

TREES

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"We lost basically our entire plantings this year. Now we've got another big hole that's going to suck up any excess that would have been in the future," Smith said, speaking about the Christmas industry as a whole.

Tim Donovan, who runs the Donovan Tree Farm in La Grande with his wife, Loraine Donovan, said the drought compounded the problem regarding the shortages.

"There was a glut of trees 15 years ago and the price went really low," Tim Donovan said. "A certain amount of farms converted into wine production, so that changed the supply balance, and this summer with the drought certain trees turned red and aren't on the market."

The Donivans have been running a tree farm since their first planting in 1979. Their 3.5-acre property on Igo Lane north of La Grande is filled with trees of varying ages and species. Many of the younger trees had been scorched by the summer heat wave, leaving the saplings to resemble the sickly tree from the animated TV classic "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Older trees largely survived the onslaught of record-breaking temperatures, though a few trees succumbed to the heat while other trees saw only a smattering of reddened needles and crispy branches.

Loraine Donovan described this year's weather conditions as highly unusual, and said the heat and drought prevented the trees from developing root structures that would help them weather the dry conditions.

"We lost a lot of the



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Reddened needles signify a dead tree scorched by the summer heat waves and drought at the Donovan Tree Farm in La Grande on Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Though most of the adult and market ready trees survived, some were damaged by the unusually dry and hot conditions this year.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Benny, the unofficial mascot of the Donovan Tree Farm, La Grande, makes her way through the grove on Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. The tree farm operates on 3.5 acres and has been planting trees since 1979.

seedlings we planted this spring, and I'm sure that was the case for other growers too," she said. "We went through and spot watered every tree, including every seedling, five times through the summer, but we still lost a large percentage of this year's seedlings — half of what we planted."

Oregon leads the nation in Christmas tree production, with exports fueling an industry worth just more than \$100 mil-

lion, according to statistics from the National Agricultural Statistics Service. According to the Capital Press, Oregon grows nearly one-third of all U.S. Christmas trees. Most of the Christmas tree farms are in or near the Willamette Valley where conditions are prime for pines.

According to Loraine Donovan, trees in Eastern Oregon take longer to grow than those in the Willamette Valley, with the average growth time of

10-12 years for an Eastern Oregon Christmas tree, as compared to the eight to 10 years in the Willamette Valley.

"We're a lot higher and drier, and they're a lot more temperate and moist," she said.

And while the Willamette Valley is poised to exit its drought starting next year according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data, the dry conditions in Eastern Oregon are expected to persist for at least one more season. That means local Christmas tree growers will continue to struggle with their crops in the years to come.

"We're just going to have to replant more next spring and hope we don't have another weather cycle like that," Loraine Donovan said.

Still, the Donivans contend they have more than enough trees to supply buyers in the Grande Ronde Valley looking to cut down their own tree for holidays. Tim Donovan said the farm has "more than we did last year."



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Kathy Rudd, center, and Mary Ann Taal, right, lay out photos of the La Grande High School class of 1964 on Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021. A small group of volunteers are restoring yearbook displays to place in the hallways of La Grande High School, showcasing the school's history.

PHOTOS

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with the school's blue and white colors, according to Kathy Rudd, a 1969 LHS graduate and a Graduation Class Picture Project member.

To date, frames have been restored for the classes of 1934, 1964, 1966 and 1969. The work is not inexpensive, running approximately \$206.44 per frame.

Rudd said the volunteers for the Graduation Class Picture Project will need funding before they can restore many more picture frames. Rudd is encouraging each class between 1924 and 2001 to submit donations to cover the cost of renovating their class frame. Rudd said each time a class provides full funding, her group will make that class its next priority.

In addition to Rudd, the group's members also include LHS graduates Mary Ellen Taal, Jim Roper, Nan Fordice and Gail Fuller-Hug.

The picture frames being restored were previously displayed in the school's main entrance. They were taken down to be restored and because they were in a disorganized state and not in chronological order.

"They were in disarray," Rudd said.

Members of the Graduation Class Picture Project stepped forward to restore the frames, Rudd said, because they were afraid the photos would be put somewhere where they might be damaged. The school's senior classes, she said, deserve to have their place in their school's history preserved.

"We want to share LHS's history," Rudd said.

The volunteers hope to display the restored class photos inside the school's east entrance, which gives access to the gym and the school's auditorium. This is a high-traffic area used by the community coming to school events and also offers more open low wall space where people could easily see framed photos.

"We want to increase their visibility," Rudd said.

She noted, though, that the photos will not be placed there until approval is received from La Grande High School.

The frame renovation work is being done in the school's Tiger Cage room. LHS's Leatha Canfield, a behavior intervention specialist and computer lab paraprofessional who is in charge of the Tiger Cage room, made space available for the photo project. Canfield is impressed with the group's energy and the quality of the work they are doing.

"They are so emotionally involved," she said.

Rudd said she has emotional ties to the project because her late mother, Betty Martin Peck, was a member of the school's class of 1934 and her late husband, Calvin Rudd, graduated with the class of 1966.

"This makes it special for me," she said.

Rudd said the project is also worthwhile because it is so closely linked to history, which all members of the photo project love.

"It is an awesome project because we are having so much fun with it," she said.

WOLVES

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Officials from ODFW and from the federal USDA Wildlife Service agency arrived on Sept. 30 and found four more dead ewes.

Wildlife Service employees then found three more dead ewes on Oct. 1, and one dead and one injured ewe on Oct. 4. Workers euthanized the injured ewe that day.

All the sheep were in the same pasture. Officials estimated the sheep were attacked the night of Sept. 28.

ODFW employees examined seven sheep carcasses on Sept. 30, three on Oct. 1 and two on Oct. 4.

All suffered wounds before death, with tissue trauma up to 2 inches deep and tooth scrapes consistent with wolf attacks on sheep, according to ODFW reports.

On the morning of Oct. 1, a sheepherder found two injured Kangal guard dogs on an industrial timberland



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo, File

Five goats were killed by at least one wolf in the Elgin area during a two-day period in late November, according to a report from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The attacks have been attributed to the Balloon Tree Pack.

grazing allotment.

The herder told ODFW employees that at about 2 a.m. on Oct. 1 he heard an apparent fight between his guard dog and an unknown

predator, with barking and growling.

Biologists examined both guard dogs. One had a 6-inch-long area of matted blood on its throat and the

left side of its neck that was dripping blood. The dog was agitated and could not be held for further examination, according to an ODFW report.

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Advertisement for Leaf Filter gutter protection, featuring a year-round clog-free guarantee and promotional discounts of 15% and 10% off.

Large advertisement for Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics, featuring the slogan "We are Growing!" and listing entry-level jobs with medical and dental insurance, paid leave, and retirement. Includes the website grh.org/careers.

Advertisement for AT&T internet service, promoting fast Wi-Fi speeds and no annual contracts. Includes contact information for a local DIRECTV dealer.