

## State Board of Natural Resources rejects Wallace Falls timber deal

- [NOAH HAGLUND](#)
- Tue Feb 7th, 2017 5:21pm
- [NEWS](#)

GOLD BAR — A state board on Tuesday turned down a compromise that would have set aside part of a timber harvest to protect trails and scenery near [Wallace Falls State Park](#), leaving local elected leaders and trail advocates disheartened.

The [Board of Natural Resources](#) voted 4-2 to oppose a request from Snohomish County. As a result, the whole 187 acres of second-growth forest known as the Singletary sale could go to auction within the next month or so.

“I’m strongly disappointed in the decision,” said County Councilman Sam Low, who played a lead role drumming up local support for the compromise. “I think we were very collaborative. We brought a lot of different people to the table on this.”

Low spoke to the board before Tuesday’s vote. The proposal would have protected 25 acres for four years. The forest is managed in trust by the state Department of Natural Resources. Logging it would provide revenue to schools, firefighters, hospitals and other local taxing districts. While local governments depend on the revenue, environmentalists and outdoors enthusiasts worried that logging could exact a toll on the natural habitat and hurt local tourism. Debate about the harvest has been ongoing since 2008.

The amount at stake is significant. The Singletary sale is a minimum bid of \$1.8 million. It could go out for bids at the DNR’s February or March timber auction.

State Commissioner of Public Lands [Hilary Franz](#), who oversees the DNR, discussed the potential compromise with Snohomish County officials. She supported the deal on the Board of Natural Resources, where she’s one of six members along with other political representatives and scientific experts.

Representing another seat is state Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal, whose responsibilities include guarding the financial interests of public schools. Reykdal voted “no.” Through an office spokesman, he relayed two reasons for his vote: a lack of guarantees to make the trust beneficiaries, including the Sultan School District, whole after four years; and the absence of a more detailed plan for preserving trails.

The timber trust land is part of the DNR’s Reiter Forest, which also includes the Reiter Foothills recreation area.

Wallace Falls attracts up to 160,000 visitors each year, said Virginia Painter, a state parks spokeswoman. Most visitors trek up to see the park’s eponymous falls.

Logging the Singletary tract would require building roads and bridges. That infrastructure would provide access for future logging of another 1,500 acres of trust land. Those harvests would border the state park, which measures about 4,700 acres.

State parks officials have been working with DNR to lessen the impact of any timber harvests in the area, Painter said.

Mike Town is a past volunteer with an advisory group that helped the DNR plan out the area. Town and others who supported the compromise believed it would have gone a long way toward keeping the park appealing and accessible. He said the county proposal did provide assurances to the state that the land could be logged after four years, barring some other solution. He also contends that a 2011 recreation plan showed how trails through the state trust land would connect to Wallace Falls.

“We are disappointed that the board voted against a compromise resolution which was passed unanimously by a bipartisan county council,” Town said.

The County Council **voted 5-0 on Feb. 1** in support. County Executive Dave Somers, who used to represent Low's council seat, also approved.

"For 10 years, efforts have been made to find a compromise that balances good stewardship of our natural resources with appropriate land management," Somers said in a statement. "It took Snohomish County Councilmember Sam Low, the City of Sultan, the environmental community and many concerned citizens years of work to craft a reasonable compromise. The Board of Natural Resources ignored both the needs of a local community and a sensible solution."

*Noah Haglund: 425-339-3465; [nhaglund@heraldnet.com](mailto:nhaglund@heraldnet.com). Twitter: [@NWhaglund](https://twitter.com/NWhaglund).*