Valley. The snowpack will decline and, even if the annual amount of precipitation is the same, the form and timing of that precipitation will change. We will get less snow and more rain and the rain will not come when we want it. Instead of the snowpack gradually melting during the year and releasing water into the aquifer and then into the Twisp and Methow rivers, by summer 2040 the streamflow in the Methow will be below the current legal limit for taking water from the river. That means a Methow with irregular and severely restricted summer irrigation. We can expect warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers.

What is the basis for these predictions? In their in-depth study of research on the situation, the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group notes that "understanding of the science of climate change is based on thousands of papers published in peer-reviewed journals." In particular, to study climate change in the Pacific Northwest, the Climate Impacts Group has drawn on 20 of the world's most reputable climate-change models and refined the results. They have made detailed studies of every stream basin in Okanogan County, with special emphasis on the Methow Valley.

The mission of the Methow Valley Citizens' Council is to preserve and protect the rural character of the Methow Valley



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### Commissioners deny climate change

Why, then, did the Okanogan County commissioners vote that "any mention of climate change, directly or indirectly, would be removed from all sections of the comprehensive plan"? One reason may be that planning director Perry Huston gave the commissioners a skewed set of three options to consider for the county's policy in an August memo. Here are some excerpts: **Option 1: No action. Include no language regarding climate change in the plan.** [A]ny mention of climate change, directly or indirectly, would be removed from all sections of the comprehensive plan.

**Option 2: Adopt Okanogan County policy re climate change in the comprehensive plan.** The... Commissioners find the climate change model that predicts world disaster due to global warming from man-made causes to be without sufficient universally accepted science-based support. Because of the lack of universal support the County believes it is inappropriate to let this model, and the dire outcomes it predicts, to influence land use planning....

The... Commissioners... find that energy conservation and... a sustainable economic base are compatible... Fossil fuels and other energy sources should be utilized to the extent necessary... but should... be supplemented or replaced by cleaner and renewable energy sources.

**Option 3: Include language in the comprehensive plan dismissing climate change.** The... Commissioners find that any attempt by federal agencies to assume authority over land-use planning under the guise of climate change to be outside of their constitutional authority. The authority for land-use planning is... reserved to the states... through the 10th amendment.

Significantly missing from these options is a summary of the findings of the Climate Impacts Group or another respected scientific body to support a proactive response to climate change. And the commissioners did not ask for such an option.

Option 2 also focuses on "world disaster" and ignores the Climate Group's specific findings about Okanogan County. The idea that forecasts are based on a single model ignores the 20 models the Group used.

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## METHOW VALLEY SHOOTING RANGE PROPOSAL WITHDRAWN

The Methow Valley Shooting Range Foundation's application to create a shooting range on a hillside on the Loup Loup Highway, directly across from Tice Ranch, has recently been recently withdrawn. The foundation had applied to construct an indoor/outdoor shooting range for archery, rifle, pistol, air guns, and shotguns, and the proposal has been highly contentious from the start.

Astonishingly, Okanogan County planning director Perry Huston, who was the responsible official under the State Environmental Policy Act, issued a mitigated determination of non-significance, which meant the county would not even have required an environmental impact study.

For more than four years, Methow Valley citizens have hotly contested the proposal, citing problems with noise, safety concerns due to proximity to Highway 20 (the 130-acre site is one-half mile east of the intersection of highways 20 and 153), environmental damage including groundwater contamination, and destruction of wildlife habitat and migration corridors for mule deer and endangered species.

A formal appeal of Huston's decision to dismiss the EIS was submitted by the Tice Ranch, represented by David Bricklin, a well-known environmental attorney who worked with MVCC to stop the Early Winters ski area proposal many years ago. MVCC joined with several others on the shooting range legal appeal.

The appeal cited expert testimony demonstrating that Huston's determination of non-significance created public safety and environmental concerns.

The application was withdrawn when the property owner, who would have leased the land to the shooting range foundation, withdrew his support. Good work, everyone! ■

## MVCC gets grant for comp plan outreach

MVCC is grateful to the Northwest Fund for the Environment for a \$3,000 grant to assist with our **Comprehensive Plan Citizen Action Alert Project: Mobilizing Community Response**. We plan to develop informational materials and build a core of activists to support informed citizen input before final action on the comp plan by the commissioners. The primary focus will be on agriculture, shoreline protection, and environmental protection and sound land-use planning for the Lower Valley.

## Can farmers and ranchers make a living off public land alone?

“The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires all communities to establish criteria to designate and conserve Natural Resource Lands which includes certain agricultural lands, timber lands, and mining lands. The State Law provides guidelines for designating the three types of Natural Resource Lands, but gives each community flexibility to establish their own criteria.”

This excerpt comes from state law, but the Okanogan County commissioners are not using this approach. Instead, they propose to restrict agricultural lands to public lands and only private lands under conservation easements. This leaves all current crop-producing lands available for development and abandons support for agriculture.

“Agricultural land” is identified by the GMA as suitable for the long-term commercial production of food and related crops. Those areas currently in the agricultural tax classification must be included. Tax exemptions are given for productive agricultural lands; the commissioners cannot remove private lands from this designation and still continue to provide a tax incentive. They either are ag lands or they are not.

The first draft of the comp plan, from Jan. 14, 2009, states that “fertile lands available for agricultural pursuits will be conserved wherever possible through incentives to keep land in agricultural production.” The Methow zoning map from July of that year shows extensive private agricultural lands, together with an assurance that there would be no changes. But the commissioners have since determined that agricultural resource lands should be confined to public holdings.

In the past, the agricultural designation was determined from U.S. Department of Agriculture crop maps. The Okanogan County Conservation District is working on an update of their crop fields inventory to identify diverse soils and climate conditions that allow long-term commercial production of a variety of crops. Nonagricultural uses should be “limited to lands with poor soils or otherwise not suitable for agricultural purposes,” according to state law. It was concluded that “for future generations to thrive it is imperative a

local dependable food supply is possible.”

Even the environmental impact statement for the comp plan prepared last March states that agriculture is a critical element of the economy and culture of Okanogan County. The statement urges “processes that allow thoughtful value-added development that avoids incompatible uses and allows the preservation of the critical mass of land necessary to support a viable agricultural economy.”

Removing productive agricultural lands from that designation would not accomplish these objectives. The commissioners have said the minimum number of acres needed by the cattle, hay, orchard, and vineyard industries to be sustainable could be met by public lands, but this does not consider that not all ranchers have leases to graze on public land and that grazing only covers a few months of the year.

Private land is a large component of ranching in this county and permittees must have a base ranch to provide for their cattle in the winter, so it would be irresponsible to designate only public lands. Is the intent to sue the federal government for more grazing leases on those public lands?

Water supply is a critical factor in agriculture and in potential development in Okanogan County. The conversion of water rights from agriculture to other uses has long-range impacts that have not been thoroughly analyzed and quantified. The comp plan should contain clear policy language regarding the impacts of these practices on the local economy and on the ability to preserve viable agricultural land. It also does not take into account the need for irrigated land for fruit and other crops.

Large blocks of public lands adjacent to our communities are a different type of natural resource – they have “long-term commercial significance” in the way of outdoor recreation, tourism, hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, etc. Earlier drafts of the comp plan draft reported that the Leisure and Hospitality economy was thriving in the county, but in the latest version these commercially significant activities are no longer protected as natural resource lands.

The natural environment is a critical element of the economy and culture of Okanogan County, as it provides opportunities for recreational activities and a variety of outdoor-centered businesses. To preserve this key part of the economy, the comp plan should provide effective review and guidance for land use that protects the natural environment from unnecessary impacts.

**Critical areas – a critical part of planning**  
The county also has a statutory requirement to identify and conserve critical areas, including wetlands, streams, aquifers, and steep slopes. State guidelines for protecting critical areas, which includes a requirement to use the best available science, are more rigorous than standards for conserving natural resource lands, but both are important. Protection and restoration of watersheds is necessary to ensure sustainable agriculture as well as fish and wildlife populations, but it seems our commissioners are avoiding laws designed to protect these areas.

The Department of Ecology, for example, “is assisting local governments in their efforts to adopt wetland regulations that protect wetlands and their functions and that are based on best available science.” Water has been identified as a “most critical issue” to protect our aquifers from declining snow packs and development.

After more than three years of meetings, the residents of the Methow expressed their support for environmental protections based on their current Methow Plan. Environmental policies proposed by Methow participants include the following:

- Do not permit new development that adversely affects designated critical areas, fish habitat, or wildlife corridors.
- Critical area ordinances will be enforced by the county to protect species of special concern, as well as threatened and endangered species.
- Ordinances will protect fisheries habitat by maintaining adequate stream flows, while protecting historic uses of existing water rights.

The commissioners should ensure that those concerns are recognized and that appropriate actions are taken in the comp plan and critical areas ordinance. ■

## Behind the scenes

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dent of the Okanogan County Farm Bureau, vice president of the Horticultural Society, and chair of the Coalition for Property Rights. He organized a large rally late in 2009 at the Okanogan Agriplex along with these organizations, during which speakers criticized the draft comp plan for being too restrictive on property rights, unpatriotic, and too oriented toward “West-side” environmentalism. Special negative attention was focused in the Wyss letter and at the Agriplex on the dark skies ordinance, which would have restricted night-time lighting.

Since Dan Gamble arrived in 1885 in the Harts Pass area with his backpack (having walked from Nova Scotia for the beginning of the upper Methow gold rush) the Gebbers Family holdings have grown and prospered. Gamble’s grandson, Dan Gebbers, later formed Gebbers Farms, which now markets fruit under Trout, Chelan Fresh, Danny-Boy, Magi, and GWP labels. About 80 percent of the fruit packed in Washington’s Chelan-north district is sold by Chelan Fresh Marketing (a merger of

Gebbers and Chelan Fruit Cooperative). Based in the Brewster area for many decades, Gebbers’ interests have also included cattle ranching, logging, lumber milling, real estate, sheep herding, various businesses and, more recently, two golf courses near Brewster.

Jon Wyss, as Gebbers’ representative, has now taken a prominent role in the development of the new comp plan, but just how influential he may have been had not been understood until the May 20 letter came to light.

With the latest stripped-down and generalized November version of the comp plan, which eliminates protection of resource lands, shorelines, and other sensitive areas, it appears that Wyss and the groups he represents may have succeeded to a great degree in their objectives.

**What does this mean to Okanogan County and the Methow Valley?**  
All this raises several questions:

- Have county commissioners been transparent and forthright with citizens of the Methow regarding the influences they respect and promises they have made?
- Was Gebbers Farms’ influence with the commissioners strong enough to persuade them to delete the input of neighborhood groups from the appendix and to ignore most of their input? What could this mean for the future?
- The Commissioners, at their June 15 meeting on the Methow, left the public believing Methow Review District zoning would be extended south to Black Canyon. What influence was later exerted, and by whom, to make the recent sweeping change?
- Corporations recently were granted not only the rights of individuals but also have rapidly gained great political power at the national level through economic control and lobbying. Do we have the same situation in Okanogan County? ■

### AMERICAN ALPS LEGACY PROJECT *(MVCC is sharing this information for educational purposes and is neutral at this time)*

The North Cascades Conservation Council (N3C) is proposing an expansion of North Cascades National Park, extending the boundaries to those in the original proposal of 1968. The expansion would add 304,300 acres currently under U.S. Forest Service administration. It includes land on both sides of the North Cascades Highway, with sizable additions near Mazama, towards Harts Pass and on the southeast side of the highway heading towards Winthrop.

N3C is seeking to expand the park because of what the group perceives as threats to wildlife and habitats in the area. Among their main concerns are risks to threatened and endangered species, from both poaching and habitat destruction. Species of concern include the gray wolf, mountain goat, wolverine, and aquatic life including bull trout and Chinook salmon.

Another threat to biodiversity in the area is development of mining claims, both patented and unpatented, particularly for uranium or copper, according to N3C. Under Forest Service administration, these claims – currently 71 patented and 2,750 unpatented – can be activated anytime. With the Park Service’s emphasis on recreation, protection of watersheds and habitat would take precedence over mining, N3C says.

Logging is another threat they have identified, with large areas of old-growth forests potentially at risk. Preventing bank erosion and sedimentation, which can result from logging operations, and protecting riparian areas is important for maintaining critical habitat for many species. The N3C report points out that the Forest Service has a history of treating insect-infected forests and areas burned by wildfires with salvage proposals; however, the report doesn’t answer the question, “what is the best way to prevent fire destruction?”

Currently, the area seen from Highway 20 is designated as a scenic corridor. This area has so far been spared rampant development beyond the highway

and the trails, but there is concern that this could change if the Forest Service were pressured to develop the area. N3C believes that Park Service management would reduce these threats through research and greater enforcement, and that their goals are more protective of the environment than those of the Forest Service.

Despite all these benefits to the environment, many have raised questions or are not in support of the expansion. Some worry that the Department of the Interior will not keep its promises to N3C or other local groups. Others are concerned that Highway 20 could become a strip development or that expansion would create gateway towns like West Yellowstone, which would keep people in their cars and therefore less connected to their surroundings.

Other concerns include trail restrictions within the Park. Many people currently enjoy Forest Service trails with their dogs or take pack animals such as goats, which are not permitted on National Park trails. The Park backcountry permit system also requires that overnight trips be carefully planned, with all campsites permitted in advance, whereas some hikers prefer to be more spontaneous.

Although N3C desires to control growth within existing towns and business areas, there is no guarantee that this won’t change. The Park Service says it would add up to 1,000 new jobs over the next 20 years. They plan to enhance recreation opportunities and to maintain some current multi-use options; for example, they would keep the Cutthroat Lake trail open to bicycling and the Harts Pass Road open to snowmobiling.

The Methow Valley Citizens’ Council will continue to study the proposal. We welcome information and input from you. N3C’s American Alps Legacy Project website, where details on the proposal and related reports can be viewed, is at [www.americanalps.org](http://www.americanalps.org). ■

ARE WE ONE WATERSHED?

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amount of buildable private land in the Lower Valley – and on which they had based their decision about the extension), was incorrect because it eliminated most of the private properties east of the Methow River, in fact showing only a fraction of the private land in the lower Methow Valley and overlooking thousands of acres of private land east of the river.

The commissioners’ reasoning? Since there was little reasoning discussed during the August 16 deliberations, any rationale for the decision had to be discovered through newspaper articles and subsequent meetings. The following details have emerged:

1. Hover was quoted in the Methow Valley News (Aug. 18, 2010, page 1) as saying that people in the Lower Methow had written in 10-to-1 against expanding the zoning south to Black Canyon. But at a Sept. 9, 2010, meeting with members of the Lower Valley Advisory Committee, Hover denied making this statement when committee members stated it was inconsistent with the public input they had read in the county’s records. He stated that the 10-1 count was arrived at through phone calls with Lower Valley residents and conversations with people he had sought out who had not written in during the opportunity for public input. It was not clear how such individuals had been selected for these conversations, and there was apparently no actual count. The official written record shows a very different story regarding the support for extended zoning.

2. It was alleged that necessary support services for Upper Methow tourism require small, affordable lots in the Lower Methow for those who cannot afford to buy in the Upper Valley. Such a plan would replay unfortunate scenarios such as the one in Aspen, Colorado, where workers have commutes of up to two hours because they can’t afford to live near Aspen. How will cashiers, wait-staff, and housekeepers afford the continual commute up-valley, and how would it affect the traffic situation in this narrow area of the valley?

The Middle Methow neighborhood group, in particular, emphasized a goal of affordable employee housing close to the place of employment in its vision statement, goals, and policies (which were

deleted from the comp plan). The short-sighted philosophy of the commissioners ignores not only the opportunity for smaller, more affordable dwellings in the towns of Twisp and Winthrop, but it also ignores the numerous small, undeveloped lots already platted in the Lower Methow. It also does not support a socio-economically diverse community throughout the Methow.

3. It was claimed by the commissioners that the decision by the planning commissioners to expand protective zoning to Black Canyon had been arbitrary. Hover claimed in the Sept. 9 meeting with the Lower Valley group that he had been told that the Black Canyon zoning boundary had been selected by the planning commission because of an “arbitrary” statement advocating that boundary made by Methow planning commissioner Dave Schulz, who supported an extension. Hover said he had not been informed by the planning department of the compromises and meetings with Lower Valley landowners, who had suggested Black Canyon themselves as a compromise for the boundary, which some had sought to extend even further south.

Hover also stated that the commissioners had not previously seen the maps created by the Lower Valley consultant that showed the many small lots already subdivided. This map had been considered extensively by the Lower Valley Advisory Group when they recommended more protective zoning for their area. Hover did not indicate that he would be willing to correct these errors, even though the commissioners had based their decision to eliminate the Lower Valley from the 5- and 20-acre minimum lot sizes on that information.

4. The commissioners were not aware that French Creek and other areas to the east of the valley bottom were a part of the Methow Valley. Is this actually believable? The map presented by Huston to the commissioners on Aug. 16, 2010, showing acreages of buildable land in the Lower Methow, did not include thousands of acres of already subdivided private land in the Methow watershed to the east of the Methow River (such as much of French Creek and properties offered for sale by the Tacoma Land Company). When this point was brought up at the work session, the commissioners asked if there were actually private land in that area. It later became clear that these deleted lands are in the same area referred to in questions by Gebbers Farms in their May 20, 2009, letter

as to whether Gebbers could be bound by 3-acre minimums in the area toward the Gamble Mill site, restricting their property rights if it were designated “Rural Medium Density.” (See related article, “Behind the Scenes,” on page 2.)

What can we conclude about this process? The many questions raised by this process can probably be summarized as follows: Were the reasons eventually articulated after the commissioners’ decision on the Lower Methow actually an effort to conceal successful private lobbying by large financial and political interests against any special protective treatment of the Methow, particularly the Lower Methow?

What will the Methow response be? What is our collective vision of the Methow watershed, regardless of political boundaries? Is the Lower Methow merely an area to drive through on the way home for the more numerous and more affluent residents further north? Are concerns about the southerly habitat for wildlife and the potential spread of intensive shoreline development of importance to citizens in our watershed? Do we really hope to concentrate service providers with lower wages in the Lower Valley, far from their jobs?

From written public input, it is clear that many Methow Valleyites have refrained from commenting on much beyond their own areas of the Methow. Although people outside the Methow have successfully lobbied against provisions strongly supported by valley residents (such as dark skies and ridgetop ordinances), Methow residents often still refrain from expressing opinions on countywide issues that affect them.

The commissioners have been considering comments by all county residents on any part of the county. By not commenting on the whole Methow, Valleyites are giving up an opportunity to shape their own future. It is important to consider the effect of the gradual northward creep of development and sprawl upon the whole watershed and its human and animal residents.

We encourage all valley residents to comment in writing and in person on the current plan for 1-acre minimum lot sizes in the Lower Methow, and to advocate for the extension of Methow zoning down to Black Canyon. ■

Contacts and resources

County commissioners: Andrew Lampe, Bud Hover, and Mary Lou Peterson (Jim DeTro as of January 2011), 509 422 7100. Send comments c/o Brenda Crowell, bcrowell@co.okanogan.wa.us, or to 123 Fifth Ave. N., Room 150, Okanogan, WA 98840

1964 comp plan, Methow comp plan, and Sub Unit A comp plan: http://okanogancounty.org/planning; click on the link for “Comp Plan Information”; then look for “Current County Comp Plan” (1964 comprehensive plan,

Methow comprehensive plan, and Upper Methow comprehensive plan) New draft of comp plan and comp plan map: http://okanogancounty.org/Commissioners Follow the link to “Commissioners Working Draft and Comprehensive Plan Maps”

Detailed information on climate change in the Pacific Northwest: cses.washington.edu/cig

The mission of the Methow Valley Citizens’ Council... to preserve and protect the rural character of the Methow Valley

Dear Friends and Neighbors,



the rural character of the valley and the surrounding wild lands.

We are thankful for those of you who have taken time from your busy schedules to comment on the comprehensive plan, to meet with commissioner Bud Hover and others, to write letters to the editor, and to donate to MVCC’s efforts on this issue. Still, it is apparent from the latest draft of the comp plan that much more work will be required to convince the commissioners that we place a high value on both of our current Methow comprehensive plans.

Over the years, MVCC has successfully worked together with other community members to achieve many protections that today’s residents and visitors take for granted. Through these efforts we:

- Organized in 1974 in response to plans for a downhill ski area on Forest Service property near Mazama. MVCC won the ski hill case in the U.S. Supreme Court;
Negotiated the protection of the 1,200-acre Arrowleaf Resort property with conservation easements;
Helped create the Methow Review District, a more protective zoning code for the Methow Valley, which extends from Gold Creek to Early Winters;
Challenged the Okanogan PUD’s plans to build a transmission line through undeveloped lands from Twisp to Pateros;
Attended meetings, such as salmon recovery, watershed planning,

planning commission, county commissioners, board of adjustment, zoning hearings, PUD, and mediation;

- Supported community projects: roadside cleanup, Winthrop park trail, well-level monitoring, financial donations to the Wagner Pool, and an environmental-education conference.

The Board of MVCC meets regularly, and we invite you join us. At meetings we talk over the latest developments in the areas of water-resource planning, the PUD, and proposed residential and commercial developments of major consequence. We publish documents to help guide citizen involvement, such as the free Citizens’ Guide, which is an invaluable resource for people looking to become more involved in shaping the Methow’s future. Look for it at local stores or online at www.methow-valley-citizens-council.org.

In spite of our successes, pressures to develop and change the Methow Valley’s character in a manner that is inconsistent with the community’s vision have been relentless. The county comprehensive plan, which began with hope for a shared community vision, has instead been a chaotic and divisive process.

It is important to keep our tradition of grassroots citizen involvement alive and to work together as a community to protect the place we call home. It is time for this community to find its voice and to speak clearly about our future. Please demonstrate your support with a financial contribution or volunteer time.

There are many ways in which you can become part of this dialogue. You can attend meetings: MVCC board meetings, county commissioner meetings, PUD meetings, or public hearings; you can write letters to your elected representatives within the county, state, or federal government, or to the editor of local papers; you can renew your membership to MVCC or join by completing and returning the form below.

Next time you take a breath of fresh air, take a moment to recommit yourself to the preservation of the rural character of the Methow Valley. Together we do make a difference in keeping this valley the beautiful place we all cherish.

ARE YOU A CONCERNED CITIZEN?

Then MVCC is your organization! For over 35 years MVCC has worked to protect the rural character and biological integrity of the Methow watershed. With your support we will continue to do so. Let’s bequeath to our children a valley every bit as vibrant and beautiful as the one we are privileged to live in now. Send in your MVCC membership today to P.O. Box 774, Twisp, WA 98856.

- Limited Income: \$10 Regular Membership: \$35 Additional contributions welcome! \$\_\_\_\_\_
Yes, I’d like to become a member. I support MVCC’s goals and actions in promoting and protecting the rural and environmental character of the Methow.
I’d like to contribute \$\_\_\_\_\_ per month/year (circle one) to help fund a staff person to track projects and keep us all informed.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP
PHONE E-MAIL

Volunteers are welcome! I can help by doing one of the following:

- Joining the board Attending meetings Writing letters Fundraising Networking and phone-tree help

MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE