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Star-News

Cougar Island buyer could run afoul of McCall zoning laws

Given the rising costs of land everywhere, someone from outside of Idaho may believe that the \$10.3 million-dollar minimum price tag for Cougar Island is a bargain. That is if they don't take a look at the details.

The Idaho Department of Lands plans to auction Cougar Island on Sept. 14 and it is within its rights to do so, However, the buyer must be aware of what they are buying.

The island is in the area of impact of the City of McCall, and once private it will be the city and county who will ultimately rule on what can and cannot be built there.

Although the IDL has divided the island into five plats, the city zoning is rural residential, i.e., 1 house per 10 acres, and the island is only 14.2 acres. You do the math.

There is also an assumption in the IDL appraisal that another septic system could be placed on the island. This all has led to the McCall City Council voting unanimously at its meeting on Aug. 11 to adopt a resolution designating Cougar Island as an area of critical concern and to develop an emergency ordinance to prohibit issuance of land use approvals and building permits until new code can be created and adopted regarding waste disposal from islands in Big Payette Lake.

This ordinance would be presented to Valley County for approval and adoption. These actions clearly demonstrate substantial local government efforts to protect the city's sole drinking water source from impacts of island development, and United Payette applauds the City Council and its efforts and urges Valley County to approve the ordinance once presented.

What else can be done? The United Payette coalition continues to work hard to find alternate solutions and is currently seeking donations/pledges to fund acquiring the island and conserving it in its current state in perpetuity.

This is clearly a big ask due to the high appraised value from IDL. However, we believe it is important for the protection of our drinking water, the lake's ecosystem, and the iconic nature of the island.

We sincerely appreciate all donors who have pledged to date for this effort. To join us in conserving Cougar Island and learn more please go to <https://unitedpayette.org>

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