JUNIPERS

Continued from Page 1B

from the local office, help in the form of a much-needed cost-share was never forthcoming because Rocky Mountain juniper had not been proven to be invasive, although the service had funded removal of another species, western juniper, in the rest of Oregon for years.

She decided to take matters into her own hands.

"I bought draft horses," she said, "and thought I'd use them to pull the trees to the top of the slope, and just start pecking away at it."

But in 2017 help arrived in the form of J. Johansen, a new soil conservationist at the Enterprise NRCS office. He started talking with several landowners, including McAlister, who wanted to control the juniper that was invading their rangeland.

But to provide cost-sharing for landowners in Wallowa County, Johansen had to prove that Rocky Mountain juniper was actually invasive here.

"We had an advantage in showing that junipers were a problem on the 6 Ranch because we've owned this land for 130-plus years," McAlister said. "I have an oil painting that my great-great-aunt did in 1902 of this north-facing slope and there's hardly a juniper on it then," McAlister said.

Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

Range conservationist J. Johansen with the Natural Resources Conservation Service uses and increment borer to check the age of a juniper Monday on the 6 Ranch in Wallowa County. The tree was about 36 years old. Most junipers in the stand are less than 60 years old, and have shaded out vegetation as well as produced an almost impenetrable thicket of branches.

Johansen found old USDA Soil Conservation Service aerial photos of the county from 1946, 1974 and 1992. They showed junipers were invading and overwhelming grasslands on the 6 Ranch and elsewhere.

With that clear evidence, the NRCS approved the conservation implementation strategy, allowing for cost shares here. Johansen mapped out the distribution of the problem trees, and the 4,500-acre Ecological Function Restoration juniper treatment area was born.

The 6 Ranch project began this week. It is the first of nine projects in Wallowa County.

Local foresters already have contracted for some of these projects. McAlister contracted with C&H Reforesters out of Salem. They will hand-fell the junipers and stack slash piles at the top of the slope. The pines, fir and riparian trees will remain.

What to do with all the wood from larger juniper trunks? The 6 Ranch bought a small sawmill, and plans to produce some boards, posts, poles and more, McAlister said. "We'll use a lot of it on the ranch, but we might also have some for sale," she said. "It's like cedar. It's a gorgeous wood."

In addition to reducing fire danger and producing wood products, the 6 Ranch project also aims to improve wildlife habitat. Upland birds and the grasshopper sparrow, an increasingly rare grassland resident, should return. McAlister also anticipates the springs that once watered the slopes above the river will reappear when the junipers are gone.

Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

Wallowa County's 6 Ranch owner Liza Jane McAlister shows the painting her great-great-aunt made in 1902 depicting a grassy slope with a few pine trees. Today, juniper trees cover the ridge. McAlister aims to restore the land to the open space in the painting.

"I think sometimes the unintended consequences of our actions – like fire suppression — throws nature out of balance," McAlister said. "This project will give us the opportunity to restore that balance."

She and the Natural Resources Conservation Service hope others will follow. For this year, the NRCS has funded 900 acres of juniper cutting and has 12 applications for the next round of cost-shares. The signup deadline for interested landowners is April 17.

One of McAlister's most prized possessions is the painting her great-great aunt made of the ranch in 1902. It's a scene looking at the steep slopes above the Wallowa River and the snow-capped mountains beyond. There is not a juniper tree to be seen.

"I'd like to restore it to what it was in her day," McAlister said. "It might take us awhile to get used to looking at a more open slope. But that's what the landscape on this piece of ground should look like."

EOLS

Continued from Page 1B

carry on as best as possible with smaller tasks at the EOLS ground in preparation for the show to go on as scheduled.

"We've got all kind of little maintenance projects," he said.

Two alterations will have to be accounted for, however, that are tied into the already canceled kickoff dinner. Billings said the dinner is when the members of the queen's court have their speech competition, and also marks the date the candidates can begin to sell tickets.

With social distancing and stay-at-home stipulations in place, Billings said, how to handle the ticket sales and the speech competition is still being considered.

"There's a lot of unknowns right now. Everyone is sitting around waiting," he said.

As for animals raised by area youth that are sold during the week of the show, Billings said a contingency plan is being developed in case the coronavirus does lead to the show's cancellation.

"If something happens and the show is canceled because of this, we would work with the kids to have sort of a sale that the animals are dispersed at," he said. "They're still working on what that could be."

The board is eying the beginning of May for when it will make the call on whether to have the show.

"We're all in hopes we're going to have it," Billings said. He noted that everybody is on board with the plan to move forward and that "none of us are running in the other direction," of saying to cancel now. "We're going to go down to the last minute."

Further, the hope is the 113th EOLS could be one that marks the region's release from the quarantine lifestyle COVID-19 has put on the country.

"We have high hopes that we're going to have a lot of enthusiasm for the show," he said, "and a lot of it because people are tired of being cooped up."

GRAZING

Continued from Page 1B

be consulting with his attorney to "try to understand how much more complicated this process is going to get."

Hammond and his father, Dwight, are well-known in the ranching community for their legal battles with the federal government and environmental groups.

The two ranchers were convicted of arson for setting fire to rangelands and sent to prison in 2012. After being released, they were ordered back behind bars when the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals determined they must both serve mandatory 5-year sentences.

Demonstrations against the federal government erupted when the Hammonds returned to prison in early 2016, leading to the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

One protestor was killed and multiple others were arrested while on a trip away from the facility.

President Donald Trump fully pardoned the father and son in 2018, and the BLM restored their access to federal grazing allotments last year.

However, that decision was overturned by a judge due to a lawsuit in which several environmental groups opposed the restoration of their grazing permits.

Because their grazing permits were again canceled, it also effectively re-started an administrative appeal the Hammonds had previously been pursuing to regain access to the allotments. If the Hammonds continue with their administrative challenge, the BLM will wait until it's resolved before making a decision on the applications.

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association is "fully supportive" of the Hammond family and would prefer that other cattlemen don't compete for the grazing allotments, said Jerome Rosa, the group's executive director.

"We really hope people will allow the Hammonds to get their permits back," Rosa said.

Only a limited number of cattlemen would likely qualify to graze that federal property, he said. "Usually it's only ranches that have their base property nearby."

Jeff Maupin, former president of the Harney County Stock Growers Association, said he "wouldn't be surprised" if other cattlemen sought to access the grazing allotments but said, "It's wrong in my eyes."

Access to federal grazing allotments is similar to having water rights, since the value of the ranch property is thereby increased, Maupin said.

The BLM's decision would seem like an infringement of private property rights, he said. "You shouldn't be able to put it out for competitive bid, or whatever they're calling it, without the landowner's approval."

FOOD

Continued from Page 1B

more people are cooking at home and thinking about how they can support local businesses and producers.

CSA is unfamiliar to many consumers, said Hutchason, but it's also new to many farms.

Before the virus outbreak, said Hutchason, many small farms relied heavily on restaurant sales. With so many restaurants now closed or limited to takeout and delivery, Hutchason called the change a "huge loss for farmers."

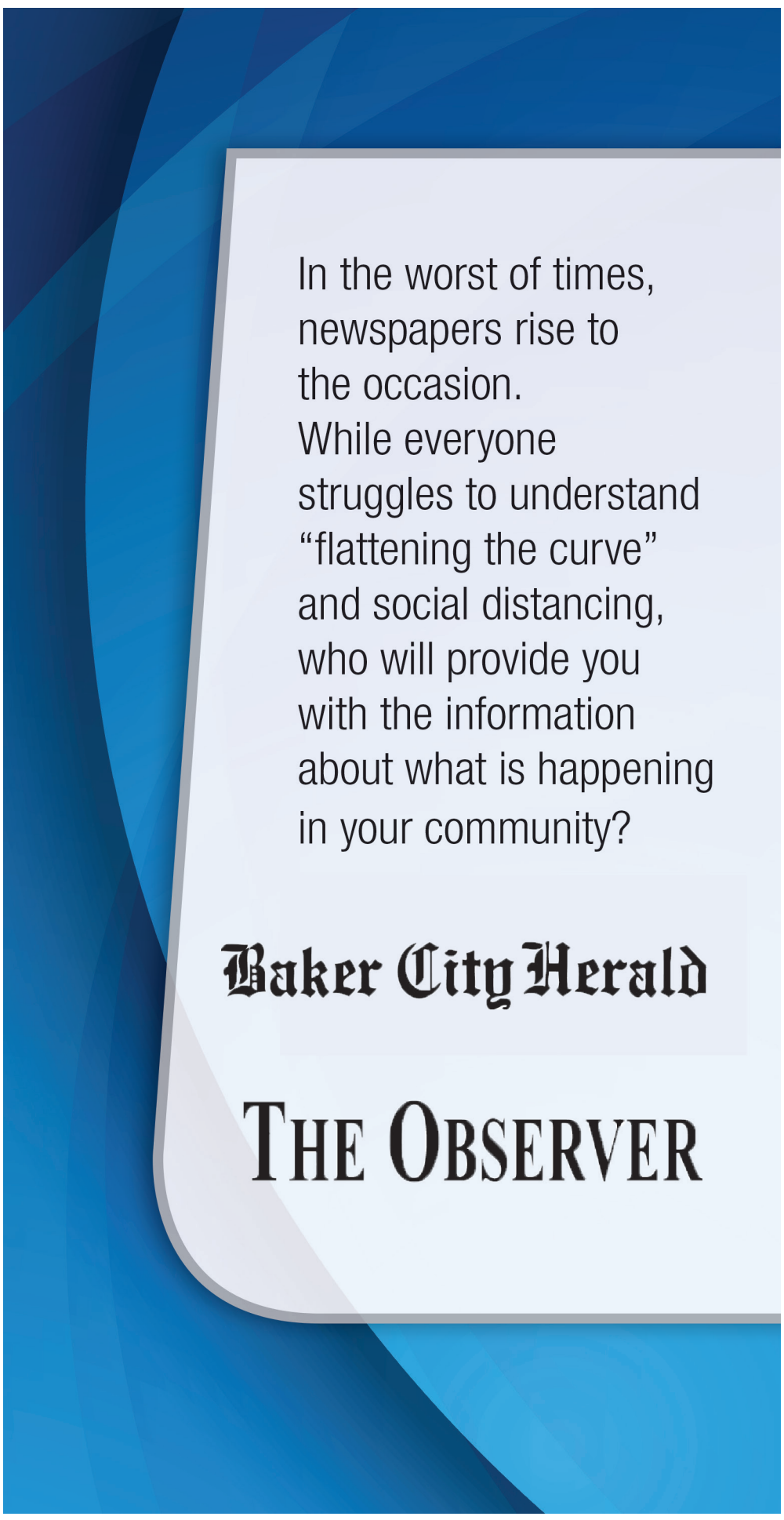
Many of these farms, she said, have been forced to adapt by expanding or creating CSAs.

Laura Masterson, owner of 47th Avenue Farm in Portland, has run a CSA for 24 years and also sells to restaurants. Masterson said the farm has about twice as many CSA signups now as this time last year, and after restaurants shut down, over 50 current members signed up for an extra weekly box of vegetables.

Aaron Nichols, co-owner of Stoneboat Farm in Hillsboro, said about 60% of sales are typically to restaurants — including about 300 pounds per week of salad greens. With restaurants closed, Nichols plans to double the number of available CSA shares. He predicts CSA crops won't be as profitable as restaurant crops, but said he's "incredibly grateful" for the community support.

"Farms are responding to this crisis really creatively," said Crane of OSU. "It's early enough in the season that they're trying to shift their models in advance of harvest."

Crane said across the state, numerous small farms have set up online ordering systems, such as Barn2Door and Farmigo, coordinated home and curbside delivery options and created pickup sites.



eomedia group
The most valuable and respected source of local news, advertising and information for our communities.
eomediagroup.com