



A GEM of an opportunity

Collaborative working to develop trail from Elk City to Avery

By Ben Jorgensen
The Clearwater Progress

Providing motorized access along a well branded forest trail could open the door to a wealth of recreational and economic possibilities in north central Idaho.

"We think this area is a real gem for recreation opportunities and it's not just hunting and fishing that most people think about," said Randy Doman, co-chair of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative's Recreation Subcommittee and member of the Idaho Parks and Recreation. "It's a lot of other things. As these mountain bikers come along they are looking for more opportunities."

More opportunities is what the Gem State offers and more specifically—the GEM Trail.

One of the CBC's recent big ideas is to develop a 243-mile motorized route dubbed the GEM (Grand Ex-

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GEM

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ploration Motorized) Trail winding from Elk City to Avery.

When completed, the trail will afford recreationists a sampling of the region's mountainous beauty and colorful history. It also promises to open an economic window for the small towns positioned along the route.

For those familiar with the North South Trail, the GEM Trail is basically the same route but with a catchier name.

The route incorporates existing trails or roads over federal, state, and private land. The CBC has been working to formalize agreements among all the stakeholders as well as develop signage, a process which can take years. The CBC is optimistic that the first phase of the trail, from the Elk City trailhead to Kooskia, will be completed by next summer.

Created out of land use conflict in 2008, the CBC is comprised of a broad array of regional interests that work in tandem to resolve natural resources issues. Its mission is to enhance and protect the ecological and economic health of the forests, rivers and communities within the Clearwater Basin.

"We have a large group of partners, and a vision, and the timing is right," said Doman about the trail.

The CBC's major partners include the Forest Service and BLM. Motorbike and ATV communities are largely onboard, as well as the Army Corps of Engineers, Idaho Parks and Rec., Idaho County Road and Bridge, Idaho County Commission, highway districts in Clearwater County, and the Shearer family who donated land for a premier trailhead at Elk City.

The GEM Trail will be designated for ATV and UTV vehicles, however there may be some sections that can accommodate vehicles over 50 inches in width, noted Carol Hennessey, Forest Service representative to the CBC Subcommittee.

"The trail will open up wonderful places on

the forest," she noted, including the historic Elk City Wagon Road which offers "a fun ride for the whole family."

The Elk City Wagon Road sets the standard for the whole route as far as signage and every campsite being marked, noted Hennessey, who added that it is possible for that road to be nominated as a national historical trail.

Such a nomination could greatly bolster its appeal just as it did for the Lewis and Clark Trail. With increased interest comes more opportunity to share the history of the area.

"During Clearwater Days there is a day they dress in period clothing and take people the entire way across. We just think it would be fun for more people to experience that," said Hennessey.

"Our overall message is to tell people they are welcome on the forest," added Doman.

Judging by the feedback he receives when brushing trail, Alex Irby, who co-chairs the subcommittee with Doman, said folks are famished for something like the GEM Trail.

"The public reception has been awesome," he said. "That's the reason for this GEM Trail. The intent to have something that people could have and come and enjoy. As old timers we know where to go and don't need guidance, we don't think we do," laughed Irby.

For novices, visitors, or families looking for a weekend outing, having a well-defined formalized trail is a must. "Many don't know where they are going," said Irby. The Gem Trail will serve as the region's main off road travel artery, but CBC members expect much more down the road, so to speak.

With ample community support all along the trail, it is anticipated that towns will support the GEM Trail with promotion and maintenance.

Doman mentioned that the Paiute Trail in Utah has been very successfully implemented and an economic boon to that state. He expects the same of the GEM



Randy Doman



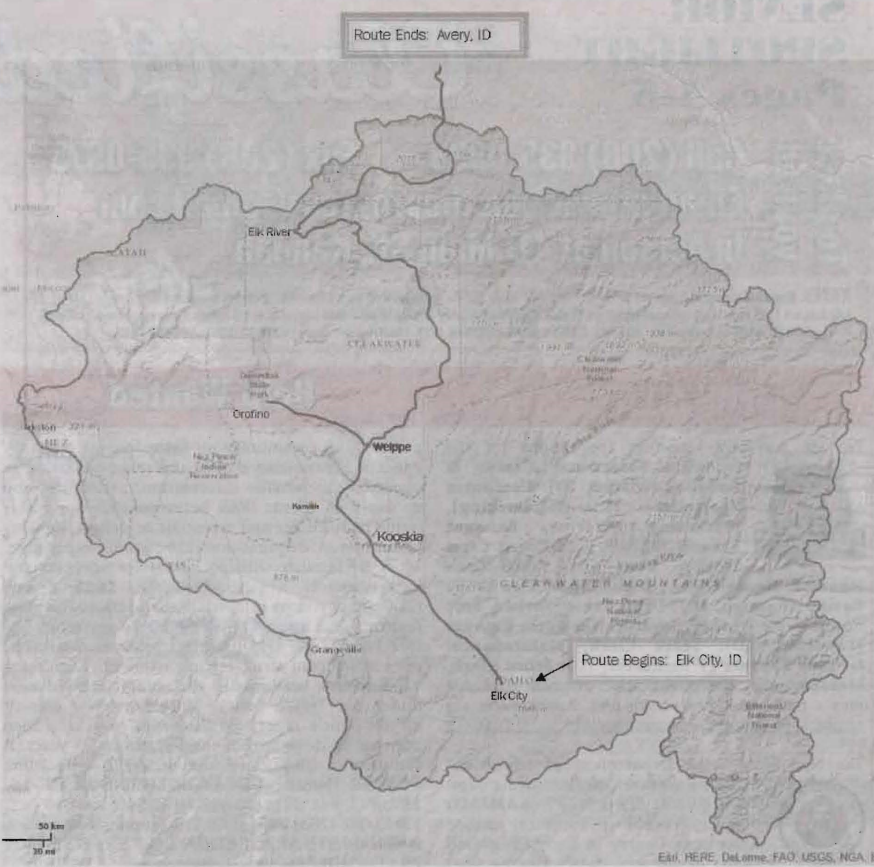
Carol Hennessey



Alex Irby



Kelli Rosellini



This map displays the present proposed GEM Trail stretching about 243 miles from Elk City north to Avery.

Trail.

"This has a dual purpose. One, it's to make people feel welcome. And two, to help restore some economy to places like Kamiah, Kooskia, Pierce, Weippe, Elk City, Elk River, Avery, and Clearwater. We're really excited about that," he said.

take routes into Kamiah along Ridgewood or from Glenwood."

He noted that last year the state passed a law that any state highway can be traversed by ATVs with a speed limit of under 45 mph. That means visitors on ATVs traversing the trail could stop off in places like

tion campaign on that front.

"For right now, the initial part," Hennessey said, "the Forest Service would take care of the trash, wear and tear, etc. Hopefully over time the consortium will step up and there will be a plan."

"In the long term, we don't picture ourselves

chor point.

"This is an awesome trailhead," said Doman. "This is the only public restroom in Elk City besides behind a tree. It's handicap accessible, heated and year round."

He said the group is in hunt mode for a trailhead and restroom in Clearwater. "If we get that there the people who own a little store in Clearwater said they would open up again. That would be a little bit of an economy for Clearwater if we can do that," said Doman.

Generating jobs for younger people has an added benefit to the community besides economics, explained Doman. Small communities need more younger people to volunteer for critical services like fire, EMT, or search and rescue.

"The GEM Trail will be the brand, the main attraction. It will be an opportunity that is not afforded a lot of other places," said Doman.

How the Clearwater Basin Collaborative formed

On May 29, 2008, after years of conflict regarding the management of national forests in north central Idaho, Idaho Senator Mike Crapo convened a diverse group of individuals and challenged them to collaborate to find solutions to divisive natural resource issues. Since its inception, CBC members have worked on a multitude of projects and issues with the Forest Service.

The first phase of the trail runs primarily across Forest Service roads using the historic Elk City Wagon Road. The second section traverses Kidder Ridge from Kooskia onto the 100 Road to Weippe and Pierce. From there it will go to Elk River with the final leg traveling up to Avery.

The expectation is for economic hubs to be developed along the route.

"If you create something people like to come," said Irby. He noted that a group of Washington hunters who harvested an elk recently, expressed high appreciation of Idaho's ATV trails. People in Washington and Montana do not have the same opportunities in their states as in Idaho, explained Irby, and are really excited about coming here.

Getting the first phase of the GEM Trail completed is critical, pressed Irby.

"We see this as an artery, but there will be lots of capillaries and branch arteries going off," added Doman. "For instance, riders can

as managers. We picture ourselves as getting something functioning and turning it over to the consortium," she added.

The hope is that the partners will form a consortium that funds and manages the trail, said Doman.

The trail also opens the door to education about local history, forest management, invasive species, good, bad and indifferent logging practices, and fire management practices to name a few topics.

"I think that that is the eventual hope for each of these communities and hubs that they begin to develop and blossom their own flower kind of thing where you get in there and not only ride the trail but the rest of the family has an opportunity to recreate as well," said Kelli Rosellini, coordinator for the CBC.

The CBC took a big step toward realizing their ultimate goal with the dedication of a premier trailhead and information kiosk at Elk City on Oct. 1. The trailhead serves as the GEM Trail's southernmost an-

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Fatality

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behind Thomas. Pevehouse was not wearing a seat belt and was ejected and died at the scene. He was transported to Pine Hills Funeral Home in Orofino.

Thomas and his passenger, Joan Thomas, 87, of Kooskia, were not injured and were wearing seat belts. Crane was not injured. He was wearing a seat belt.

The incident occurred at about 12:43 a.m. The Lewis County Sheriff's Office and Idaho Transportation Department assisted at the scene. Miles Towing and Forest Towing responded to the scene.