

Chewaucan – Proposed new site and interaction with USFS personnel in Paisley, OR

To all of my rendezvous friends,

I write this chronology of our attempt to acquire a new site (or use the old site as an alternate) to help you understand the hurdles we and future rendezvous face. Something which should have, or dare I say, could have been relatively simple turned insurmountable. Here are the details:

End of June 2019 - Myself and Ross Westgate contacted our usual ranger (Catherine Callaghan – a Paisley resident) to start the process of obtaining permission to use the new site on the Chewaucan – the same process as previous years.

End of July 2019 – After multiple attempts via phone, Ross contacted her at home. She stated she was very busy and asked for a map of the site.

July 28 – the map was emailed.

August 10 – most of the chiefs met at the site and determined the layout of the event.

October 28 – after multiple attempts to get paperwork started, Ross made a personal visit to the headquarters of the Winema-Fremont FS to ask if we needed certified hay (as it has to be ordered the Fall before it is needed). They were unaware we were planning an event. I received an angry phone call from Sharon Dooley who stated she was upset we were advertising the event in “her” forest without a permit, and this was the first she had heard of our group.

I spent a significant amount of time assuring her we were working with Catherine Callaghan and our group is well known to their district. I also asked, “If she was the specialist for this type of usage, why was this the first time we had heard her name?” We definitely would have contacted her instead of Catherine had we known. I assured her our group had been in their district six times starting in 1992 and have always had an excellent working relationship with the Forest Service.

November 1 - She requested a “proposal” for the event be emailed to her with a listing of the information needed. Larry Wahrenbock and John Christison provided needed information for the submission. It was emailed along with supporting documents. We were given a date for a meeting in Paisley.

November 8 – Steve (and his wife Michelle Aldrich) and Ross met with Sharon Dooley, Realty Specialist, and Doug McKay, District Ranger, for a two-hour meeting at the Paisley office. The results were unexpected, unwelcoming, and absolutely without hope of overcoming the hurdles placed upon us by June 2020.

1. Grazing Rights – these rights take precedence over any use in the district. If we do obtain permission from the ranchers who have payed \$4.5 million for those rights, we cannot damage any grass in the area. They will do a survey prior and after the event to determine this. If damage is detected, we can be fined.
2. PPR is **NOT** in good standing with the USFS. She could not find we had submitted the final reporting from 2015 to determine if we owe further monies AND she could not find we had ever had insurance on ANY event.
3. Past usage was non-compliant with the rules as we are parking in a “meadow”. When we stated the sagebrush and rock field was not a “meadow” she retorted, “It’s not my words, it’s yours! It is written in the application from 2015.” Rules absolutely prohibit ANY use of a “meadow”.
4. Road closures have happened all over the district. The only way to know if a road you plan to travel on is open is by obtaining a map physically or online. The roads we use to access both the old site and new site are closed to motor vehicles. We must ask for permission to access those roads with motor vehicles.
 - a. As part of the road closures we would be required to wash the undercarriages of all vehicles prior to entering either site. If we exit the site (go to town) we would be required to wash the vehicle again.
5. Studies would have to be done prior to issuing a permit checking for sensitive plant species, archaeological items, and Fish & Wildlife assessments.
6. She noted the vendors had never been charged a 5% assessment in past years and is required. She was adamant even blanket traders need to pay the assessment minus items donated for prizes – with accompanying receipts for proof of purchase to receive that deduction.

7. The usage fee is determined as 5% of the gross receipts minus prizes given. Included in that fee is 50 hours of their time to do all the assessments, etc. If it goes over 50 hours, we can be charged an additional undisclosed amount.

It became apparent when we tried to problem-solve these hurdles there was not going to be any attempt to work with us on any of these items. We told her the “non-compliance” issue from 2015 would be easily and swiftly taken care of so we might become in good standing again.

After extensive discussion with Larry and Cat Wahrenbock and John Christison, it was decided to no longer pursue ANY site on the Chewaucan for 2020. Our good friend and rancher, Martin Murphy, was also upset about the treatment of our group. We are always welcome on Martin Murphy’s property, but we need the USFS property for parking and the area up to the fence at the beginning of Trader Row. There is no other access to his property which does not cross USFS property and their closed roads.

Is it possible to ever work with the USFS again in the Paisley area? We do not know. They stated multiple times on the phone and in the meeting it “would be easier for you to use private land for your event.”

Thankfully, Doug Bean of the 516 Ranch in La Grande has been wanting our group back on his property. He fell in love with what we do and worked with us to find a site on his property more suited to our needs. He is so excited to have us back in 2020! It is landowners like this we need to foster relationships with as it will never get easier to deal with government entities.

Sincerely,

Steve “Mountain Badger” Aldrich
Booshway 2020

P.S. Feel free to write letters to your congressman and/or USFS Region 6, Pacific Northwest Region

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