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Inability to fight small battles for endowment land carries big risk

In activism, you win some battles, lose some and receive setbacks, but you keep fighting the forces that refuse to stand up for people in our community, the land, our watershed, and wildlife.

Valley County commissioners denied the two recommendations the McCall City Council voted on to protect Cougar Island.

I watched the commissioners' meeting in disbelief, felt heartbreak, and was disappointed at their decision to deny the City of McCall's bold and courageous action at their Aug. 11 meeting to protect Cougar Island.

The commissioner's arguments for denial were weak. The fear of a lawsuit by the state by complicating the auction was an assumption based on no facts. McCall City Attorney Bill Nichols and two expert land use attorneys I spoke with agreed a lawsuit would be unlikely" because it would not prevent development."

The timeline for this decision was a months-long kicking of the can from the county. A back-and-forth of who had jurisdiction, the county or the city. Then after a few months, the county asked the City of McCall to write an ordinance to protect Cougar Island, "you have jurisdiction."

The McCall City council submitted two regulations, the most crucial being declaring Cougar Island an area of critical concern. The two ordinances would help protect Payette Lake, McCall's source of drinking water, by requiring essential and needed environmental analysis.

The City of McCall sent their recommendations to the county commissioners, who fast-tracked the hearing without public comment and denied the recommendations.

Commissioner Elting Hasbrouck stated one of the reasons for denial: "It is only a piece of property with a lake around it."

What is at stake from the inaction of our county commissioners is our drinking water. The inability to fight the small battles for endowment land will risk losing the fight to save 5,000 acres of endowment land around Payette lake, threatening our drinking water.

If we do not fight county commissioners who do not have a sense of what this priceless land means to the people in our community or the loss of this land for future generations and the threat to our watershed, then we will lose it all.

The morels in spring, the huckleberry bushes full of berries in summer, 100-year-old trees, our wildlife neighbors, and our drinking water will be threatened by those who only think of endowment land as a commodity for profit.

The solution to saving our endowment land is to vote out commissioners that do not understand what is at stake. The key to saving the endowment land is not to try to outbid investors and developers with more money but to fight to amend the constitutional mandate for endowment land enacted in the 1890s that will not protect this land and water for future generations.

We must fight the manipulations and take away the power of the self-interested who want to exploit what remains of our land and water.

David Gallipoli, McCall

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