

EFFORT UNDERWAY TO BUY EASEMENT AT WALLOWA LAKE

Seeking to restore sockeye salmon

By Katy Nesbitt
ForWesCom News Service

JOSEPH — A robust fundraising effort is underway to permanently protect vital salmon spawning ground at the head of Wallowa Lake.

Mary Jane Miles, council member of the Nez Perce Tribe's executive committee, said the dream of reintroducing sockeye salmon is driving the Tribe's fundraising effort to purchase a conservation easement — extinguishing development rights on most of the Wallowa Lake Lodge property.

"The lake has no sockeye," Miles said. "In this move here with the easement, restoring sockeye and preserving the pristine nature of the water is what the tribe is about."

Once the easement is purchased, Miles said the Tribe's Joseph Field Office will oversee its management. The field office's manager, Jim Harbeck, said the habitat within the easement is excellent potential sockeye habitat.

"The land is being protected and is in good shape — it's where sockeye will come back to spawn," Harbeck said.

More than 100 years ago Wallowa Lake was one of only two Oregon lakes that sockeye salmon called home. With 19th century settlement came canneries, and the Wallowa Lake strain was fished into extinction. Harbeck said the easement helps keep alive the dream of resto-



Katy Nesbitt / ForWesCom News Service

The Nez Perce Tribe plans to buy an easement near the Wallowa Lake Lodge that includes spawning grounds for reintroduced salmon.

ration.

"Wallowa Lake was a well known Nez Perce fishery that fed the tribe and made them wealthy," Harbeck said. "At one time, sockeye was the most abundant salmon species in the county. If I don't get to see the reintroduction, I hope my children will."

Miles said the easement and a recent gift of 1.5 acres from the Wallowa Lake Methodist Church camp upriver from the lodge are steps toward further reconciliation and the Tribe's sense of belonging in their homeland restored.

"Sockeye restoration and owning land at the lake, I never thought I'd

see any of it," Miles said.

Fish restoration isn't just a symbolic gesture, but a primary food source for the Nez Perce people. Miles said she remembered collecting lamprey at Celilo Falls before The Dalles Dam flooded the area along the Columbia River.

"It's a way of life I would like to recapture. This feels like a step," Miles said.

According to James Monteith, president of the Wallowa Lake Lodge, sockeye restoration is also one of the main reasons 100 families and individuals invested in the corporation that purchased the lodge.

"The easement is in the river and aquatic zone of the property and will be totally protected with the right to restore the area in the event of a flood or forest fire," Monteith said.

Ann McCormack, the Tribe's economic development planner, agreed to spearhead the \$1.2 million fundraising effort.

"We have a three-year plan to raise the money," McCormack said. "When the easement is purchased the tribe will own the land forever, even if the lodge changes ownership."

The Nez Perce Tribe's fundraising is scheduled to wrap up by May 2019, and McCormack said she is in conversation with as many as 10 foundations about contributing to the purchase of the easement. Overall she said the concept has received a positive response.

"It surprised me when we explained the easement how easy it was for them to understand," McCormack said.

To attract contributions from donors around the state and region, in June the Tribe invited 14 foundations to a three-day weekend at the Wallowa Lake Lodge to talk about the project.

"We wanted the funders to see our natural resource fisheries staff are highly qualified in field work, research and legal issues," McCormack said.

During their stay at the lodge, the foundation staff members were invited to an early morning Ceremony of the Empty Saddle. An appaloosa horse stood in the front lawn, saddled and riderless, as Chuck Axtell sang and drummed in honor of his father Horace Axtell, the tribe's spiritual leader who recently died, and to honor Old Chief Joseph, whose grave is at the foot of the lake.

"The ceremony is really meaningful for the tribe and demonstrates a sense of place," McCormack said. "It let the funders feel the experience and deepened their understanding."

Lori Wyman, Pacific Power's regional business manager for Northeastern Oregon, met with Harbeck, McCormack and Miles the afternoon of Oct. 17 to present a letter and check for \$4,000 to be used for toward the purchase of the easement. She said the grant, along with \$1,000 given to Wallowa Land Trust to host a series of workshops on Nez Perce history, fell under the foundation's Community Enhancement category.

"I like to do special work for the tribe and this was a really good fit," Wyman said.

McCormack said in addition to the \$4,000 from PacifiCorp the tribe has earmarked \$300,000 of in-kind legal, fisheries and administrative staff time to put toward the \$1.2 million purchase price.

TAMARACKS

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Much like their cousins the ponderosa pines, mature tamaracks often have straight, smooth trunks free of branches for the first 30 feet or more.

The larch family has inspired more than one creative colloquialism.

The great essayist E.B. White —

his finest work in my estimation, though he's much better known as the author of "Stuart Little," "Charlotte's Web" and "The Trumpet of the Swan" — lived much of his adult life in Maine, and he generally referred to tamaracks as "hackmatacks," a name I sometimes try to slip into a conversation but which seems unlikely to gain traction hereabouts.

The Maine hackmatacks are eastern larches, *Larix laricina*.

During winter the needleless tamaracks present a rather dour appearance. I have on many occasions, while hunting up the year's Christmas tree, thought that the typical juvenile tamarack in early December much resembles the tree that stands alone in the lot when Charlie Brown comes along in the classic holiday TV special.

Indeed tamaracks, when surrounded by green firs and pines, look

for all the world as though they were dead, the victim of some voracious insect or persistent blight.

It is for this reason that the Forest Service reminds firewood cutters to avoid sawing down live tamaracks. Woodcutters covet the species both because it produces quite a lot of heat, and because, properly seasoned, it is a joy to split into stove-lengths.

(Or as much a joy as such a task

can be.)

Tamaracks bring visual joy in more seasons than one.

When their yearly crop of needles erupts in spring the color is the fresh green of new grass. Tamaracks aren't quite so conspicuous in spring — it's a case of shades of green rather than the eye-catching yellow-orange — but from a certain perspective they're easy enough to distinguish against the darker foliage of the evergreens.

WALLOWA MOUNTAIN HELLS CANYON TRAIL ASSOCIATION PLANS EVENT OCT. 29 AT EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

Trailwork group hopes to expand mission

By Katy Nesbitt
ForWesCom News Service

ENTERPRISE — During the past two summers volunteers cleared 107 miles of trail on public land in Wallowa County.

On Oct. 29 the Wallowa Mountain Hells Canyon Trail Association invites Baker and Union County trail enthusiasts to Eastern Oregon University to learn more about the effort.

The Wallowa Mountains and Hells Canyon draw more than a million visitors a year, but shrinking federal recreation budgets make it difficult to keep up with trail maintenance. To help with the backlog, a group of trail users banded together to form the Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trail Association in 2016.

So far, the work has been concentrated on the north end of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Rick Bombaci, a member of the trails association, said the Oct. 29 event at Lewis Auditorium is intended to generate interest and involvement from Baker and Union County trail users, including those whose favorite trails are in the southern part of the Wallowa-Whitman.

"What we hope to do is share information and stories about work accomplished and what we are hoping to do next year," Bombaci said. "We are a 'boots on the ground' organization. Volunteers get to see some beautiful country and do something useful while they are out there."

The association was born out of conversations around a lunch table in the backroom of Enterprise's Cloud 9. Within a year the first project was launched — clearing obstacles from the Imnaha River Trail from Cow Creek to the Snake River in March



Submitted photo

Jon Larson and Michael Rooper pull a crosscut saw with Randi Jandt assisting on the Chief Joseph Trail near Wallowa Lake.

2017.

Maintaining the four-mile trail took a couple trips, but the results were noticeable the following spring, Bombaci said.

With the Imnaha River Trail cleared, the association hosted a large work party at Salt Creek Summit southeast of Joseph in early June of 2017, attracting dozens of trail users who came out to clear trails used by cyclists, hikers and skiers.

Bombaci said the group cleared twice the number of miles in 2018 as the previous year.

In 2017 the association hosted 10 one-day trips clearing 27 miles and totaling 1,054 volunteer hours, time and labor the U.S. Forest Service valued at nearly \$25,000.

In 2018 the numbers doubled. Volunteers completed 10 one-day work parties plus six multi-day backcountry trips. More than 80 miles of trail were cleared, including

sawing through more than 850 logs that spanned a trail. More than 2,100 volunteer hours were logged at a value exceeding \$50,000.

"After a season working together we were more efficient and got deeper into the back country," Bombaci said.

Camping in the wilderness allowed trail workers to clear more miles than single day trips and support by backcountry horse and mule teams. Bombaci said going over the same trails year after year helps as well.

"Each year we are catching up on deferred maintenance so it goes faster when you only clear one year's worth of growth instead of several," Bombaci said.

It's not just the shrubs and trees encroaching on the trail that need to be cleared away, but a lot of the heavy labor comes with clearing trees that fell over the trail during the winter months.

"A hellacious storm one

season can be as bad as catching up on several years of clearing, but we feel like we gained on things this summer," Bombaci said.

No skills are required to join and clear trail, Bombaci said. Those who work with crosscut saws will be trained in their use, but a lot of the work is done with standard gardening tools.

To Learn More

The Wallowa Mountain Hells Canyon Trail Association's public event is set for Monday, Oct. 29 at 6:30 p.m. in Zabel 101 in Lewis Auditorium at Eastern Oregon University.

"Basically anyone at any level of experience can come out for one trip or the whole season," Bombaci said.

People from all backgrounds, young and old, have come out for trail clearing and there are jobs for all ages. Bombaci said children who come along with their parents work alongside the adults.

"We have an interesting mix of longtime residents and newcomers," Bombaci said. "It's a great way to make new friends and get more familiar with the trails."

The association has also pledged its support of the Wallowa-Whitman's historic structures. Volunteers are working this fall at the Lick Creek Guard Station east of Salt Creek Summit to restore a cabin on the National Register of Historic Places.

Bombaci said association members ripped out rotten flooring and joists in a Citizens Conservation Corps 1930s cabin, improved ventilation in the crawl space, sealed areas where wildlife could get in, and improved drainage around the building so it doesn't get wet from snowmelt in the future.

While the association has low overhead, a grant from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance helped it complete this year's trail work. In 2018, the Alliance provided funds for projects in over 40 national forests in 15 different states.

The Oct. 29 presentation starts at 6:30 p.m. in Zabel 101 in the Lewis Auditorium.

Jim Akenson, the association's board chairman said of the program, "The emphasis will be the past two years of the association's work accomplishments, featuring photographs of awesome scenery, and the projected efforts for 2019."

Membership information will also be available, Akenson said. Currently, a yearly individual memberships costs \$20 a year, or \$30 for a family.

For more information contact Akenson at micaake@yahoo.com.

PICK'N PATCH
We will be OPENING
on October 5th!
Where: Corner of Booth Lane and Lower Cove Road
When: Friday and Saturday: 9am-6pm
Sunday: 10am-4pm
Monday-Thursday: By appointment
What you will find:
Small corn maze, several varieties of pumpkins and gourds, straw bales, corn stalks.
If you would like to schedule a school field trip or other event, please call the number listed below.
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