

The Orchard Frequently Asked Questions

When did the focus on the Orchard property begin and why was it started?

- The US Forest Service (USFS) initiated engagement on The Orchard property a couple of years ago with the County Commissioners. As the Recreation Staff, Heather Berman wanted to see if the County Commissioners had interest in utilizing the property through a Special Use Authorization for recreation purposes similar to the St. Regis Park example, which is partially on USFS property and under a Special Use Permit. From there the focus has expanded and changed direction as more engagement has taken place. At the same time as the conversation took place with the County Commissioners, the USFS also reached out to Kaniksu Land Trust and Sanders County Community Development to help with community engagement.

Will anything be changed at the Mule Pasture?

- No, this project is solely focused on the property across Columbia St/Weber Gulch Rd containing an old Ponderosa pine plantation and helicopter landing zone.

Why is this site being considered for recreation opportunities?

- The Forest Service recognized that the plantation and helicopter landing zone had not been used for those purposes in decades. Also, due to its proximity to town and another popular recreation spot (Mule Pasture), it was an ideal location to consider providing an opportunity for the community.

What is CIRD?

- The Citizen's Institute for Rural Design (CIRD) program is a grant offered by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Housing Assistance Council (HAC). The program is for rural communities to work on designing a community space with public engagement and assistance from design and placemaking professionals. To Be Done Studio is an architecture firm contracted with CIRD to provide their services to the selected communities. This is not a cash award, but rather a gift of professional services.

Is housing a possibility at the Orchard?

- At no time during this process has housing been considered for The Orchard. It will not be considered, and is not an option on this property.

Where does the funding come from for maintenance year after year?

- Depending on the management action needed, funding could come from USFS funds, grants or Resource Advisory Council (RAC) funds the USFS or a partner applies for, or partner funds. For example, if the management action is restoration of the site by treating weeds then a mix of USFS funds, grant funds, and partner/volunteer time could be used to accomplish the work.

Isn't the old USFS administration building a private residence?

- The old administration building is privately owned and on private property. It is not Forest Service land and not part of The Orchard area. The property was sold in 2021.

Can the power company mow the tall grass (fire hazard)?

- We will look into this and see what options there are within the Special Use Authorization with the power company as a first step.

How can we restore the site?

- We would gather a team of specialists together to develop a plan to restore the site. This could be a team of USFS personnel or we could work in a collaborative effort to restore the site by having a team of USFS personnel, other agencies, partners, volunteers, and educators working together to develop a plan. Restoration of the site would be an ongoing process likely to take multiple years.

What needs to happen for fire mitigation?

- Fire mitigation would be incorporated into future management plans. Whether future management plans focus on forest health, restoration of the site, recreation, etc, or some combination of these, fire mitigation can be addressed at the same time.

How can we stop what has already started (ex. grants)?

- The only grant for the Orchard that has been received to date is the Citizens Institute for Rural Design Grant. This grant does not provide any source of funding for the project . It is a one-year planning opportunity that brings in professionals with skills in design, planning, and creative placemaking. They help communities put together workshops to bring together local residents and local leaders to tackle community projects.

Why do we need outside resources to provide us with improvements?

- At this time, there are no improvements approved or planned for the Orchard. The USFS is simply asking the Thompson Falls community their thoughts on how The Orchard should be managed moving forward. We have engaged a variety of partners (including KLT and SCCD), who have worked on other projects in the community, to help us with engaging the community. We appreciate these partners volunteering their time to help us engage the community in this effort.

What types of surveys have been put out to the public and who has taken these surveys?

- A public survey was conducted July-August 2022. It was promoted online, through flyers hung at various businesses, through email and newsletters, offered via paper form at the Thompson Falls Library and Senior Center, and through door-to-door or mail delivery. There were 169 responses, 136 of those were Thompson Falls residents, and 99.3% were 18 years or older. Results from the public survey can be found [here](#).
- A student survey was also conducted in May 2022 with Thompson Falls students in grades 5-12. There were 168 responses to this survey, which were calculated separately from the public survey. Results from the student survey can be found [here](#).

I heard there was a group that proposed a disc golf course at the Orchard in 2020 and were told no, why?

- When the USFS met with the Sanders County Commissioners to inquire if the County was interested in utilizing the Orchard for recreation purposes under a Special Use Permit, it was during a public meeting. A couple of different groups present expressed interest in utilizing the Orchard and would do so under a Special Use Permit. Some groups expressed a desire to see different recreation opportunities at the Orchard by submitting unsolicited proposals. Before things could go further, the USFS asked for a pause on project proposals so that a process could be put in place to allow input from the community on what they would like to have happen in the Orchard. This is where we are at now in the process.

If you have a question that was not answered in the above FAQ please call or email Kayla Mosher at kayla@kaniksu.org or (406)827-0487 and if she can't answer it, she will find out the answer!