

EOLS still on — for now

■ A decision on whether to hold the event will be made in early May

By Ronald Bond
EO Media Group

UNION — Nothing has stopped the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show since its inception in 1908 — not World War I, World War II, not the Spanish Flu and not even a fire — and it's because of one fact.

"The show does not go on without volunteers," EOLS President Dave Billings said. "That show can't survive without volunteers. During those years when everyone else took off, this area had enough volunteers to make it happen. That's why it stayed alive."

Billings is hopeful those volunteers will be able to put on the show for the 113th year in a row this coming June. But what happens in the next month with the coronavirus will determine the fate of the oldest rodeo and livestock exhibition in the northwest.

The EOLS kickoff dinner, which was to take place Saturday, was canceled, but that is the only scheduled event between now and June 8, when the show is set to begin.

"We won't have anything else until the first weekend in June, which is the weekend ahead of the rodeo," Billings said, with the only major activity between now and then a cleanup day June 6, two days before the beginning of the Livestock Show.

But like everyone else nationwide, Billings and the board members are watching the fallout of COVID-19. And with all the details that go into the event, Billings said if the coronavirus



EO Media Group file photo

Springfield's Jesse Tennent tries to outrun Leapfrog during the first freestyle bullfighting competition at the 2019 Eastern Oregon Livestock Show. The event is set to take place for the 113th straight year, though the decision to go forward comes in early May and depends on the fallout from COVID-19.

impacts the show, there wouldn't be an option to reschedule or postpone it, or have it in an abbreviated sense.

"We would have to just cancel for the year," he said. "The schedule for rodeo and livestock, bulls — there's just a lot of

things that are hard to postpone. That stock is tied up for the next weekend (at) other places. "Too many things that all have to line up to make it work."

He noted, for example, the schedule for the horse racing, which takes place Friday through

Sunday each year, has been set since January.

"The rest of the dates are taken," he said.

Billings said the plan is for volunteers and board members to

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Hammonds may face competition for grazing allotments

■ Oregon Cattlemen's Association is 'fully supportive' of the Hammond family

By Mateusz Perkowski
EO Media Group

HARNEY COUNTY — Neighboring cattle producers can apply to compete for access to federal grazing allotments that Oregon's Hammond Ranches lost in a court decision last year.

However, those applications will be put on hold if Hammond Ranches decides to continue with an administrative challenge against the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

Ranchers have until April 14 to apply to graze livestock on the four allotments, which include more than 26,000 federal acres, while Hammond Ranches must decide by that time whether to pursue its appeal — or also submit an application for a new grazing permit.

Steven Hammond, co-owner of the ranch, said he's not sure whether other cattlemen will seek to compete for the grazing allotments, which his family has relied upon for decades.

Hammond said he's also undecided about which procedural action to take and will

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Fighting a juniper invasion

■ Natural Resources Conservation Service funds 900 acres of juniper cutting

By Ellen Morris Bishop
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — At first glance, they look like ordinary evergreen trees: a little short, a little rotund, harmless enough. But junipers are opportunists of the highest order, gobbling up some of Wallowa County's grassland and water resources at a fierce rate.

Now, thanks to the teamwork of range conservationist J. Johansen and 6 Ranch owner Liza Jane McAlister, the Natural Resources Conservation Service is dedicating more than \$1.8 million to help landowners remove these native — but invasive — trees from 4,500 acres of Wallowa County's private lands. The work started this week.

The 6 Ranch, just west of Enterprise, will be among the first landowners to take advantage of the new NRCS Ecological Function Restoration juniper treatment program. It's a welcome and long-awaited opportunity for McAlister who has been looking for some help in juniper removal and wildlife habitat restoration for more than two decades.

The problem with junipers is that, absent fire and other con-



Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

A worker takes down a juniper Monday as juniper removal begins on the 6 Ranch in Wallowa County.

trols, they expand their range exponentially. The stout, 20-40-foot tall trees suck up huge amounts of ground water — an estimated 2,000-4,000 gallons per acre, per day on the 6 Ranch — and shade out native shrubs and grasses. That creates a treed-up desert with a virtually impenetrable maze of lower branches, no understory plants and dry soils and springs.

"The trees have just sort of swallowed the steep slopes above the Wallowa River," McAlister said. "When my great-grandparents owned the ranch, there were no junipers on that slope at all. I've been watching those trees invade the ranch and thinking

what would happen if they caught on fire, especially in the hot, dry summer. It would be catastrophic," she said.

That fire, she continued, would burn the ponderosa pine and fir and other species, burn so hot it would sterilize soils and lead to extreme erosion into the Wallowa River, with soil and ash muddying the water.

"It would be really bad for fish and all aquatic species," she said.

"It's a nightmare."

McAlister had asked for help from the Natural Resources Conservation Service beginning around 1998. But, despite efforts

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More people are buying food directly from farms during virus

■ Farms also are creating payment options for buyers during pandemic

By Sierra Dawn McClain
EO Media Group

VENETA — New unemployment claims in Oregon catapulted nearly 1,500% the last week of March, according to the Oregon Employment Department. But for Brandon Huff and his wife, Phaedra, owners of Ambrosia Farm in Veneta, this is their busiest season yet.

Industry leaders say more people are buying directly from farms to avoid grocery store crowds, shorten the supply chain and secure a reliable food source at a time when store shelves are often empty.

"Everyone's getting laid off and talking on social media about chillin'," said Brandon Huff. "And over here, I'm busier than ever. It seems like agriculture is full speed ahead."

Experts say subscriptions to CSA — Community Supported Agriculture — have spiked the past few weeks. CSA is a partnership between a farmer and customer in which a customer pays for a membership share in exchange for a weekly box of fresh produce, meat or other farm goods.

Ambrosia Farm runs a CSA program. Members pay a share price at the start of the growing

season and receive weekly boxes of colorful cabbage, peppers, strawberries, spinach and more. The farm offers both delivery and pickup options.

"We're seeing a major uptick in CSA memberships," said Holly Hutchason, executive director of the Portland Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition, or PACSAC.

In the past two weeks, RJ Ewing, operations manager for Deck Family Farm in Junction City, said the farm's number of CSA members has leapt from 80 to 125.

Kelly Crane, executive director of the Oregon Farmers Markets Association and former owner of a 50-member CSA, said people may be seeking farm-direct food for a sense of stability.

"People are feeling a little food insecure," said Crane. "Having a relationship with a farmer committed to delivering food every week is reassuring."

Hutchason and Crane said people may also be choosing CSAs to sidestep grocery stores and distribution chains.

"I you're concerned about how many people are handling your food," said Crane, "buying direct from the farm is the shortest imaginable supply chain."

Heidi Noordijk, Oregon State University's small farms coordinator, said she thinks CSAs also are gaining traction because

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Environmental groups complain about Snake River dams hearings format

■ Environmentalists ask federal government to double the comment period to 90 days

By Nicholas K. Geranios
Associated Press

SPOKANE — Some environmental groups are complaining about the teleconference format for gathering public comments on a federal government proposal to save salmon runs on the Columbia River system.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the government decided to hold teleconferences, rather than in-person public hearings, on its new proposal that downplays removing four dams on the Snake River to save the fish.

The teleconferences are cum-

bersome and allow for far fewer comments than the traditional public hearings, environmental groups contend.

"Twenty years ago, 800 people turned out for Spokane's public hearing on whether the dams should be removed, with the vast majority testifying in support of restoring a free-flowing lower Snake River," said Sam Mace, a spokeswoman for Save Our Wild Salmon.

"The teleconference calls clearly are not working for the public, with only 20-30 people speaking," she said.

She and other environmentalists are calling on the federal government to double the comment period to 90 days and hold more hearings.

"This doesn't feel like a meaningful way to engage the public," said Robb Krebbiel of Defenders of Wildlife. "Lots of people have

other things on their plates."

Amy Echols, a spokeswoman for the Army Corps of Engineers Northwestern Division in Portland said people at this point should plan on the comment period ending on April 13 as planned.

"We are pleased with the fact that people are calling in," Echols said. "It's meeting our need to get input."

The last telephone hearing of the six scheduled will be Tuesday.