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## **Star-News, 3-24-22**

### **Valley County applies to set aside 1,218 acres of state land**

**Lease would prevent development, allow recreational uses**

BY DREW DODSON

The Star-News

An application to conserve 1,218 acres of state land on both sides of Payette Lake has been submitted to the Idaho Department of Lands by Valley County.

About 1,051 acres are along Warren Wagon Road near McCall, while 167 acres are along Eastside Drive south of Lucks Point.

If approved by the state land board, the lease would prevent development on the lands, but still allow public access for camping, hiking, berry picking and other recreational activities.

The lands department could also earn money from additional leases on the lands for logging, recreation, grazing and other uses, under the proposal.

There is no timeline for the lands department to review and respond to the county's application, IDL spokesperson Sharla Arledge said.

The parcels are among the most popular state lands for summer and winter recreation near McCall, Valley County Commissioner Dave Bingaman said.

"Both parcels are close to town and are popular camping areas," Bingaman said.

The Eastside Drive parcel is an access point to the Payette National Forest and Crestline Trail through mountains east of Payette Lake.

The land along Warren Wagon Road contains snowmobile trails and is the most visible state land from McCall.

The lease would be for two to three years and would pay the lands department an amount still to be determined.

The lease would be held by the county, but funded by United Payette, a nonprofit group which has raised more than \$100,000 for conservation leases.

Allowing Valley County to hold the lease would ensure long-term stability since it is a government agency, said Jeff Mousseau, a United Payette board member.

The lease application covers about 20% of the more than 5,000 acres of Payette Lake endowment land on which United Payette hopes to secure conservation leases.

United Payette's plan mirrors the acres covered by the state's management plan for Payette Lake endowment lands, which was adopted last spring.

However, the coalition's plan encourages selling about 160 acres, or 58% less than the 377 acres that could be sold off within 20 years under the state's management plan.

#### **Lake Islands**

United Payette's plan originally said the 27 acres making up Shellworth Island and Cougar Island in Payette Lake could be its top priority.

However, the likelihood of the lands department putting Cougar Island up for sale this year made a short-term conservation lease unworkable, Mousseau said.

"We have commissioned a task force for developing a permanent solution for Cougar Island that may also lay a path for Shellworth Island," he said.

Mousseau expects the coalition and the county to join on more lease applications for lands around Payette Lake if the current application is successful.

The short-term leases would give the coalition time to raise money for conservation easements that would permanently restrict future development on the endowment lands.

*Publication Date: Thursday, March 24, 2022*