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Merkley touts rural Oregon's support

Senator calls to improve forests, irrigation, internet and housing

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley is setting his sights on fire protection and forest resilience in Eastern Oregon.

The Oregon Democrat previously promoted The Valley West Joint Chiefs project in September 2021 as a way to “ensure the safety of our communities, the resilience of our forests, and the conservation of our natural resources,” according to a press release from Merkley’s office. The project is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Forest Service.



Merkley

“I am very happy to be able to announce that I was able to secure \$1.8 million for the La Grande Valley West Joint Chiefs project,” he said during a one-on-one interview Wednesday, March 30. “We’re talking about precommercial thinning, fuels reduction, prescribed burning (and) mowing, and all of it produces jobs in the woods, saw logs for the mill, and a more fire resilient forest, which I think is a triple-win.”

Forest resilience and response to drought

Last year’s fire season was one of the most explosive ones yet in Oregon, though Eastern Oregon was largely spared from conflagrations and widespread damage like that seen in the southern parts of the state that were hit hard by the Bootleg Fire. Still, it’s a matter of when, not if, a fire breaks out and threatens Eastern Oregon’s landscape.

“It is essential to recognize that with the drought, the warmer temperatures and the longer season that we’re going to see a lot of problems, and we need to prepare wherever we can,” Merkley said. “Particularly we need to focus on areas close to towns because if that forest is treated, maybe we can stop the fire before it gets to a town or city.”

Of those options, Merkley said he

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DIGGING DEEPER

OSP will examine Finley Creek site where remains were found in 1978



An off-road trail, at left, leads to the site where the remains of a young woman — shown above in a reconstructed sketch — were found outside Elgin in 1978 near Finley Creek. The Oregon State Police plan to reexamine the site in 2022 in an attempt to determine her identity.

Background: Suzanne Timms/Inset sketch: Melinda Jederberg/Contributed Photos



Cadaver dog Brynn and a team of volunteers including Suzanne Timms, seated, in August 2021 investigate the area where the Finley Creek Jane Doe was discovered near Elgin in 1978. Timms believes the unidentified woman is her mother. With Timms are her relatives Jennifer Harrington, center, and Wenda Parr, left, plus Karin Anderson of Dallas, Texas, who is a member of a Reporter’s Notebook group that is producing podcasts about the search for the identity of Jane Doe.

By DICK MASON
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — The Oregon State Police are turning up the heat on a local cold case.

OSP officers and OSP crime lab personnel will soon reexamine a site near Finley Creek, 18 miles north of La Grande, where the remains of an unidentified woman were found in August of 1978.

The OSP team, which will have human remains detection dogs, will be searching for anything connected to the unidentified woman who was found there in a shallow grave more than 40 years ago.

The OSP will go to the site after all the snow there has melted. Detective-sergeant Sean Belding of the OSP said his agency will be facing a big challenge.

“It will be a little like looking for a needle in a haystack,” Belding said.

Melinda Jederberg, of La Grande, a member of the Finley Creek Jane Doe Task Force, is more hopeful.

“We are very optimistic,” said Jederberg, who founded the task force in 2019.

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BAKER CITY

La Grande developer tackles ‘attractive nuisance’ property

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Gust Tsiatsos steps off the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway and enters the Boys Jungle.

Which no longer much resembles a jungle.

Tsiatsos, a contractor and developer from La Grande, bought this property, along with four other nearby parcels totaling about 13 acres, last year.

This winter, his workers cut and trimmed trees and removed much of

the undergrowth that gave the Boys Jungle the name it has had for many decades.

Although this approximately 2-acre piece of ground, just north of D Street and with the Powder River forming its western border, has always been private property, for generations of Baker youth it was a chunk of wildland within the city with its towering cottonwoods and willows.

More recently, though, city officials have described the Boys Jungle as an “attractive nuisance,” a place

where juveniles went to drink alcohol or smoke, screened from view by the dense foliage.

In 2011 the city asked the former owner, Ben Dean, to clean up the property and install private property and no trespassing signs.

The signs went up and some of the brush came down.

Property cleanup

But Tsiatsos, whose company, GCT Land Management Inc., bought the property and the other parcels from Dean, did a much more

thorough job.

Most of the mature trees remain, but in between the ground is largely bare, and visibility is much improved.

Tsiatsos said that after he bought the Boys Jungle he found evidence that it had been used as a homeless camp.

Joyce Bornstedt, the city’s technical administrative supervisor and also its parks coordinator, said Tsiatsos’ efforts have greatly

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WEATHER

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	Tonight	
	26 LOW	Wednesday
	Cold	56/30
		Sunshine; milder

CONTACT US

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