



SPORTS

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Good day to our valued subscriber Sandra Clausen of La Grande

## Wallowa conservation projects win OWEB grant

■ The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board approved nearly \$1 million in funding

By Francisca Benitez  
The Observer

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board approved \$937,322 in funding for six projects in Wallowa County on April 17. All the projects benefit forest or fish conservation in Wallowa County.

"That amount of money to go to one county in one funding cycle is extraordinary," said Coby Menton, project manager at the Grande Ronde Model Watershed.

OWEB is a state board made up of 19 members based in Salem and is funded by the Oregon lottery, federal dollars and salmon license plate revenue, according to the Oregon Secretary of State's website.

Of the six, three are GRMW projects. Founded in 1992, GRMW is "the primary entity coordinating habitat restoration on both private and public lands within the Grande Ronde Basin," its website states.

Receiving the most funding of the three — \$118,096 — is a project to replace a double culvert at Little Sheep Creek in the Imnaha Basin. Menton said the area has been a known fish passage for years, and the project will open up 11 miles for habitat for steelhead and trout. GRMW will partner with the Federal Highway Administration, Oregon Department of Transportation, U.S. Forest Service and Wallowa County in addition to OWEB on this project. GRMW was also granted \$101,002 to continue an ongoing project that involves monitoring 12 existing stream gauges in Union and Wallowa counties. GRMW is partnering with the Oregon Water Resources Department and Bonneville Power Administration in addition to OWEB.

See OWEB / Page 5A



# Thousands of acres SUBMERGED

Dick Mason/The Observer

This is a small portion of the agricultural and between Imbler and Cove that is covered with water.

## ■ Flooding takes a toll on Grande Ronde Valley farmers

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

The flooding that struck Northeast Oregon 2-1/2 weeks ago did minimal damage to structures in Union County, but the same can not be said for agricultural land.

Thousands of acres of agricultural land in Union County remain under at least a foot of water in the Imbler and Cove area. So bad are conditions that some fields could easily be mistaken for small lakes.

Among those who have been hit hard is Blue Mountain Seeds of Imbler, which grows much of its grass seed on the land of farmers it has contracts with.

"It has been a tough two weeks," said Bill Merrigan, general manager of Blue Mountain Seeds, who noted this year's flooding has been the worst the Grande Ronde Valley has seen since 2011.

Merrigan estimates approximately 5,000 acres of farmland is currently

submerged in the Grande Ronde Valley. Merrigan said 1,000 acres of land his company has contracted for seed production is under water. This is a substantial percentage of the land Blue Mountain Seeds has under production, land that will now not produce harvestable seed crops until 2021.

*"We have no flood control... We have nothing holding the water back."*

— Bill Merrigan, Blue Mountain Seeds general manager

Merrigan explained that the land now submerged is lost for this year because the grass seed crops growing on it were destroyed by the flooding. He said that even if the water were to suddenly drain off the fields, it would be too late in the year to plant new seed.

The Blue Mountain Seeds general manager added it also would not be

wise to plant seed on the land because of the damage caused by the flooding, which will have to be repaired over the next year.

"Flooding tends to deposit silt and debris and brings in weeds," Merrigan said.

The challenge the Imbler company faces is compounded by the fact that all of the grasses it grows are perennials, which produce seed after two years and then die. This means Blue Mountain Seeds will not be able to harvest a crop on the land that is now submerged until the summer of 2021 since the seed to be planted in 2020 will not produce seed until 2021.

Patty Bingaman, a farmer in the Imbler area whose family farm has been impacted by flooding, said many agricultural families are being impacted significantly by flooding.

"(The total number of acres impacted) is not a huge percentage of farmland in the Grande Ronde Valley, but for some it is the only ground they raise crops on," Bingaman said.

See Flood / Page 5A

## Meet Morgan Lake's new camp host

■ Civil War reenactor Deidre Lepper traveled 2,400 miles to La Grande for a 'perfect way to spend the summer'

By Amanda Weisbrod  
The Observer

Hailing from Murfreesboro, a town with a rich Civil War history just outside Nashville, Tennessee, La Grande's newest camp host is bringing her nomadic spirit and fun-loving personality to Morgan Lake.

Deidre Lepper, who starts at her Morgan Lake camp host post May 1, said she moved to La Grande to explore the Northwest during her retirement and to spend time with her son, Joseph Hayes, a retired Army ranger, and his sons.

"It's just beautiful here, absolutely gorgeous," she said. "I thought when I retired that I was going to head toward the Northwest and do the nomad thing and camp, but I decided to hang out here about a year or two with Joe until I get comfortable with camping and things like that and be ready to be on my own."

See Camp / Page 5A



Lepper



First Last/The Observer

Summerville artist, David Lundquist and partner Laura Zambrano showcase the benefit painting that is raising funds for fire victims of Paradise, California.

# Rising up to Paradise

## ■ Local artist creates painting to benefit Paradise fire victims

By Trish Yerges  
For The Observer

Summerville artist David Lundquist of Eagle Eye Studios, a former illustrator for the Grateful Dead, Jerry Garcia Band and Bill Graham Presents, has been selling limited edition, signed prints of his latest image, "Rising Up to Paradise," to benefit victims of the Camp Fire, which leveled the city of Paradise, California, last November.

*"I asked myself, 'what can I do?' These people obviously need some help."*

— David Lundquist, Eagle Eye Studios artist

The Camp Fire, which is now being called the deadliest and most destructive fire in the state's history, was reportedly caused by a PG&E transmission tower malfunction. The burden of liability has caused the corporation to file bankruptcy, leaving fire victims wondering if their insurance alone will provide enough support to recover.

"About 86 people lost their lives and

16,000 homes were destroyed," Lundquist said. "The figures keep changing, but there are about 500 still missing, and they are still finding more remains."

The Camp Fire burned a fiery 15-mile-wide swath through Paradise as far as the eye could see, everything reduced to ashes except for a few free-standing chimneys and the raw steel shells of parked automobiles. (Very oddly, there was an occasional house that was untouched by the fire that incinerated every house around it.)

"It was absolutely frightening what I saw," Lundquist said. "It was really a wake-up call. I asked myself, 'what can I do?' These people obviously need some help."

In talking to a friend from the Bay area, Lundquist learned that this friend was going to put on a benefit concert for the Paradise victims. That's when Lundquist thought of creating the benefit artwork to sell at that concert.

"I spent two weeks painting this idea in my head that was an image of a Phoenix rising from the destruction of the fire and creating life again," Lundquist said.

He later learned the concert had fallen through, but undeterred, Lundquist moved ahead with the project, seeking out a printer who would make prints of the image.

See Paradise / Page 2A

### INDEX

Classified.....4B	Dear Abby.....8B	Record.....3A
Comics.....3B	Home.....1B	Obituaries.....3A
Community...6A	Letters.....4A	Opinion.....4A
Crossword.....5B	Lottery.....2A	Sports.....7A

### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	<b>Tonight</b> 28 LOW Mainly clear		<b>Tuesday</b> 55/26 Partly sunny
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