

Learn to appreciate other points of view

BY ED LEVERT

Many of you are aware of the collaborative group called the Kootenai Forest Stakeholder Coalition (KFSC), a diverse group of area citizens and groups that came together to find common ground on a diverse number of natural resource issues. It all began back in 2006, when the KFSC was born. Many of our founding group thought that this was just an opportunity to help the forest sell more timber and bring back a sawmill to Libby. But it didn't take long before we found that there were widely varying objectives in our group. Not everyone thought that cutting more timber was the most important resource out there and some thought that cutting no trees was all right.

The simple truth is that no collaborative group is going to succeed unless all viewpoints are recognized. We had the wilderness advocates and the snowmobile groups along with ATV advocates all resulting in any number of contentious issues. Over the years we have learned

to appreciate the other point of view of our group.

Collaborative groups that are effective typically move at glacier like speed. Ours is no exception. But finding agreement on our guidelines did happen and showed that we could actually increase the timber harvest over the current levels using our guidelines. And yes, we actually came to agreement on those other difficult land use allocations including wilderness, motorized and non-motorized area designations. But that isn't all we have been doing over the past 12 years. We have had project teams working in cooperation with the forest service on timber sales, providing input with the objective of being able to support those projects. We don't support all of their projects, but we have supported the majority of ones we have worked on.

Our bottom line is that our citizens need to have a voice in the management of our national forests. The emphasis currently being given to the agency is that you need to have a collaborative approach to projects and that doesn't exactly mean just send us your comments. When the East Reservoir Timber Sale was litigated our collaborative, which

supported the project, also successfully intervened in the case. Did that make a difference to the district judge? You bet it did and Judge Christianson found in favor of the forest service. I don't think that would have happened if we as a support group had not been represented by our lawyer and our executive board.

We have now embarked on a mission to seek legislative action that could see congressional action to make permanent our recommendations for wilderness, motorized and non-motorized recreational areas. We also hope that through this congressional action we might provide incentives to the Kootenai National Forest that hopefully will simplify and accelerate their timber sale program. We want you to know that we are not trying to take over their authority, as we only want them to succeed. How can they not succeed if they have the community solidly behind them? What we ask of you, the citizens and organizations of our area, is to support this process as we move forward. We don't have all the answers yet, but with your help we are trying.

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