



Art of Community | TREAD will advocate for trails, recreation in our valley

by Rufus Woods | Publisher | **Aug. 15, 2017, 2:36 p.m.**

Outdoors, Art of Community

A new recreational advocacy and education organization, Wenatchee Valley TREAD, has been formed to enhance the quality of life in the valley. The formation of TREAD, which stands for Trails, Recreation, Education, Advocacy and Development, was announced Tuesday at a press conference at the new Saddle Rock Gateway trailhead.

Developing a trails and recreation organization was one of the game-changer projects identified by the Our Valley Our Future community-building effort, said coordinator Steve Maher. It's the first Our Valley game-changer to be completed.

Also announced at the press conference was the completion of an economic impact study of recreation, sponsored by the Wenatchee Valley Chamber and funded by the ports of Chelan and Douglas counties. The study shows that recreation contributes \$478 million in economic impact to the two counties.

The formation of Wenatchee Valley Tread addresses a nagging issue in developing a more comprehensive recreation program here. Recreation and trails development has been scattered among various nonprofit groups and state and federal agencies and has lacked coordination and focus.

I spoke with Jeff Ostenson, who is chairing the TREAD steering committee, about the effort earlier this week. The goal, he told me, is to have Tread represent a wide spectrum of user groups, including motorized off-road vehicles, equestrians, cyclists, kayakers, trail runners, fishing and hunting interests and the like. It's a big tent approach.

One of the really interesting questions that group has been wrestling with, Ostenson told me, is whether a recreation system should be built primarily for outside visitors or the local community. The general consensus, he said, is that a system should be built to enhance the quality of life in the local community.

People from outside the area will come to enjoy the vast recreational assets, of course, but Ostenson hopes that maintaining that connection to the sense of place and of caring for the land, that visitors will treat our resources with respect and care.

Chamber executive director Shiloh Schauer said the focus is on values-based recreational development rather than a consumption-based approach.

As the population booms in the greater Seattle area, we're going to see more pressure on our lands as they come here to seek recreational opportunities. "If we don't have the structure in place to prevent their vision to be the new vision (for our valley), it won't be the place we love," Ostenson said.

The founding board doesn't yet represent all of the user groups, but filling out that group is a priority for the TREAD organization. For the first 18 months, the Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce will provide some logistical support and be the fiscal sponsor for TREAD while the organization seeks nonprofit status.

Ostenson hopes that this umbrella organization can make a strong case for state funding through the Recreation and Conservation Organization grant process and developing additional local resources. Among early priorities for TREAD will be developing an asset inventory and convening a recreation roundtable to begin developing a comprehensive and targeted approach to development of the valley's recreational resources.

We are going to see tremendous changes in the valley and the more we effectively shape the future with an eye toward preserving the quality of life for our communities, we are more likely to appreciate the outcome. Having no plan as a valley is a recipe for lots of unintended consequences.

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