

Land Trust receives Skyline Forest commitment

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Bend, Oregon — The Deschutes Basin Land Trust announced this week that Cascade Timberlands, the owner of Skyline Forest, has committed to work with the Land Trust and the community to explore conservation opportunities for Skyline Forest. The Land Trust has sought to acquire and conserve Skyline Forest, the 33,000-acre tree farm that stretches from Bend to Sisters.

The property has historically been known as the Bull Springs Tree Farm, operating as such for roughly 80 years. It contains low elevation deer winter range as well as the foothills of the Cascades. The name “Skyline Forest” refers to the Land Trust’s vision for Bull Springs as a Community Forest that is managed for the long-term benefit of local communities. At the public’s urging, the Land Trust has been working systematically for more than two years to acquire and conserve Skyline Forest. Nearly a year ago the Land Trust learned that Cascade Timberlands had a new majority owner, Fidelity National Financial. Fidelity cancelled a planned auction of Skyline last April and since then has been evaluating all of their timberland holdings and looking at their options. “We’ve been pretty outspoken in our desire to acquire Skyline Forest for the community. In talks with Cascade/Fidelity they’ve indicated they won’t sell Skyline without talking to us first. However, they’d like to explore developing a portion of their land and if successful would contribute the balance to the Land Trust,” said Brad Chalfant, the Land Trust’s executive director. Chalfant noted that while the Land Trust would ideally like to acquire all of Skyline Forest, “A land trust can only accept what’s offered to it, whether that’s a donation of land or the opportunity to purchase.” Chalfant was pleased with Cascade/Fidelity’s willingness to have a public dialogue on the future of Skyline, but noted that irrespective of the offer, the Land Trust will continue to need to raise funds to pursue the Skyline Forest project. “This is a monumental opportunity, but also a monumental undertaking and is why we’ll continue to need the community’s strong support to see this through.” The Deschutes Basin Land Trust works cooperatively with private landowners and local communities to conserve and restore the lands and streams of the Deschutes Basin. Since 1995, the Land Trust has protected more than 6,700 acres.

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