Several years ago Siskiyou County cut down most of the trees in Spini Meadow at Lake Siskiyou, ostensibly for meadow restoration, but included many large trees close to the Lake Siskiyou Trail. There was no prior public outreach or involvement by a recreational planner. The public outcry was strong, because it is after all public land, and Lake Siskiyou basically serves as a County park. Also, the North Shore was required to be protected as a “Wildlife Mitigation Area” by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife when Lake Siskiyou was built.

A couple years ago trees were marked with blue paint from Spini Point all the way to the Delta along the trail, once again without public outreach or recreational input, and once again the public response was strong. In that instance, however, the County agreed to have its forester mark out trees with black paint that were of particular concern to trail users.

The County recruited a logging contractor this winter, but also very recently marked a large number of additional trees, again without prior public notice or recreational input. Logging has already started, and once again, there has been a large and still growing public outcry.

The recently marked large trees along the trail and in the North Shore parking area are important for shade, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration in a changing climate, screening between the trail and road, and aesthetic values. They are also the most resilient to wildfire, even though one of the justifications for the logging is wildfire protection. It is the small trees that need to be thinned, and it is the dense areas closer to homes that need the most protection as soon as possible, given what looks to be another hot dry summer on the horizon.
The County owns around 2,000 acres of land surrounding Lake Siskiyou, plus the 400-acre lake. These forested lands need to be managed for forest health, fire protection, and removal of hazard trees, which in turn is a good source of ongoing revenue for the County. To that extent logging is an important tool. The Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center submitted a letter to the County last year supporting logging for these purposes around the lake, but with the caveat that the public be included in planning and that a recreational planning person be included.

Also, after all these years, the County still refers to Lake Siskiyou as the Box Canyon Project, which was the name of the dam construction project in the 1960s. It is, however, for all intents and purposes, a County Park. It is long overdue to be designated and managed as such.

The County Public Works Department, which manages the lake, is not in the parks business. The County does not have a department of parks, nor does the City of Mount Shasta. There is, however, the Mount Shasta Recreation and Parks District, which exists precisely for that purpose, and Lake Siskiyou sits right in the middle of the District boundaries.

A master plan update is currently being prepared for the Rec District, and the possibility of the Rec District taking over recreational management at the lake is being included. Also, being included is the possibility of the Rec District taking over the campground when that lease expires in 2028.

These possibilities need serious consideration at this juncture by the public. Lake Siskiyou is a tremendous recreational resource for local residents and visitors from afar, and it plays a key role in our local
tourism-based economy. Its role is so important, that even during our COVID summer last year the lake’s parking areas were overflowing, the chalets were booked solid, and the campground was full.

The immediate issue is the tree cutting along the trail, which is happening NOW. We implore the County to pause just long enough to allow for recreational input to identify selected trees that should not be cut.

Lake Siskiyou deserves good management, as a park, and the County is failing in providing it. We need a change, and we need it now! Please let your concerns be known to the County supervisors immediately!

Richard Lucas

Richard Lucas, Board President
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center