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Star-News

Truck drivers prefer downtown over bypass



A logging truck turns right from Railroad Avenue onto Third Street (Idaho 55) last week in downtown McCall. Courtesy/Suzan Ahrens

[December 29, 2022](#)
in [News](#)

Steep grades, slick conditions cited

BY DREW DODSON

The Star-News

Yael Oren cringes each time she watches a loaded log truck drive by on Idaho 55 outside the window of her office in downtown McCall.

Oren, an employee of FIG Financial Insurance Group at 1005 N. 3rd St., worries that loaded log trucks driving toward a sharp turn in downtown McCall are “an acci-dent waiting to happen.”

“We hear the brakes screaming,” Oren said. “I don’t think it’s appropriate due to the amount of traffic and pedestrians.”

Many of the log trucks Oren sees daily are coming from a 390-acre timber sale on Eastside Drive that was recently sold by the Idaho Department of Lands to Idaho Forest Group.

The \$1.3-million sale will produce about 1,000 truckloads of logs before work is completed next summer, said Mac Lefebvre, a procurement forester for the Coeur d'Alene lumber company. So far, the company has been averaging about eight truckloads per day from the sale, but that number is expected to double to about 16 trips per day in January.

The company allows truck drivers to choose between two routes through McCall while driving logs to sawmills south of New Meadows on U.S. 95 and in Grangeville.

One route takes drivers down Lick Creek Road, Davis Avenue, Wooley Avenue and Railroad Avenue before turning right onto Third Street (Idaho 55) in downtown McCall.

The other route follows Lick Creek Road and Spring Mountain Boulevard to Deinhard Lane and Boydstun Street, two city roads that serve an unofficial Idaho 55 bypass of downtown McCall.

McCall city manager Anette Spickard has requested that the bypass route be used for all IDL logging projects, but the city cannot ban trucks in downtown McCall because Third Street is owned by the Idaho Transportation Department.

“It is not appropriate for us, nor do we have the legal authority, to restrict the legal use of a state highway,” Sharla Arledge, an IDL spokesperson, said of the city’s request.

Most of the trucks from the Eastside Drive timber sale seem to be opting for the downtown right over the bypass, according to Oren and other business owners in the area.

“I see the logging trucks frequently, but I’ve never seen them cause an issue with traffic backup or pedestrians,” said Claire Holcomb, who works the front desk at Hotel McCall.

Rebekah McHolm also sees the passing log trucks daily from the windows of the Payette Dream Coffee House and Diner, which she has owned since 2017. McHolm does not object to the trucks passing through downtown as long as they follow the speed limit, but questioned why the route seems to be preferred by truck drivers.

“If I was the driver, I would not want to go through a congested, high-density pedestrian area where people and kids might step out from between cars,” she said.

For truck drivers, the choice between the two routes often comes down to picking the lesser of two evils, said Dan Green, owner and operator of D&D Green Trucking of New Meadows.

“I don’t like going through McCall, period, no matter which way I go,” said Green, who has driven log trucks in the area for 40 years.

Green is not working the Eastside Drive timber sale but said he would drive through downtown McCall if he was. The downtown route has more traffic and pedestrians, but the bypass route has steeper grades that can be dangerous when icy, Green said.

It can also be hard for loaded trucks to turn left onto Idaho 55 from Boydstun Street due to traffic. Log trucks can more easily navigate tight turns in downtown McCall because the trailers are designed to be able to get through windy logging roads in the forest.

“We can pretty much wiggle around whatever,” he said, adding that he does not consider turns in downtown McCall as “tight.”

Overall, the 1,000 log truck trips through McCall are expected to produce about 5.2 million board feet of lumber at sawmills near New Meadows and in Grangeville, Lefebvre said.

Logging will thin about 167 acres across from the Tamarack Bay Condominiums and 192 acres near the intersection of Eastside Drive and Lick Creek Road.

About 31 acres near a segment of the Crestline Trail, an 11-mile out-and-back trail through mountains flanking the east side of Payette Lake, will be clearcut and replanted.

The sale will mainly remove trees damaged by the Douglas-fir beetle, the spruce budworm and other insects in an area last logged about 20 years ago, Arledge said. Removing the damaged trees will reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildfire that could threaten nearby homes.

Logging will primarily happen Monday through Friday, but could also happen occasionally on weekends, Lefebvre said. Flaggers will be used when logging close to Eastside Drive to protect people from driving into dangerous timber fall zones.

Most of the money from the \$1.3-million sale will go to Idaho State University and Lewis and Clark State College, which are among the beneficiaries of state endowment land, Arledge said.