

# The Bulletin

## For ODFW, a different perspective on Metolius, development

By Kate Ramsayer / *The Bulletin*

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Courtesy Department of Fish and Wildlife

Fish and Wildlife Commissioners Zane Smith, left, and Carter Kerns look out over the Cascades during a field trip up Black Butte on Thursday morning. "It was a great perspective," Kerns said.

## Upcoming meeting

The Fish and Wildlife Commission meets at 8 a.m. today at the FivePine Lodge Conference Center in Sisters. It will debate hunting and trapping regulations for furbearing animals like bobcats and foxes, and discuss salmon reintroduction in the Upper Klamath River Basin. The public is welcome to attend.

It wasn't a typical start to an Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission event.

Two dozen Fish and Wildlife commissioners and staff members gathered at the top of Black Butte, and Chip Dale, the area's ODFW regional manager, pointed out the mountains across the horizon, from Broken Top to Mount Adams.

Commissioner Jon Englund was looking for another landmark.

"Chip, where's the area where the controversy is?" he asked.

Dale pointed out the areas in the green forest below the butte. He identified a clear-cut to the left of the Metolius River, where developers have proposed a 640-acre resort, and an area to the east of the river, where another company is planning a 2,500-unit destination resort.

“To give you some perspective, picture some golf links out there,” Dale said.

The commissioners, who are holding their monthly meeting in Sisters today, had made the two-mile hike up to the Black Butte summit Thursday morning to get a better perspective on the Metolius Basin, and to learn about local fish and wildlife projects. And with the Legislature slated to consider updating Oregon’s destination resort rules in the next session, and ODFW offering input to the governor about impacts to different species and their habitats, people discussed the consequences of development.

People including State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, whose family owns a home near the headwater, and members of the Friends of the Metolius have expressed concerns that the two proposed Metolius Basin destination resorts would interfere with the area’s groundwater. In 2007, an effort to pass legislation banning resorts near the river died in the Legislature. The Land Use Board of Appeals ruled earlier this year that changes need to be made to Jefferson County’s destination resort zone plans, but the changes weren’t enough to prevent the developments from going forward. And the Oregon Court of Appeals recently upheld LUBA’s decision.

Viewing the area from above gave commissioners a different perspective on the situation in the basin, said Carter Kerns, a Fish and Wildlife commissioner, after the hike.

“I was surprised at the number of resorts that are planned,” Kerns said. “I thought our land use laws would have done a better job of regulating so we didn’t have so many of them.”

There is a finite amount of natural resources in Oregon, he said, and development is causing the loss of wildlife habitat and migration routes. Plus, with destination resorts, as with other changes to the land use, such as wind farms or lands that are put in a conservation trust, opportunities are often lost for hunters and fishermen, he said.

“I don’t have the answers, but we’re becoming a land of no use,” Kerns said, adding that these off-limits areas change a lifestyle for many Oregonians.

When you put a whole bunch of people in an area, Dale said, wildlife often go from a valuable resource to a problem. Elk trample golf courses, deer eat landscaping and cougars start getting too close for comfort. That also puts an added burden on the Fish and Wildlife agency to deal with those conflicts, he said.

Fish and Wildlife acts as a consultant to counties and developers when it comes to destination resorts, said Glen Ardt, wildlife habitat biologist with the department. But it's sometimes a challenge for the agency to ensure that the developments follow through with the projects they are supposed to complete to make up for the disturbances to wildlife and habitat, he said.

And Fish and Wildlife is increasingly finding itself on the opposing side to counties, who want the economic boost that destination resorts bring.

The issue extends from destination resorts to other developments as well. Plans for the Skyline Forest west of Bend call for much of it to remain forested but for some development as well. But that could have a serious impact on the deer population that lives there.

The herd is already depressed at about 2,200 animals, said Steve George, district wildlife biologist. And the development would block their migration patterns, which could cut the herd in half, he said.

And then there are the water issues that come with development. From the top of Black Butte, Dale pointed out that the Upper Deschutes Basin has a groundwater system that's closely tied to surface water flows.

"We've got to be careful to not allow these money-making ventures to soak up the water," said Zane Smith, a Fish and Wildlife commissioner from Springfield.

One of the problems that destination resorts pose is that they often are located in areas that were previously working landscapes, whether it be timberlands or grazing lands.

"You don't have to plop them down in these valuable places," Smith said, adding that there could be places where destination resorts would be appropriate, if the spots aren't critical habitat for animals, and aren't in areas where wildfires and water are issues.

The Metolius resort proposals are concerning because of the loss of deer winter range, he said, since there is often not enough of that to support the herds.

For Englund, the impact on wildlife is a concern, he said. And from Black Butte, covered in wildflowers Thursday morning, he could see the problem that resorts might pose for migrating animals.

“Being up there, you got a good picture of a very productive basin,” he said. “We should be wise users there.”

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