

COMMON SENSE ADVICE FOR RURAL LIVING IN KLAMATH COUNTY

The men and women who first settled this part of Oregon were bound by an unwritten code of conduct. The values of integrity and self-reliance guided their decisions, actions and interactions. In keeping with that pioneer spirit, this information is offered to assist citizens of Klamath County, and those moving here, who wish to follow in the footsteps of those tough and rugged individualists by living outside the urban/city limits.

INTRODUCTION

It is important for you to know that life in the country is quite different from life in the urban or city areas. County government is not able to provide the same level of service that city government provides. Because of that, this information is provided to help you make educated and informed decisions when purchasing rural property. The following topics will hopefully guide you in your decisions:

1. ACCESS
2. UTILITY SERVICES
3. THE PROPERTY
4. NATURE
5. AGRICULTURE

ACCESS

Yes, you may be able to drive directly to your property. That does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests or emergency service

vehicles can achieve that same level of access at all times. Consider the following:

- a. Do you have legal access to the property? Are you crossing someone else's property to get to your property? You would be wise to obtain legal advice and/or have a title company (usually for a fee) research the deed records for easements. Klamath County will not issue building permits without proof of legal access.
- b. Emergency response times (sheriff, fire, medical) cannot be guaranteed. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is very slow and expensive, even non-existent. (If you have a serious medical condition, why in this world would you consider a move 20, 30 or 50 miles from the nearest medical facility?)
- c. Road maintenance cost may be a substantial cost to you. Klamath County maintains over 800 miles of roads. Before you buy, find out which roads are County maintained and which are not. Road districts or private road associations maintain many rural roads. Again, find out. There are some County roads that are not maintained by anyone! Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who provides that maintenance.
- d. Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. You would be wise to determine if your road is properly engineered and constructed. Is the drainage adequate? How about the grade (the steepness)? Is it too steep for icy conditions?
- e. If you are planning to build a house or move in a manufactured home, can construction vehicles or your "house on wheels" navigate your access road?
- f. School buses generally travel on paved roads only. You may have to transport your children to the nearest paved county road so they can get to school. Check with your local school district.
- g. During extreme snowfall conditions, even County maintained roads may become impassable. You may need a four-wheel drive

vehicle with chains for all four wheels in order to travel. You may need your own snowplow for your access road or hire someone to plow it for you. These extreme weather events can last for several days.

- h. Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. Klamath County will repair and maintain County roads, however, you will be responsible for your own access off the county road. Dry creek beds can become a raging torrent during summer thunderstorms or quick snowmelt situations.
- i. Unpaved roads generate dust. If you don't like a dirty car, dusty shoes or have breathing problems, you might want to reconsider your purchase.
- j. If your road is not paved, it is highly unlikely that Klamath County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check with the County Public Works Department when any statement is made by the seller of any property that indicates an unpaved road will be paved.
- k. Unpaved roads are not always smooth and are often slippery when wet. Your vehicle maintenance cost will most likely increase when you travel unpaved roads. Tires wear out faster, air filters plug-up faster and oil needs to be changed more often, not to mention shocks and other suspension parts.
- l. Mail delivery may be to the nearest paved county road. Check with the local postmaster to determine where mail may be delivered.
- m. Similarly, newspaper delivery may not be available or at the least, not to your doorstep. If you desire the local newspaper, check with them concerning delivery.
- n. Parcel and overnight delivery can be a problem for those off the main road. Confirm with the service providers as to your status.

- o. More costs and time may be involved to build a rural residence due to delivery fees and the time required for inspectors to reach your site.*

UTILITY SERVICES

Water, sewer, electric, telephone and other services may not be available or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer than in the city. Consider the options below:

- a. Telephone, television and related internet communications can be a problem, especially in mountainous areas of Klamath County. In some locations even cellular phones will not work. Television can only be obtained by using a satellite dish.*
- b. It is likely no sewer service will be available. You will have to construct and maintain your own septic tank and drain-field or whatever type of septic system is approved for your location by the County Environmental Health Department.*
- c. It is likely you will have to have a well drilled for a supply of domestic water. In some areas of Klamath County, there is no water. Check with local residents and well drillers for information. Wells can be very costly and water quality and quantity may fluctuate.*
- d. Electric service may not be available to all areas of the County. You need to determine where the nearest power is located and then it is likely you will bear the cost of extending power lines to your property. Check with the local electric utility for cost estimates and/or special power needs.*
- e. Power outages can occur more often in rural areas than in the city. Power loss will interrupt your water supply from a well, refrigerators and freezers won't work and computers may have problems as well. You may need to survive a week or longer with*

no utilities. An option would be to purchase an electric generator to get you through the tough times. Consult with your local power provider before hooking up to a portable generator. If you choose to have a generator on hand, you will need a substantial supply of fuel for it.

- f. You will probably have to haul your own trash to the nearest disposal site. It is illegal to create your own garbage dump, even on your own land.*

THE PROPERTY

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land.

- a. Not all parcels may be built on. At the least, check with the County Planning, Building, Public Works, and Environmental Health Departments to know if you can build on a certain piece of property or what the limitations may be.*
- b. Existing easements may require you to allow construction of roads or utilities across your land. There may be easements not of record. Check these issues carefully.*
- c. Many property owners do not own the mineral rights under their property. Owners of mineral rights have the ability to change the surface characteristics in order to extract their minerals. Check the deed to your property through a title company. Also be aware that adjacent property may be affected by mining activities which in turn may affect you.*
- d. You may be provided with a map of your property, but unless the property has been surveyed by a licensed surveyor, don't assume corner monuments are correct.*

- e. Fences that separate properties are often misaligned with the correct property lines. A survey by a licensed surveyor is the best way to confirm the location of your property lines.
- f. The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. Check with the County Planning Department to find out how adjacent property is zoned and to see what future developments may be in the planning stages. The view from your property may change.
- g. If there is a ditch running across your property there is a good possibility that the owners of the ditch have the right to come onto your property with heavy equipment to maintain the ditch.
- h. If water rights are involved with the purchase of your property, it is important to make sure there will be sufficient water to maintain fruit trees, gardens, pastures, or livestock.
- i. Water flowing in irrigation ditches belongs to someone. You can't assume that because the water flows across your property, you can use it.
- j. Flowing water can be a hazard, especially to young children. Consider your children if locating your home near a waterway.

MOTHER NATURE

When the elements and the earth turn unfriendly, residents out in the country usually experience more problems than the urban dwellers. Consider the following:

- a. The physical characteristics of your property can be positive and negative. Trees are nice, but they can become a real problem in a forest fire. Building at the top of a forested draw is just as dangerous as building in the path of a flash flood prone area. Defensible perimeters are helpful in protecting buildings from

forest fire and vice-versa, keep the forest from catching fire if your house catches fire. If you start a forest fire, you may be held liable for the cost of extinguishing it. Consult with your local fire department and your insurance company.

- b. Steep slopes can slide in unusually wet weather. Large rocks can roll down steep slopes thus endangering people, livestock and property.
- c. Clay soils can buckle concrete foundations. It may be prudent to have soil tests conducted by an engineer.
- d. North facing slopes get little sunlight during winter months. Snow can accumulate and not melt until late spring.
- e. Topography of the land can tell you where water will go in case of heavy precipitation or quick snowmelt. When property owners fill in natural drainage, property damage may occur to your property or a neighbor's property.
- f. Flash floods can occur, especially during summer thunderstorms. A small dry gully can be turned into a raging river. Take this into consideration when placing your home or outbuildings.
- g. Likewise, spring runoff can affect you like a major thunderstorm.
- h. The rural environment can provide you with an abundance of wildlife not experienced in the city. Deer to run into with your car or eat your flowers and garden. Rural development also encroaches on the habitat of coyotes, bobcats, cougars, rattle snakes, squirrels, bears, foxes, mosquitoes, skunks, raccoons and countless other wild critters. Some can be dangerous if not just annoying. It is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance. Your trash and pets can attract unwanted visitors. You need to know how to handle them properly. It might even be wise to arm yourself with a firearm or have one available to protect yourself, your family, pets and livestock.

AGRICULTURE

Farming and ranching is an important way of life to many families in Klamath County. If you purchase property suitable for agricultural purposes or if you purchase property adjacent to an ag operation there are a few things you should know:

- a. You need to know how to take care of the land.*
- b. Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Dairy operators sometimes milk without stopping and hay is often baled at night. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet.*
- c. Land preparations and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.*
- d. Farmers occasionally burn their ditches and grain stubble to keep them clean of debris and weeds. Burning causes smoke that may be objectionable.*
- e. Chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides are often used in growing crops. They may be applied by airplanes that fly early in the morning. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people have severe allergic reactions.*
- f. Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors.*
- g. Agriculture is important business in Klamath County. If you choose to live among the farms and ranches, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your neighbors. They were there first.*

- h. Many areas in Klamath County are open range. This means that if you don't want someone else's livestock on your property, you have to fence them out. Conversely, some areas are in livestock districts, wherein you are required to fence your livestock in on your property. Check with the Public Works Department for locations.
- i. Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds that may be expensive to control. You may be required by law to control these weeds. Some of these weeds can be harmful or lethal to livestock.
- j. Animals can be dangerous. Bulls, stallions, rams, boars, etc. can attack humans. Children need to know that it is not safe to enter pastures or pens where these animals are kept.
- k. The average yearly rainfall in Klamath County is around 12 to 13 inches with the west side of the county probably above that and the east side near those figures or below. As a result, irrigation is required to make pastures grow. If pastures are not irrigated, overgrazing and destruction of pasture is the result. Water is vital. Use it wisely.

IN CONCLUSION

Even though you pay property taxes to the County and other public entities, the amount of tax collected does not necessarily cover the cost of the services provided to rural residents. The more densely populated urban areas tend to subsidize the cost of services to rural dwellers. For example, police/sheriff patrol- Many more miles per person are covered for rural areas in comparison to miles covered per person for urban areas. The same can be said for medical and fire services.

In Klamath County, none of your property taxes goes to the Road Department. When you have a road problem, don't use the old cliché "I pay taxes, you better fix my road". The road department is funded through state gas tax and revenue from timber sales on national forests. True, we all pay state gas tax and we all pay federal taxes, but the individual amount paid is nearly negligible in comparison to road maintenance/construction costs. Be patient. If the complaint is legitimate, the problem will get fixed.

This information is to assist you and is by no means all there is. There may be other issues encountered that have not been covered here. These suggestions are to encourage you to be diligent in your duties to explore and examine those things that could have an effect on you and your family. Don't depend on the government to bail you out if you run into unexpected problems.

These comments are offered in the hope that they help in your decision making. The intent is not to dissuade you, only to inform you and encourage educated choices.