

By the riverside, opportunity

March 31, 2015

There just isn't much left. Places where the public can gain easy access to the Wenatchee River shoreline are few between the major population centers in Wenatchee and Leavenworth. Sharp drops, steep bluffs, berms, cliffs and orchards are the dominant features. To reach the water by a low and gentle slope, and stand on public land on the shore of the beautiful river, in the most beautiful valley in the state of Washington, that is an opportunity too rare.

How fortunate, then, that three-quarters of a mile of pristine riverfront is in public ownership, adjacent to the old mill site at Peshastin. The Port of Chelan County long ago put the land up for sale, including the longest stretch of undeveloped low-bank waterfront between Wenatchee and Leavenworth. The 14 acres of shoreline is available for \$460,000.

Wenatchee's Complete the Loop Coalition signed an earnest money agreement that reserves the shoreline property for another 14 months. A consortium of conservation-minded organizations is raising money for the purchase, with the intent of turning it over to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for management as primitive, non-motorized public access — for bank fishing, hiking, skiing, picnicking, paddling, cycling, etc.

These opportunities do not rise often. It is fortunate the issue has been taken up by a group so wide-ranging in interest and experience. The Complete the Loop Coalition that made the initial effort is joined by Icicle Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Wenatchee Valley Fly Fishers, Leavenworth Winter Sports Club, Wenatchee Row and Paddle Club, Chelan Douglas Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Wenatchee Sportsmen's Association, American Whitewater and the Peshastin Community Council. They have a website, SavePeshastinMillWaterfront.org, where you can see photos of the site, learn more about the land and consider making a donation. The group is planning an organizational meeting June 23 at the Cashmere Riverside Center to coordinate the volunteer effort. An anonymous donor pledged \$50,000 in seed money, and Dr. Eliot Scull offered a \$100,000 matching grant challenge, so the effort is near a third of the goal, as the earnest money clock is ticking. Phaedra Booth of Trout Unlimited said many small donations are an indicator of strong public support, which helps entice larger donations and grants.

Conservation efforts are not new or unusual in this region. Our community support has been needed and sought before, and will be again many times over, but this cause is unique. It is a gorgeous site, with such great potential for recreation of all kinds, aquatic or dry land. Setting the land aside for generations of public enjoyment seems a must. We should not let this great opportunity pass.