

Trout Lake Redistricting Q & A

Q: What is the situation?

A: In 2011/12 - to balance the population levels between Commissioner Districts (as required by law after the census was conducted in 2010) - the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) decided to move a portion of Trout Lake from Commissioner District 1 to Commissioner District 2. Many of those residents have resided here for a number of years and did not wish to be in District 2. However, a decade ago there was limited opportunity for meaningful dialogue with the BoCC as to what other alternatives were considered in their decision. In 2021 (after the 2020 census) the BoCC utilized a similar process and made their decision on December 28, 2021 to retain the current Commissioner District boundaries.

Q: Why is it a problem?

A: The redistricting process identifies several elements that must be considered in the redistricting plan. What follows is what the Council brought to the BoCC attention in the 12/21/21 letter regarding the plan:

1. The plan does not meet requirements of RCW 36.32.020 that each district “shall comprise as nearly as possible one-third of the population of the county.”
 - District 1 is significantly larger in population than the other two districts and is the fastest growing area of the county. Maintaining the status quo will expand existing inequity which will be exacerbated over the next 10 years, pending the 2030 census.
 - There are possible adjustments that more closely balance the district populations and these proposals could have been made had the Commission allowed proper time for the discussion.
2. The plan does not meet requirements of RCW 29A.76.010 (4)(e) that “district boundaries shall coincide with existing recognized natural boundaries and shall, to the extent possible, preserve existing communities of related and mutual interest.”

- The Trout Lake Valley is distinct geographically from the Glenwood Valley. The two valleys are in different watersheds, have different sources of drinking and irrigation water, and other natural features.
 - Trout Lake is a community of related and mutual interest. We have a school, a post office, a grange, a business association, and the Trout Lake Community Council.
 - Under the 2011 redistricting decision the Trout Lake Community Council must work with two county commissioners. We have one set of interests. The Council bylaws define our district to match that of the School District to reflect fair representation and to not disenfranchise those living in our community.
 - The blocks moved to District 2 are in the very center of the town of Trout Lake. One example: the Pearson Family farm, the iconic and historic farm at the entrance to the town center, is divided so that the family residence is in one district and the barn and farmland across the street are in another district.
3. The plan does not meet the requirement of RCW 29A.76.010 (4)(d) that “population data may not be used for purposes of favoring or disfavoring any racial group or political party.”
- There have been primary candidates for District 1 Commissioner who have come from Trout Lake. The current situation, with 276 Trout Lake residents only able to vote in District 2, prevents them from voting for these candidates from their community, if they so choose.
4. The plan does not meet the requirement of RCW 29.A.010 (5) that “the county shall ensure that full and reasonable public notice of its actions is provided”.
- Publication date of the public notice for the December 21 meeting was December 11, a Saturday. The draft plan was not included in the public notice, and the draft plan was not available until Monday, December 13.
 - Besides this technicality, we feel strongly that a public meeting held on December 21, four days before Christmas and 10 days before the legal deadline for the County to complete the plan does not provide full and reasonable notice.

- We are not aware that the BoCC has had discussion of this plan, including but not limited to, discussion of the timeline for publishing and adopting the plan. It seems incredible that the Commission could have arrived at a decision to put forward the draft plan without a single public discussion or workshop.

Q: How does the current plan affect Trout Lake Residents?

A: For those residents that are in District 2 (the same voting precinct as Glenwood) the impacts are the greatest. Some residents reside in one district and their business is located in another district. So, during the primary election process they are unable to vote for the candidate who they may feel best represents their interests. When there are issues they have to figure out which commissioner to go to – dependent upon where their residential property is located or where their business is located. These residents have connections with their community, Trout Lake, and not the community of Glenwood. They feel the BoCC decision disenfranchised them from their community. For those residents that remain in District 1 it feels like our community has been split in half. For the Council, we need to deal with two different commissioners depending upon the issue and location.

Q: What are the possible benefits of retaining the district boundaries as they are?

A: For the Council, working with two Commissioners can have its advantages. We are able to develop relationships with 2/3 of the BoCC. For residents that have been split off from the rest of the community, it is difficult to discern a possible benefit from the decision.

Q: Since the decision is already made, what is the value of getting involved after the fact?

A: It is our understanding that a private citizen (or citizens), within 15 days of the BoCC December 28th decision, did file for a review with the Superior Court. The BoCC has 20 days to respond to that review request. We do not know what the timeline is after the BoCC response but we do want to be prepared to support the review process. Any documentation that we generate regarding how constituents feel about the BoCC redistricting plan may be of significant value during the Superior Court review.