

Workshop Session – December 16, 2013

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Monday, December 16, 2013 at 4:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street for their regular monthly workshop session. Commissioners present were: Robert M. Edwards, Billy Holder, and Keith Eller. Commissioner Raymond Williams and Connie Orr was not present at this time but was expected to be in attendance.

1. Commissioners Edwards called the workshop session to order and read the agenda.
2. Commissioner Edwards asks Rick Davis to speak. Mr. Davis asks if he can wait and speak in the regular session before the full board. Commissioner Edwards asks Clerk Crisp to amend the regular session agenda to allow Mr. Davis time to speak. Clerk Crisp stated that she would add Mr. Davis on the regular session agenda. Mr. Davis thanked the board.
3. Commissioner Edwards asks Manager Cable to lead the discussion on the Wilderness Resolution. Commissioner Edwards stated that he would allow public comment regarding this subject after Manager Cable presents the resolution presentation. Manager Cable stated that the Forest Service is going through their Forest Management Plan Revision and currently hold almost 26,000 acres of designated wilderness and wilderness study area in Graham County. The county wants to be involved in this study due to this vast amount of acreage involved. A meeting was held concerning the study and the board didn't want any misconceptions or misrepresentations about what they wanted for Graham County. In Graham County, our revenues from timber sales have been declining over the years and the board felt that there shouldn't have any more acreage named as wilderness area. This resolution was written to let our representatives know that our county doesn't want any more wildernesses to be in our county. Manager Cable asks for comments.
4. Commissioner Edwards asks David Wood to speak. Mr. Wood, a business owner from Cherokee County spoke regarding the resolution. Mr. Wood stated that he was here about the Snowbird area and he was concerned because as long as this area is in the wilderness area it is protected as far as the water and if it is removed from the study and logging resumes then this would hurt this area. Mr. Wood stated that people come to this area as it is and if it is damaged by logging then it would hurt the value of the tourist industry and he is against the resolution. Mr. Wood stated that he has wilderness in Cherokee County in the "Standing Indian" area that is great in his county. Mr. Wood stated that this resolution looks to him like it is leaning only to logging and this is not good. Mr. Wood felt that the Snowbird area should stay in the wilderness study area. Mr. Wood stated that you can camp, hunt and fish there and due to the vast amount of water it is not a good place to log. Mr. Wood requests that the commissioners remove this resolution. Mr. Wood stated that he has invited Manager Cable to join their team at the meetings that they are hosting. Commissioner Edwards stated that he knew Mr. Wood was looking for balance and he did have concern about the limitations of wilderness but his concern is control of land. Commissioner Edwards stated that there is a tract of 755 acres of land worth \$3.5 million dollars and he is concerned about this land. Mr. Wood stated that this is private land. Brent Martin, a member in the audience, stated that this tract is private. The wilderness study area is a congressional study area and congress is the only one that can undo the study area. Mr. Wood stated that the private properties are not in the wilderness study area and he is for timber management and he is for the wilderness study area for the tourist industry. Commissioner Eller stated that he is in the rescue squad and it makes his job hard in the wilderness area if people are hurt and need help being removed with the use of ATV's. Mr. Martin stated that if you call the regional office you can take ATV's into the area and get the people out. Mr. Martin stated that we want to establish a partnership to develop a plan on what the county wants to see happen with the Forest Service management plan. Mr. Martin stated that if this resolution passes he is afraid that it will hamstring the efforts that are being put forth in going forward. Mr. Martin stated that he is not opposed to logging but the Snowbird Wilderness Area is already a federally designated road less area and it cannot be logged so this resolution will not work for this area. Mr. Martin stated that this is law as protected lands but if we work together we could possibly have logging on other parts of forest service lands. Commissioner Eller stated that there is very little logging if any on forest service lands now. Mr. Martin stated that we have potential right now to request a plan to ask for better roads to have access to log more forest service land in the county. Commissioner Edwards stated that this is a huge problem nationwide and no one wants to take on the PILT issue, we get \$2.05 per acre in tax money for our forest service lands and something needs to be done. We need to make money on tourism, we need to give our logging industry a chance to come back and we need to look into the possibility of mineral rights. Commissioner Edwards stated that we must look toward our future while protecting our history but also protecting the needs of our people. Commissioner Edwards stated that we have the highest unemployment in the state and he would like to draw more people to our area with tourism but how does this draw enough people to our area. Bill Hodge, with (SAWS) Wilderness

Society spoke and stated that he had worked on trails in the Deep Creek Trail area cleaning out the trails and spent approximately \$25,000.00 in labor hours trying to open these trails to allow people to enjoy our trails and further stated that he will be back next year to work on other trails throughout the county. Mr. Hodge stated that his goal is to restore the trails for health benefits to people and to provide cleaner lands and water. Mr. Hodge stated that he has a crew coming in next year for the Joyce Kilmer / Slickrock area. Commissioner Edwards asks Rick Davis about GREAT's involvement. Mr. Davis stated that David Dobson actually chairs that group and is a key partnership in the county on the clean trails and water. Commissioner Edwards asks Ms. Moore to speak. Ms. Moore stated that she didn't come to speak on the resolution but her concern is water quality and streams and the implementation of the plan to submit to the Forest Service by the collaborative. Ms. Moore stated that Graham County has one watershed which is Snowbird Creek and this needs to be protected as much as possible. Ms. Moore stated that the list of concerns that the board has been discussing are the things that need to be listed in the plan. These are the things that are being discussed with the partnership collaborative and this is totally separate from the Forest Service and we are meeting in Asheville because we are lumped in with the Pisgah National Forest because we have to meet in a central location. We are meeting voluntarily so that when they have the NEPA process our group will present the recommendations by the group which will include logging. Ms. Moore stated that Graham County representatives have barely missed any meetings and are welcome to join the meetings to have your concerns heard. Ms. Moore stated that there a lot of strategies to dictate high priorities in the Forest Service plan to help get to the private lands especially in Graham County where you are owned at a high percentage rate by federally owned lands. Commissioner Edwards asks who you talk to in Congress. Mr. Martin stated that you speak to USDA and your local congress members. Commissioner Williams asks who the elected official was that is here. Mr. Wood stated that he is and he is a Commissioner with Cherokee County. Mr. Woods stated that he was against the resolution and he was not here as a commissioner he was here as a business owner. Mr. Wood stated that Snowbird was dear to his heart and he makes money off of Snowbird by taking people fly-fishing and hiking and he stated that they needed logging in Cherokee County with timber management. Commissioner Williams asks who wilderness benefits. Mr. Wood stated that it benefits the county. Commissioner Williams asks how the other board members felt about wilderness. Mr. Wood stated that some felt the same way that he did. Commissioner Edwards asks William Wayne Adams to speak. Mr. Adams stated that he owned the only working saw mill in the county and they had to survive at 25% of private lands with little tracks here and there and only one Forest Service job this year. Mr. Adams stated that up until this year 100% of his business has been fed by private land and in his opinion we did not need any more wildernesses in this county. Mr. Adams stated that he employed 20 people in his business and they depended on him to feed their families and they needed timber management not more wilderness. Commissioner Edwards asks what avenues does the county need to take to work together with a group to let Congress know what we would like to see take place in our county. Joe Bonnette stated that another way to look at this is to say that the county doesn't want any more "net loss lands put into restricted management" because the last management plan resulted in net loss of our land. Mr. Wood stated that the manager needs to come to the meetings being held. Mr. Hodge stated that he hoped that the board will hold on this resolution and pass another resolution later that will better reflect what the board would like to see happen in the county.

5. Commissioner Williams made the motion to adjourn the workshop session. Commission Holder seconded the motion. Vote unanimous.

Robert M. (Mike) Edwards, Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Billy Holder, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Keith Eller, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Raymond Williams, Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board