

November 18, 2020

Dear Neighbor,

The Hulen Meadows Reach of the Wood River (the portion of the river just east of our neighborhood including the Hulen Meadows Pond) is in poor shape today and will continue to deteriorate to an increasing rate unless a scientifically designed renovation project is undertaken. If nothing is done to restore this Reach, we fear the habitat will continue to be degraded, so much so that infrastructure could be damaged by flooding, the pond will be disconnected from the river completely, and we will eventually lose this recreational amenity that many have come to enjoy.

As residents of Hulen Meadows (HM), we decided several years ago to see what might be done to put the Hulen Meadows Reach and Pond back in a healthy condition. This letter describes how we got where we are today and how a beneficial project – creation of a Sun Peak Preserve -- might yet be achieved.

Any path forward must take into account the following circumstances:

- 1) The Hulen Meadows Reach is in bad shape and getting worse all the time.
- 2) Neither BLM nor any other state or local governmental entity has the financial wherewithal to accomplish the work necessary to restore the Reach and Pond to a healthy condition and then maintain it into the future.
- 3) We approached the Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) because they have the expertise to implement a project that will enhance habitat, create and manage a preserve for long term use, and provide access while preserving open space. The WRLT Board and Staff have been good trustworthy partners in this effort.
- 4) We approached the City of Ketchum after recognizing that having a local sponsor willing to submit an RPP lease to BLM would save considerably on costs (see below for more detail).
- 5) As of today, we are still in the conceptual design phase seeking public comment on what the Sun Peak Preserve might look like. Various iterations shown in open sessions so far are **proposals** on which public comment is sought in order to refine designs.
- 6) Any transfer of the property by BLM to local entities will undergo a lengthy review process offering multiple opportunities for public input.
- 7) BLM rules require that any use of the property following transfer to local entities must comply with ADA guidelines.

Here in greater detail is the actual story of how we got where we are today:

#### I. The Deterioration of the Hulen Meadows Reach and Creation of a Restoration Plan

In 2016, a study of the full length of the Wood River in our valley conducted by river experts Biota Research and sponsored and funded by BLM, the Forest Service, Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy and The Wood River Land Trust identified the Hulen Meadow Reach as the most

seriously unstable portion of the entire river. It recommended restoration of the entire reach to improve its hydrology and reduce its erosion and sedimentation and reconnection to the River's floodplain.

In 2017 HM residents met to review the seriously deteriorated status of the river and pond. The consensus at that meeting at the home of Sarah Michael and Bob Jonas was to revisit the pond restoration through the lens of a "preserve" closely related to the Wood River. Wendy Jaquet who attended that meeting volunteered to explore options with HM resident Paul Ahern.

Jaquet and Ahern have presented ideas for restoring the river and pond at every HMHOA annual meeting since 2017 and also made periodic reports in the HM newsletter which always encourage any interested residents to contact them to discuss the status of their restoration efforts.

The WRLT established an account to fund at our request and over \$17,000 was donated by fifty-one HM residents to hire Biota Research to create a concept plan to improve the health of the Hulen Meadows Reach and restore the Pond in such a way it would not be refilled with sediment in future years. At the HMHOA Annual Meeting in June of 2018, residents voted 70 to 1 in favor of the concept plan designed by Biota.

## II. The Effort to Find Funding for the Restoration Project.

A thorough effort to find government funding for the restoration project was undertaken beginning with an approach to Congressman Simpson's office. Mr. Simpson did insert helpful language in recent appropriations bills encouraging BLM to work collaboratively with local stakeholders on the project and local BLM officials are ready, willing, and able to do so. However, it was determined that direct federal funding to accomplish the project was not going to be available in our lifetimes.

Jaquet and Ahern then asked the Blaine County Commissioners and Blaine County Recreation District Board members if this would be a project either governmental entity would undertake. The County referred them to the Recreation District which declined due to other priorities.

Jaquet and Ahern then approached the WRLT and requested its active support for the restoration because of its experience in land, water and wildlife projects. We were encouraged when WRLT Board and Staff indicated a willingness to work with us to see if the entire Hulen Meadows Reach as well as the Pond could be restored.

Preliminary meetings were convened in early 2019 with BLM staff to investigate what might be accomplished and how best to proceed. An observation by a BLM hydrologist led Biota to revise its original plan to add work on the floodplain north of Sage Road in order to reduce river velocity and enhance wildlife habitat.

Following these meetings, BLM suggested that the parties apply for a Recreation, Public Purpose (RPP) patent which would permit local entities to carry out the restoration work and maintain the area thereafter. [More on the RPP application review process below] The WRLT could apply directly for a patent and pay one half of the fair market value of all BLM property west of the river or, alternatively, a governmental entity could apply for the patent and pay nothing with the WRLT assuming responsibility for funding the project work and then maintenance of the preserve.

With the second more cost-effective option in mind, Blaine County and the BCRD were approached a second time but again declined to participate. Our group then approached the City of Ketchum to measure its interest in pursuing the project in the limited role of government sponsor. Fortunately, the Mayor and staff have been willing to help to see whether the restoration project might be accomplished, but with no commitment of City funds for the restoration work or future maintenance of the preserve.

If broad community support can be achieved, we hope the City will agree to file for an RPP patent from BLM which would allow the restoration project to move forward and that the WRLT will agree to try to raise the necessary funding for the project and long-term maintenance.

*Having gone through this lengthy investigation, we see no other feasible path to accomplishing the restoration of the Hulen Meadows Reach, including the Pond.*

### III. What Must Happen Next to Achieve Restoration of the Hulen Meadows Reach and Pond

At the present time, the parties supporting this restoration project are considering possible configurations of the Sun Peak Preserve and seeking community input on various proposed designs. Proposals are evolving based upon the advice of river experts and input from folks throughout the valley. *We recognize that successful restoration will only occur if there is broad community support for the project.*

To that end, open public meetings presenting the evolving design concepts were held at Ketchum City Hall and the Limelight Hotel in December 2019 and March 2020. Many HM residents attended one or both of those sessions. The general consensus appeared to be to proceed with improving the health of the river and restoring the pond. Possible amenities include a restroom, parking, picnic tables and a handicapped accessible viewing/fishing platform. Staff were directed to create conceptual designs for the next round of public meetings. The conceptual designs were informed by public comments received to-date, and advice from hydrology and fish and wildlife professionals, as well as professionals familiar with ADA requirements and best practices.

A revised proposed design was presented on October 21, 2020 to another public meeting held at the pond location and attended by over 80 citizens, most from Hulen Meadows. Many concerns were expressed about elements of the proposal. Most attendees appeared to recognize the importance of creating a Sun Peak Preserve and restoring the Hulen Meadows Reach, but objections were raised to new parking configurations and other hardscape amenities. The

project's advocates are considering other revisions for the proposed design in light of the comments received from that evening.

If and only if a concept design is proposed that enjoys broad public support and the City of Ketchum and WRLT decide to proceed, then a lengthy multi-step review process will be conducted by BLM before it decides whether to issue an RPP Patent. This process brings all interested parties to the table including federal, state and local agencies, NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and community residents. BLM will also review the environmental impacts of the proposed design. There will be multiple opportunities for public input. Project details would be spelled out in any final Patent issued and any material deviation from those details would require additional BLM approval.

*It is important to recognize that BLM regulations require that this project must comply with ADA guidelines. Approximately one out of every ten Blaine County residents report having one or multiple disabilities. The support of this group of our neighbors and friends will be critical to a successful application process.*

Finally, assuming a Patent is ultimately issued, then efforts could proceed to apply for government grants and raise charitable contributions to fund the restoration work. A management reserve will also need to be raised to fund required maintenance of the preserve. The project is roughly estimated to be in the range of \$1 million and the final amount could vary depending upon the final design and ultimate construction costs.

#### IV. Call to Action

We continue to encourage all interested HM residents to join us in working towards a restoration project design that enjoys substantial community support. You can contact Wendy at [REDACTED] and Paul at [REDACTED]. Working together, we can improve the health of the Hulen Meadows Reach and Pond so that this beautiful environment can be preserved for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Wendy Jaquet

Jim Jaquet

Paul Ahern