

## Commissioners cautious of proposed bike route to Leavenworth

by Christine Pratt

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WENATCHEE — Chelan County commissioners this week postponed a decision on a proposed back-road bike route between Wenatchee and Leavenworth until organizers work to address orchardists' and neighbors' concerns that cyclists on roads make it harder to farm.

"We're going to ask them to work more closely with the orchardists and the homeowners in that area... to resolve the issues the private landowners have," Commissioner Doug England said Monday.

"If we can find a route that can be worked out, we're supportive of it," he said. "But we want to make sure it doesn't inhibit the homeowners and uses that are now there."

Wenatchee attorney and trail advocate Bob Parlette proposed the alternative road route to commissioners last week and asked commissioners to pledge the support of the county's Community Development and Public Works departments to make it happen.

"We look with interest to meet with a growers' group, because the cyclists have the absolute right to use those roads," Parlette said Monday.

Officials from the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, the Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Wenatchee Outdoors recreation website all back Parlette's bike-route proposal.

Parlette's "Complete the Loop Coalition" would raise money to pay for signing that would be placed along the approximately 48-mile "Fruit Loop" that meanders over public, county roads that skirt thousands of acres of prime Wenatchee Valley orchards. Only small portions of the route cross or parallel busy Highway 2/97.

Commissioners Monday said they'd each received calls and emails from concerned orchardists and neighbors worried that a designated-and-signed bike route would increase the volume of cyclists, slowing traffic and increasing danger on the narrow country roads they depend on to transport fruit and heavy machinery from orchard to orchard. They also worry about spray drift the days they apply ag chemicals.

"It affects me greatly," Peshastin pear orchardist Diane Yonaka told commissioners Monday. "As it is we have three weekends of no production due to all the traffic of bicycles."

Yonaka said her Saunders Road orchard is on the route of popular annual community bike rides that send hundreds of cyclists past her farm.

"In a farming community, you've gotta be able to farm," Commissioner Keith Goehner said. "It's important that the trail people have the opportunity to talk with growers."

All three county commissioners are orchardists. England also manages a fruit cooperative.

Parlette and his group pointed to a resolution approved by county commissioners in 2005 that pledges to support the concept of a non-motorized trail system between Wenatchee and Leavenworth.

But Goehner said that, at the time, the route was thought to be a separate trail, not one that depends on public county roads.

Much of the proposed route is already part of the Greater Wenatchee Bicycle Master Plan, officials say, and is already well-cycled and identified on maps.

Commissioners said they want Parlette's group to meet with orchardists and try to resolve conflicts before the commission agrees to provide support from county planners and public works staffers.

They encouraged Yonaka to get other growers involved in the discussion.

Friction among trail advocates and orchardists is nothing new in the Wenatchee Valley.

A group of orchardists lost a 7-year legal battle in 2011 over a proposed 5-mile, paved pedestrian trail that would cut through lands they leased for farming from the state Department of Transportation. The state Supreme Court ruled unanimously against the orchardists. Part of that trail is under construction now.