

WALLOWA MOUNTAINS HELLS CANYON TRAILS ASSOCIATION

Taking on the trail troubles

RECREATION REPORT

FREE FISHING WEEKEND IN OREGON

Anglers don't need a license to fish in Oregon this weekend, Feb. 15 and 16. All other regulations, such as size and bag limits, apply.

FOREST SERVICE WAIVES DAY-USE FEES MONDAY

The U.S. Forest Service will waive fees at day-use recreation sites in Oregon and Washington on Feb. 17 in honor of Presidents Day.

The fee waiver includes many trail-heads, picnic areas, boat launches, and visitor centers. Fees for camping, cabin rentals, heritage expeditions, or other permits still apply. Fees will continue to be charged at recreation sites operated by concessionaires unless the individual manager chooses to participate.

FISHING FORECAST

MALHEUR RESERVOIR

As of Feb. 11, most of the reservoir was ice-free with some patches of ice near the dam and drifting ice elsewhere. Fishing is good for rainbow trout ranging from 12 to 20 inches.

PHILLIPS RESERVOIR

Ice conditions appear to be fair. Recent reports indicate that fishing for rainbow trout has been good, and that the fish are of good size.

IMNAHA RIVER

Flows recently jumped but are currently falling. Steel-head will be moving into the Imnaha River from the Snake River as late winter progresses and conditions improve.

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

There are millions of trees in the Wallowa Mountains but sometimes it only takes one to stop a bunch of Boy Scouts.

Russ West has seen that tree.

He has in fact sawed through it, although not without a certain amount of trouble, including having to fashion a wedge from a sapling to extract the saw blade.

In any case West has a keen understanding of the effort needed to keep trails in the Wallowas, and other wild country in Northeastern Oregon, accessible to hikers and to horseback riders.

His own experiences over four decades of backpacking and riding horses, especially in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, served as motivation for West to join the Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trails Association.

This group of volunteers, since forming in early 2017, have donated more than 5,600 hours of toil and cut through around 2,000 trees that had crashed across a trail.

The organization, which coordinates with the Forest Service and with other volunteers, including the Blue Mountain Backcountry Horsemen, has cleared logs and brush from 240 miles of trail in three years.

"I just love the wilderness and want to do what I can to keep the trails open," said West, 66, who retired in 2018 after serving for 15 years as Union County Circuit Court judge and 18 years as the county's district attorney.

Over his years exploring the Eagle Cap, Oregon's largest wilderness at 365,000 and with a trail network exceeding 500 miles, West has seen the effects of declining trail maintenance budgets for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, which manages the wilderness.

"The Forest Service hasn't been able to keep up," said West, who worked for the agency as a smokejumper firefighter for five years.

And as West's struggle with that lone log while leading a



Submitted photo

Cynthia Armentrout, left, and her son, Corrin Armentrout, dig a trail tread at Nez Perce Crossing in Hells Canyon.

Trails Group Meets Tuesday To Plan 2020 Projects

LA GRANDE —

Anyone interested in maintaining trails in the region, including the Wallowas, Elkhorns, Blues and Hells Canyon, is invited to attend a project planning meeting of the Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trails Association on Tuesday, Feb. 18 at 5:30 p.m. in the Colleen Johnson Meeting Room at the Cook Memorial Library, 2006 Fourth St. in La Grande. Learn more at www.wmhcta.org

50-mile Boy Scout backpacking trip illustrates, a trail left to nature for even a few years can become all but impassable.

(That log was a good 2 feet through the middle, West said, and it fell across a steep



Submitted photo

Russ West, left, and Jim Akenson saw through a log on the Dobbin Creek trail in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, with John Hollenbeak looking on.

section of the Lower Minam trail where a detour wasn't possible.)

But West is optimistic that the Trails Association, building on the work of groups such as the Blue Mountain Backcountry

Horseman, is making a tangible difference for hikers and equestrians.

"I think we're making a dent," he said. "We've done a lot, but the problem is it's a never-ending problem."

Every winter storm topples trees.

The Trails Association welcomes everyone, asking only for a \$20 membership fee.

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Get out, meet new people and have fun at a gun show

If you listen to the antis, gun shows are the root of all evil, but I have attended numerous gun shows and never seen a hint of all of the mayhem and wickedness that they claim is happening at them. I just see a lot of older people, young kids, etc. having a good time. So, from my naïve perspective, let's look at what to expect when you go to a local gun show. Realize every gun show will have its own flavor.

I never thought about it until just now but I don't think that I've ever actually bought a gun at a gun show. I've sold some guns but never bought one so I guess, really, I just go to buy accessories and cool stuff. As I'm typing this article, I'm visiting South Dakota. I noticed that there was a gun show going on in the town where I am staying, so me and a buddy decided to hit it. It was not unlike most shows.

FORMAT

Vendors will rent tables to set up their wares. They can rent from one table on up to I guess as many as they want but usually it will be one to three with a handful of the bigger vendors renting four to maybe six.

There will be a handful of vendors selling new guns. More than likely



BASE CAMP
TOM CLAYCOMB

these will be a local gun dealer. Then there will be quite a few tables with used guns. These are set up by guys who appear to hit all of the local gun shows. If you talk to them it sounds like they hit the Ontario, La Grande, Pendleton, Nampa and Caldwell shows. To me it seems like a lot of this group do gun shows almost as a hobby. I don't really see them selling too much. I think they like to hang around that group of people and hope to make enough to support their lifestyle.

Then there will be a few who specialize in brass. Most of these guys are into shooting and not really hunting. They just love to shoot, tweak their rifles and spend a lot of time at the gun range. This explains why gun shows can have a semi high attendance even during hunting season when normal people ought to be up in the mountains hunting! I couldn't believe it but at a meeting at the SHOT Show last week one of the speakers said that shooting is the No. 2 sport in America, ahead of golf.



Tom Claycomb photo

You'll see some characters like this guy at gun shows. He is holding an OLD Benjamin Franklin airgun. I'd never seen one this old.

KNIVES

And of course knives are always a big item. I write a weekly knife product review for AmmolandShooting SportsNews, which is the largest outdoor website in America so as you can imagine, I love knives. Yes, half of the knife tables will have cheap imports but there will also usually be a few quality knives at every show.

And, there will be a few tables with some old school knives. I never tire at looking at these — like the old Case leather handle knives. I met a guy last year in La Grande and he had a table full of knives made in Finland. The sheaths were made of reindeer leather and some of the handles out of their antlers. It's always cool to find some new twist like this. I got a few and am testing them

and will do some product reviews on them sometime in the future. It's fun to find something new like that.

Then something that is cool to the old-timers is that there are always a few tables that have some World War II knives, bayonets (if you're young and don't know what a bayonet is, it is a knife that can be attached to the muzzle of your rifle for hand-to-hand combat in the trenches), rifles and pistols.

Some guy here today had a whole table of German Lugers which was cool. I'd love to own one of them. And while on old military gear, there will be a couple guys who have some old military clothing for sale.

AMMO

There will be a lot of ammo for sale. At every gun show I can find at least a few vendors that have a good deal on ammo. So, I always end up buying a few boxes to go plink with. If you're looking to buy in bulk, a gun show is a good place to check out.

So, as we wrap up, if you're in town when one of the (semi) local gun shows is going on, you might want to check one out. Who knows, you might become a gun show groupie!