

Mining study: 22 small-scale operations planned for area

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is proposing to approve 22 mining operation plans along Powder River tributaries southwest of Baker City and near Sumpter.

The Wallowa-Whitman released a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) earlier this month that's been in the works for about four years.

Some of the miners, however, have been waiting even longer for their plans to be approved.

The 224-page draft EIS analyzes the potential environmental effects from the proposed mining operations on the national forest.

Locations near Sumpter include claims along Cracker, McCully, Deer and Lake creeks and Buck Gulch.

Several of the claims are southwest of Baker City, including ones along Blue Canyon, French Gulch and California Gulch. There is one proposed mining operation along Salmon Creek west of Baker City.

The proposed work includes placer mining, suction dredging and, in four places, underground (lode) mining.

"I'm very, very pleased that it is finally out," Jan Alexander of Unity, mineral policies director for the Eastern Oregon Mining Association, said of the draft EIS. "It's been a long haul. I'm very glad for the miners. They waited an awfully long time for this."

The initial project started around 2005 or 2006, said Ray Lovison, mineral coordinator for the Wallowa-Whitman.

At some point, he said, a previous forest official stopped work on the analysis of the proposed mining plans. Lovison said the work restarted soon after he began work on the Wallowa-Whitman in 2017, in response to repeated requests from miners.

He said a staffing shortage on the forest forced officials to hire a contractor to do much of the work on the draft EIS, which is part of the reason the process has taken four years.

Alexander said many of the miners whose operating plans are included in the draft EIS are members of the Eastern Oregon Mining Association, based

CLAIMS COVERED IN DRAFT EIS

A list of the mining plans covered in a draft environmental impact statement released recently by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest:

- AC, placer, 11 acres, Cracker Creek
- Amigo Mines, placer, 4 acres, Elk Creek
- Anchor 1/Old Crow/Peerless, placer, 20 acres, Elk Creek
- Bald Mountain Mine, lode and ponds, 1 acre, McCully Creek
- Barbara 1, lode, 2 acres, Lake Creek
- Blue Jay, placer, 2 acres, Cracker Creek
- Buster 1, placer, 10 acres, Blue Canyon
- Buster 3, placer, 2 acres, Blue Canyon
- California Gulch, 5 acres, processing with hand tools, possible suction dredging
- David No. 1, placer, 3.5 acres, Cracker Creek
- Dead Horse, placer, 9 acres, Buck Gulch
- Fine Gold, 3 acres, processing in existing pond, Cracker Creek
- High Bar No. 1, placer, 22 acres, possible suction dredging, Cracker Creek
- J&J, placer, 1 acre, Blue Canyon
- Medic, placers, 5 acres, McCully Creek
- Native Spirit, placer, 3 acres, McCully Creek
- Pardners Group, placer/lode, 2 acres, Poker Gulch
- Return Placer Group, placer, 44 acres, Deer Creek
- Salmon Creek, placer, 1 acre
- Slow Poke, placer, 15 acres, Buck Gulch
- Struggler Lode and French Gulch, placer/lode, 12.5 acres, French Gulch
- Tough Luck Charley, placer, 11 acres, Bridge Creek west of Auburn

in Baker City.

Although claim holders can do minor exploration on their claims without an approved plan of operation, they need such a plan to use equipment to process ore, even at a small scale, Alexander said.

That means the release of the draft EIS, with the potential for final approval of the 22 operating plans, is significant, she said.

Alexander, a former Wallowa-Whitman employee who retired in 2001, said all 22 of the proposed mining operations are relatively small-scale projects, generally involving a few miners who work their claims during the spring and summer, often only on weekends.

She said that in most cases the mining proposed would take place on less than one acre each year.

"The amount of ground disturbance we will see is pretty insignificant," Alexander said.

None of the mining plans involves the use of chemicals to process ore, she said.

The claims are unpatented, meaning the land remains publicly owned, with the claim holder having the exclusive right to prospecting and mining for minerals or precious metals.

One exception is the Bald Mountain lode mine northwest of Sumpter, which is a patented claim, meaning it was converted to private land decades ago.

The Bald Mountain plan of operation is included in the draft EIS because the owner plans to use ponds that are on adjacent public land as part of the mining.

The draft EIS includes a 45-day public comment period, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

That federal law, which dates to 1969, requires agencies to study the potential environmental effects of projects on public land, such as mining or logging, and to give the public a chance to comment about such proposals.

The draft EIS and associated documents, as well as instructions on commenting, are available at www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45945.

"We look forward to receiving public comments and expect they will help us to enhance the draft environmental impact statement," said Kendall Cikanek, ranger for the Whitman District. "After we finalize the environmental impact statement and publish the Record of Decision, those who submitted substantive public comments will have another opportunity to engage during the objection and resolution process."

Alexander said she doesn't expect any mining will take place until 2023 at the earliest, since the final EIS and Record of Decision are still pending.

Alexander said the claims involved in the draft EIS have all been mined in the past, some dating back more than a century.

Today's miners are either picking through the remnants left by historic miners or looking for deposits on parts of claims that weren't mined before, she said.

"We don't have those rich deposits just lying there," Alexander said.



A 3D computer rendering shows what the interior of the renovated Orpheum Theatre, in Baker City, will look like. Orpheum Theatre/Contributed Photo

Orpheum's rebirth continues thanks to \$200,000 state grant

By LISA BRITTON
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A recent grant has kick-started work again on the Baker Orpheum Theatre renovation project for phase five of the six-phase endeavor on the historic building at 1812 Main St., Baker City.

The \$200,000 grant came from Oregon Heritage, a division of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

"This is a big deal," said Aletha Bonebrake, chair of the Orpheum building committee. "The \$200,000 is the largest amount they're allowed to give."

Bonebrake is also a board member for the Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre organization, which will make its home in the Orpheum when it is complete.

The grant was one of 28 awarded to Oregon Main Street Network organizations across the state for projects that "encourage economic revitalization."

Baker City Downtown solicited applications for local projects, and a BCD committee selected the Orpheum to submit to the state.

"It had a good solid plan ready to go, local support, and the economic impact to downtown will be huge," said Carol Phillips, a BCD board member.

This most recent grant, paired with \$295,000 from the Cultural Resources Economic Fund that was awarded in April 2021, gets the ball rolling again on the project.

"Now we're starting to build," Bonebrake said. "These two grants have been spectacular."

The last bit of asbestos

has to be removed, and a geotechnical analysis on the foundation is underway to prepare for concrete footings, which will support the structural steel framework for the balcony, staircase and fly loft.

"This is the beginning that people have been waiting for," Bonebrake said. Sid Johnson & Co. is the general contractor.

The timeline

The project began in May 2016 with a \$130,000 donation from David Burris that enabled the Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre to purchase the 1889 building that housed the first Orpheum Theatre, a vaudeville stage that grew with silent films and "talkies" into the late 1950s.

The theater closed in 1956. In 1964 it was remodeled into retail space.

After Burris' donation, the Orpheum project grew with grants and donations that funded feasibility studies, design plans and asbestos removal.

Total fundraising to date is \$1,116,027.

Of that, \$355,527 came from local gifts and events. The amount from foundations and public funds totals \$760,480.

Bonebrake is pursuing more grants for the sixth, and final, phase.

"The phase after this is the finish work," she said. The total project cost

is estimated to be \$2.5 million.

The plan

The Baker Orpheum Theatre will have 325 seats with a professional stage, balcony, fly loft and state-of-the-art acoustics, sound and lighting.

The marquee design is based on the 1930s art deco style.

Bonebrake said the Orpheum will be used for EORT performances as well as local music groups and other performing arts.

She said the main floor, with 125 seats, will provide a space for smaller gatherings or presentations.

The Orpheum will also bring national acts to Baker City, she said.

This is where Burris' support comes in again — he has created a donor advised fund through the Oregon Community Foundation that will support the Orpheum's future, such as underwriting the cost for national artists to reduce the price of tickets for local residents.

Take a look, donate

Bonebrake is happy to talk about the Orpheum project with interested groups and individuals.

"I'll show what we've done," she said.

To request a presentation, call Bonebrake at 541-519-3255.

Monetary donations can be mailed to EORT, Baker Orpheum Theatre Fund, 2101 Main St., Suite 113, Baker City, OR 97814.

Lawsuit drops arrest claim against doctor

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The lone woman suing a Hermiston doctor for malpractice has dropped part of her complaint.

Kimberly A. Helms is suing Dr. Andrew Haputa and Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, and Good Shepherd Medical Group for more than \$4.6 million, accusing the doctor and Hermiston hospital of medical malpractice.

Attorney Kelly L. Andersen, of Medford, filed the complaint Jan. 10 in Umatilla County Circuit Court. Helms has since amended the complaint, removing an accusation about Haputa's arrest in April 2019 for driving under the influence of intoxicants and causing a crash.

Helms still alleges Haputa botched her gallbladder

surgery on April 3, 2021, resulting in extended hospital stays and corrective surgeries. Haputa in a response denies the allegations, court documents show, including that he was negligent or caused injury to Helms.

Troy LeGore, vice president of Good Shepherd Medical Group, wrote a letter Nov. 5, 2019, to the court in Haputa's DUI case. As Haputa's workplace monitor and the vice president overseeing his practice, LeGore stated Haputa was fully compliant with hospital requirements following the arrest, including the completion of an inpatient treatment program.

"He has taken full responsibility for his actions and has been proactive in pursuit of each of his aftercare deliverables," LeGore stated. "Moreover, he has been a model citizen both on duty and off."

LeGore also stated in the letter Haputa's lifesaving surgical skills are integral to the hospital "sustaining advanced care availability for west Umatilla and Morrow counties," and his "maturity, humility and contrition have resulted in solid support from GSHCS' leadership."

Haputa and Good Shepherd are defendants in two more medical malpractice lawsuits. Kathleen Williams and Aimee Hughes are each suing for more than \$1.5 million, claiming that Haputa left an "appendiceal" stump after an appendectomy, which caused subsequent complications, surgeries and expenses.

The Salem law firm of Lafky & Lafky filed the lawsuits in March and represents Williams and Hughes. Court records do not yet show responses to the two lawsuits from the hospital, Haputa or the other doctors.

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