



# Oregon legislation pushes Butte Falls Community Forest Project funding over finish line

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BUTTE FALLS, Ore.- A newly-passed piece of legislation is pushing a community project across the finish line. The Butte Falls community will now own the over 400 acres of land surrounding it and will take its first major steps towards its community forest project.

Butte Falls is surrounded by acres of privately owned land. This leaves the town unable to utilize the property and develop tourist interest, expand business, and mitigate wildfires.

But thanks to a newly passed piece of legislation in Salem, that's all about to change.

"We thought the acquisition would be the hardest part. But it's just the beginning," said Butte Falls Mayor Linda Spencer. We spoke to her in October about the ambitious project. It's been in the works for years.

At the time, she was concerned about the looming financial deadline to raise enough money. Now, her outlook is wildly different.

"When you begin a project that's big like this, you don't quite believe- it's a fantasy! It's not going to come true. And then when it does, it just kind of hits you," she explained, adding she was crying tears of joy when she got the news.

House Bill 5006 passed at the end of June, as the legislature wrapped up its busy session. It contained the allocation of \$700,000 dollars to Butte Falls for the purchase of the forest land. It matches the US Forest Service grant the city had already secured.

Spencer and her project partners watched the bill for weeks.

"They were keeping us informed. And I'm sure we bugged them to death because we were just constantly like 'where is it now? Where is it now?'" she said.

One of those people is state representative Vikki Breese Iverson. The legislator from District 55 represents a portion of northeast Jackson County.

"They invited me into their community, I went down and toured their area, I toured it after the wildfire season last year and saw the devastation. They've been working for years to put together

this joint effort,” she explained. She says this bill includes community projects across the state, not just in Butte Falls.

But the local effort also gathered support from Senator Ron Wyden, Governor Kate Brown, and other local legislators which made it a bipartisan issue.

“It’s very satisfying and gratifying to me when I can help a project like this come to fruition by bringing those tax dollars back to the community,” Iverson said.

“These were legislators that were really, really in our corner and helped,” Linda Spencer added. Spencer’s next few weeks are filled with meetings with local, state, and federal partners to make this little town’s big dream a reality.

Though the timeline for the planning part of the project is still vague, with the biggest hurdle now behind her, Spencer can take a deep breath.

“It’s gonna be a mystery and it’s going to be fun!” she laughed.

The Trust for Public Lands will now handle the official purchase of the private lands, which has to go through by December. Meanwhile, Spencer and partnering groups like BLM, the Forest Service, and Oregon Solutions will discuss the next steps for the land.

About the author:

Grace Smith is co-anchor for NBC5 News at 6. The Chicago native is a recent graduate of University of Miami with a Communication Honors degree specializing in Broadcast Journalism. She minored in Creative Writing and focused her senior thesis on social media usage and engagement. During her time at the University of Miami, she anchored multiple award-winning student television programs, covering everything from music festivals to the Super Bowl.

Though she loved Miami’s beaches, she’s thrilled to be in the Pacific Northwest where she can experience all four seasons and have a real Christmas tree! When she’s not at work, you can find Grace glued to any television showing live sports (especially if it’s the Chicago Bears) or attempting a new recipe as she learns to cook.