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THE PIONEER

Columbia Gorge's wine success rooted in Lonnie Wright's old vine legacy

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

THE DALLES — The pump is on for the first time this season but things aren't working. Alejandro Rojas, Lonnie Wright's foreman and friend for 20 years at The Pines 1852 vineyard, says there isn't enough pressure to water the grapes up on the slope: the Syrah, the Merlot, the "Young Zin" and, of course, the Old Vine Zinfandel that grows at the heart of Lonnie's story.

Wright doesn't like what he's hearing. Truth is, he's fuming. He says there must be a leak in the system. He wants



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Gnarly Old Vine Zinfandel vines at The Pines 1852 vineyard near The Dalles, Ore., may have been planted as long ago as the 1880s. The vineyard had been abandoned for 20 years when Lonnie Wright brought it back to life in 1982.

Rojas and two other employees to chop a path down to Mill Creek to see if there's a problem in the pipe down there.

Rojas demurs; he has other options to check first. And besides, he just had a bout with poison oak and doesn't savor crashing through brush to examine the creek pipe.

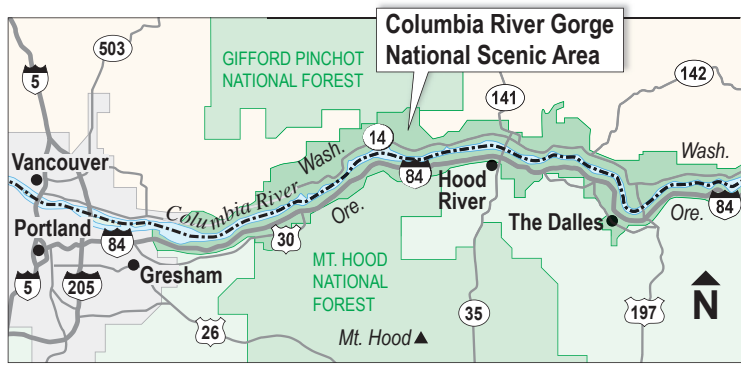
"You got a machete?" Wright asks. "I'll do it." And next thing he's rummaging through a tool shed, muttering, looking in vain for a machete and grabbing a couple of big clippers instead.

Turn to WINE, Page 12



Courtesy of Rodger Nichols

An undated photo shows what is believed to be the Old Vine Zinfandel vineyard outside The Dalles, Ore., that was revived decades later by Lonnie Wright. Grapes weren't trellised but instead were grown "head-trained on the ground," which provided frost protection but made them susceptible to bunch rot.



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

TOP PHOTO: Lonnie Wright is considered the pioneer of Columbia Gorge wines, having planted or managed dozens of vineyards over the past 35 years. In 2011 he was given a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Oregon Wine Board. Photo by Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Alarm sounded over white top infestation in Malheur County

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — White top, an invasive weed, has exploded to alarming levels in Malheur County this year.

"This is the worst it's ever been," said Oregon State University Cropping Systems Extension Agent Bill Buhrig, who has lived in the county for 40 years. "It's all over the place."

White top, also known as hoary cress, usually blooms in stages throughout the year, said Malheur County Weed Inspector Gary Page. But this year it appears to have exploded virtually all at once.

It has also appeared in remote areas far removed from any previously known white top infestation, he added.

"We're reaching a tipping point most likely where it's just going to explode" to a level where it's not economically feasible to manage, Page said.

The noxious weed competes with beneficial plants, crowds out grasses and is noxious for cattle, Buhrig said.

Page said it has invaded a lot of alfalfa fields and irrigated pastures and, if the problem worsens, could have a major negative impact on livestock grazing, the backbone of the area's economy.

"If we don't do something pretty quickly, it could end up being a big economic issue in livestock production," he said.

Page and Buhrig have sounded the alarm over the white top problem and are asking for landowners' help in controlling it.

Because it's a persistent weed and hard to kill, many people mistakenly assume it can't be controlled and give up trying, Buhrig said.

"It can be controlled with some available herbicides and that's what we're really trying to emphasize," he said. "You can fight it."

There is still time to control the weed in 2016 even though it has flowered, Buhrig said. "Anything you can do this year to keep it from going to seed is a good thing."

One of the reasons the weed has gained a local reputation as being uncontrol

Turn to WEEDS, Page 12

Oregon lawmakers hear arguments over Owyhee monument

Supporters, opponents of national monument testify during hearing

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Advocates and opponents of a proposed 2.5 million-acre national monument in Eastern Oregon tried to enlist the support of state lawmakers during a recent legislative hearing.

The two sides are mount-

ing competing public relations campaigns to influence the possible designation of the Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument, which will ultimately be decided by President Barack Obama.

Critics say the area is bigger than the Yellowstone, Yosemite or Grand Canyon national parks and would cover

40 percent of Malheur County. Ranchers and other natural resource users in the region have objected to the proposal, fearing the establishment of a national monument will entail new regulations on public land and invite additional environmental lawsuits.

Turn to OWYHEE, Page 12



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Elias Eiguren, a rancher from Oregon's Malheur County, speaks against the proposed 2.5 million-acre Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument during a press conference on May 23.

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