

Forestry collaboratives receive federal grants

Northern Blues Forest Collaborative received \$3M for project

By **STEVEN MITCHELL**
Blue Mountain Eagle

WASHINGTON — Forest collaboratives in Central and Eastern Oregon have received word they will be getting upward of \$11.6 million in federal funding.

The collaboratives, which bring together environmentalists, public and private land managers, and timber industry professionals, seek to find common ground on hot-button forestry issues.

The projects were selected by a federal advisory committee and funded through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, which is intended to encourage ecological and economic sustainability and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

The Southern Blues Restoration Coalition, a joint effort of Blue Mountains Forest Partners and the Harney County Restoration Collaborative, received \$3 million. Both groups are forestry collaboratives, groups of diverse stakeholders to find solutions to stubborn forestry issues that satisfy environmental concerns while providing jobs in the woods and generating a steady and predictable timber supply to feed area lumber mills.

Backed by the two collaboratives, the Southern Blues Restoration Coalition has been supported by CFLRP money since 2012. The coalition was initially awarded



Blue Mountain Eagle, File

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\$2.5 million per year and received a bump to \$4 million per year in 2016.

Malheur National Forest program manager Roy Walker said a big chunk of the money they will receive would go toward prescribed burning. Some of the funding, he added, would go to pre-commercial thinning throughout the Southern Blues Coalition area.

Walker said the main goal is to reduce wildfire hazards on the

Malheur.

“(The funding) is really helping us accelerate our restoration out here in the (Malheur) National Forest,” Walker said.

Northern Blues collaborative

The Northern Blues Forest Collaborative received \$3 million for a 10.4 million-acre project in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest to reduce wildfire risk and prepare

the landscape to manage fire safely.

Nils Christoffersen, the executive director of Wallowa Resources, a member of the Northern Blues Restoration Partnership, said there had been a significant loss of capacity to manage forests on both the public and private sides since the 1990s. These funds, he said, help offset that disinvestment.

Most people, he said, concerned about the landscapes and commu-

AT A GLANCE

Northern Blues Forest Restoration — \$3 million: A 10.4-million-acre project to reduce wildfire risk and prepare the landscape to safely manage fire.

Southern Blues Restoration Coalition — \$3 million: A project to restore 1 million acres that suffer from drastically changing wildfire patterns, species composition, and forest stand densities that threaten to destroy key habitat, old growth, important aquatic resources and private property due to uncharacteristic wildfires and effects of a changing climate.

Rogue Basin Landscape Restoration Project — \$3 million: A 4.6 million-acre project intended to accelerate restoration treatments to meet goals of wildfire risk reduction, landscape resiliency, improved wildlife habitat, watershed protection, adaptation, and social and economic resilience.

Lakeview Stewardship — \$2 million: An 859,000-acre project to create a healthy, resilient and functional forest landscape maintained with fire to mitigate the threat of high-severity wildfires.

nities of Eastern Oregon have been arguing for a long time that these forests need additional money and staff to respond to the challenges they face.

Christoffersen said the No. 1 thing in people’s minds is wildfire. But the funding, he said, is not limited to fire prevention.

“We’re looking at how we can improve the forest’s overall condition,” he said.

Christofferson said that includes making sure the watersheds are operating correctly to ensure clean water, maintaining and improving wildlife habitat, and putting people back to work in the woods and the mills.

California man goes to federal prison for role in Eastern Oregon meth trade

East Oregonian

PORTLAND — A California man who was part of a methamphetamine trafficking ring in Eastern Oregon and beyond is going to federal prison.

The federal court in Portland on Wednesday, April 27, sentenced Noel Lomas Murillo, 34, to five years in prison and another three years of supervised release.

According to the press release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office of Oregon, the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team, Oregon State Police and the FBI, Murillo in November 2017 began a drug trafficking organization led by his brother, Abel Lomas Murillo, 28, of Weston.

The investigation revealed that, as early as July 2017, Noel Murillo transported drugs from Vacaville, California, to Klamath Falls where a courier would deliver them to his brother. Abel Murillo also made multiple trips to Medford to pick up drugs and transport them to Morrow and Umatilla counties for distribution.

An OSP trooper in January 2018 stopped one of Abel Murillo’s couriers, Luis Alberto Navarro, 33, of Boardman, in a vehicle near Klamath Falls en route to Umatilla County. A search of the vehicle revealed 11 concealed packages containing more than 8 kilograms of methamphetamine.

In early May 2018, as the investigation continued, Abel Murillo enlisted another courier, Noel Ponce Villegas, 28, also of Boardman, to drive meth from Medford to Boardman. Investigators surveilled Abel Murillo as he traveled from Umatilla County to a storage locker in Medford and loaded a trailer

pulled by his truck.

Abel Murillo paid Villegas to drive his truck and trailer while he followed him to minimize his own risk. In the early morning hours of May 6, 2018, investigators from BENT, state police and FBI stopped Abel Murillo and Villegas near mile marker 102 on Interstate 84.

Investigators seized 42 packages of methamphetamine, 36 of which were concealed in the false bottom of a propane tank, according to the press release.

The packages contained approximately 17.6 kilograms of methamphetamine. Later the same day, investigators executed a search warrant at Abel Murillo’s residence, seizing 29 firearms and body armor. Pursuant to a separate search warrant, law enforcement seized another 10 pounds of meth and five firearms in a Medford storage locker Abel Murillo had visited earlier in the weekend.

A federal grand jury in Portland on Dec. 19, 2019, returned a two-count superseding indictment charging Noel Murillo with conspiring to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine and possessing with intent to distribute methamphetamine. He pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charge on Sept. 28, 2021.

Navarro in May 2018 pleaded guilty to possessing with intent to distribute methamphetamine. His sentencing is May 23.

Abel Murillo in April 2019 pleaded guilty to conspiring to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine. He is serving almost 20 years in federal prison for the crime.

Villegas in April 2019 pleaded guilty to possessing with intent to distribute methamphetamine. His received a sentence in December 2020 of time served and three years’ supervised release.

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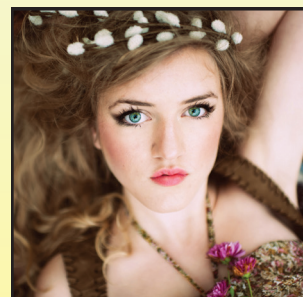
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