

Environmentalists Cautiously Optimistic About Port Gamble Partnership

By Christopher Dunagan

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PORT GAMBLE

Environmentalists who had serious doubts about Kitsap County's Rural Wooded Incentive Program are finding favor with the [North Kitsap Legacy Partnership](#).

"The devil is in the details," noted Ed Bass, chairman of Kitsap Conservation Voters.

Kitsap County Commissioner Steve Bauer and Jon Rose of Olympic Property Group unveiled a plan this week that would bring 7,000 acres of private forestland into county ownership. In return, property owner Pope Resources would receive undetermined benefits, including increased housing development in the Port Gamble area.

Bass said the county commissioners must protect the environment and the interests of the public. One issue, he said, is to protect critical wildlife habitat, even if that happens to be where the company wants to build.

Tom Nevins, a Kitsap County planning commissioner who supports environmental causes, said he can't say too much, because the issue is likely to come before the planning commission.

"I can easily go on record as saying this has potential beneficial attributes," he said. "Some things need to fall into place before this happens. It is early in the game. It looks generally positive."

"My reaction," said Tom Donnelly of Kitsap Citizens for Responsible Planning, "is that this proposal has merit. It makes good sense to me if, at the end of the day, there is 8,000 acres in play and the county has at least limited control over 7,000 of those acres and a kind of conservation easement that prevents industrial development."

Donnelly was one of the strongest critics of the Rural Wooded Incentive Program, which allows a property owner to build four times as many houses, provided they are clustered together. Ultimately, that program could create many scattered clusters, and the property owner could continue to harvest timber from his land.

That incentive program is on hold because of a county-imposed moratorium.

Donnelly said he does not object to Bauer's idea of selective logging on county forestlands if the money is used to maintain the property and its network of trails.

He warned county officials to have a negotiator equal to Pope Resources' employees, who do their job well.

"Their job is not to give away the store for the county," he said. "It is to make money for the shareholders. This concept has lots of merit, but the details are critical."

Vivian Henderson, executive director of Kitsap Alliance of Property Owners, attended a meeting of the county commissioners Wednesday. After the meeting, she said her organization has not yet taken a position on the idea.



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