

## People &amp; Places

# Sheep can improve rangeland

## J. Bret Taylor supervises unique sheep grazing studies in Idaho

By DIANNA TROYER  
For the Capital Press

When sheep are grazed at certain intensities during spring and fall, they can help rehabilitate sagebrush habitat after it has burned, according to innovative studies at the USDA's Agricultural Research Service U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in eastern Idaho.

"We're looking at the best ways to manage sagebrush steppe in the Upper Mountain West, so it can be sustainable for sage grouse habitat as well as livestock production," said J. Bret Taylor, research leader and supervisory animal scientist at the station near Dubois.

Taylor, an expert in livestock production and nutrition, focuses on ways to improve lifetime production yield of range sheep and shrubland health and sustainability.

"The sagebrush steppe is fascinating to me because it's an important shrubland ecosystem that provides many, many diverse benefits," he said.

### Fire simulation

In 2008 and 2009, 16 pastures with sagebrush were burned at the station, simulating how wildfires on public land throughout the West have scorched habitat essential for sage grouse, a species of concern.

As the pastures began recovering, several scenarios were created to investigate how different intensities of spring and fall grazing affect

sagebrush and other plant growth.

Burned habitats recovered best when pastures were grazed lightly in spring, then rested for a year or two. The same pastures could be grazed moderately in the fall annually.

"Placing more emphasis on fall grazing has improved the recovering habitat," he said.

In spring, sheep tend to eat their favorite plants of grass and forbs and avoid sagebrush. As a result, repeated heavy spring grazing tends to promote greater density of sagebrush, reduce plant diversity, and give rise to invasive plants, the study has shown.

In the fall, however, sheep tend to graze on all types of plants including some sagebrush. Essentially, the sheep are pruning the sagebrush, preventing it from growing too thickly.

"If sagebrush canopy becomes too dense, it's unsuitable for grouse or livestock and increases risk of wildfire," Taylor said. "As sheep eat dried plants in fall, they're scattering and cultivating the seeds. We're grazing sheep in such a way to keep sagebrush at an optimal canopy cover."

### Acquired taste

Sheep do not consume much sagebrush. However, researchers have noticed some sheep eat more sagebrush than others.

Taylor compared it to how some people are genetically predisposed to enjoy the fla-



Courtesy of Sam Cox

J. Bret Taylor is supervising studies in eastern Idaho on the effect of sheep grazing on sagebrush steppe after it has burned.

vor of some foods.

"Some people naturally like broccoli or black coffee, while others don't," he said. "Studies have shown it's due to a person's genetic code."

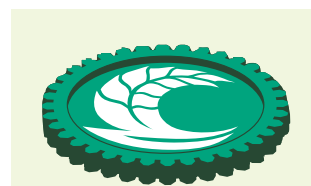
To identify sheep that are inclined to eat more sagebrush than other sheep, researchers tested the reaction of rams toward a bitter compound that was placed in their drinking water.

"The bitter flavor didn't bother some rams at all, while

others disliked it and wouldn't drink the water," Taylor said. "We'll breed the rams that didn't seem to notice the bitterness to ewes this fall and see if their offspring will consume more sagebrush."

In both studies, Taylor credits cooperators, Melinda Ellison and Joel Yelich from the University of Idaho's Nancy M. Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center in Salmon.

"The studies will help pro-



## Western Innovator

### J. Bret Taylor

**Occupation:** Research leader and supervisory animal scientist at the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station near Dubois, Idaho

**Age:** 49

**Education:** Bachelor's degrees in biochemistry and animal science, West Texas A&M University; master's degree and Ph.D. from New Mexico State University in ruminant nutrition and molecular biology with emphasis in toxicology;

**Author, editor:** Authored or co-authored more than 90 peer-reviewed articles; a former division and associate editor for the Journal of Animal Science and guest editor for the Animal Frontiers journal

**Memberships:** Society for Range Management, American Society of Animal Science, International Society for Selenium Research; a past president of the Western Section American Society of Animal Science.

**Family:** Wife and two children

ducers make decisions about the length and location of grazing and be conscientious about forage availability, season of grazing and sage grouse habitat," he said.

# Youth group promotes resource careers, self-development

By JAN JACKSON  
For the Capital Press

SALEM, Ore. — Kirk Hutchinson, former agriculture instructor and FFA adviser at Perrydale High School in Amity Ore., has come out of retirement to become executive director of the newly organized Future Natural Resource Leaders of Oregon.

Chartered in 2016, the organization is the first statewide Career Technical Education program in the nation for students who wish to pursue careers in forestry, outdoor recreation, fish and wildlife, ecology, environmental science or other areas of natural resources. The group held its second annual convention April 27-28 at Hopkins Demonstration Forest in Oregon City.

The organization is the brainchild of Reynold Gardner, agriculture and natural resource systems specialist for the Oregon Department of Education, and Peter Matzka, Oregon State University Clackamas County forestry outreach coordinator. It is modeled after the 90-year-old nationwide FFA program that provides a vital connection between classroom study, real world applications, leadership training and career placement.

Matzka, who led the group



Jan Jackson/For the Capital Press

Students try out a log harvesting simulator at the Future Natural Resource Leaders annual convention.

through the first year to get it started, will continue to work with Hutchinson as its adviser.

"My ultimate goal is education, and to that end I am challenged to build a career education organization that does the best possible for these kids," Hutchinson said. "We had 125 kids or so from 11 schools attend the convention, we have five or six more (schools) that are ready to be on board."

The five-year plan anticipates 50 schools enrolled in the program.

"It's thanks to the help, support and enthusiasm of students, teachers, industry representatives and other partners, that we have had a remarkable year of growth and

development," Hutchinson said. "We've been fortunate to have a great group of Career Technical Education instructors that have understood the importance of broadening the kids' education beyond the classroom, putting time and effort into these kids outside of their regular teaching duties."

Hutchinson, who was born and raised on a small farm in southwest Portland's Multnomah Village, attended Wilson High School before achieving agriculture and teaching degrees from Oregon State University. His award-winning years as an agriculture teacher and FFA adviser at Perrydale High School are legendary.

"I milked the cow, fed the



Courtesy Photo

Kirk Hutchinson, executive director of the Future Natural Resource Leaders of Oregon.

chickens and pigs every morning before school and thought I wanted to be a farmer when I grew up," Hutchinson said. "I went to Portland Community College and learned to be a welder but didn't like sitting in fumes all day so went to OSU and studied agriculture. I had never heard of FFA or seen a 'blue jacket' and when I found out that you could teach agriculture, I decided I would teach for 10 years and then be a farmer. I taught two years in St. Paul, came to Perrydale in 1984 and stayed there until I retired in 2011."

During the first day of the convention, students heard talks from representatives of Seneca Sawmill Co. and Basco Logging and participated in technical events that

included such topics as compass and pacing, ground log scaling, job interviews, map reading, timber cruising and tree identification.

The next day included skill events such as arbor tree climbing, ax throwing, cross-cut bucking, spur tree climbing, cable splicing, choker setting, chainsaw bucking and log rolling.

"FNRL isn't just about coming to convention and sawing logs and throwing a few axes, however," Hutchinson said. "It is learning how to work hard, be on time, be respectful and learn to work in groups. Many will work in jobs we don't even know about today so it is important get away from specific knowledge and focus on the type of worker you are. We need to prepare these kids to be successful in any job that may come their way."

This summer they will develop a handbook for chapters at the local and state levels.

"It is this education beyond the classroom that I believe helps make lifelong learners and to help them realize that what we learn today will just be background for what we do tomorrow is important."

For more info call Kirk Hutchinson at 503-550-0471 or email him at hutchfurl@gmail.com

## Calendar

geneporodeo.com/

### Sunday-Wednesday

#### July 1-4

Molalla Buckaroo Rodeo. 5 p.m. Buckaroo Rodeo Grounds, 815 Shirley St., Molalla, Ore. Join us in celebrating our nation's birthday with non-stop rodeo action, mutton bustin', a carnival midway, food and vendors. A fireworks show, live music and dance follow each evening performance. Website: <http://www.molalabuckaroo.com>

### Tuesday-Saturday

#### July 3-7

St. Paul Rodeo. 7:30 p.m. Rodeo Grounds, Main Street, St. Paul, Ore. The 83rd annual St. Paul Rodeo runs July 3-7 and celebrates Independence Day with five days of fun. Website: <http://www.stpaulrodeo.com>

Eugene Pro Rodeo. 5 p.m. Rodeo Grounds, 90751 Prairie Road, Eugene, Ore. Rodeo, dances and fireworks are featured. Closed Thursday, July 5. Website: [rodeo.com/](http://www.eu-</a></p>
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### Wednesday, July 11

Caneberry Field Day. 1-5 p.m. OSU North Willamette Research and Extension Center, 15210 NE Miley Road, Aurora, Ore. This is the annual field day for commercial and backyard caneberry growers. Sponsored by Oregon State University. Website: <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/NWREC/>

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N. Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the fourth session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost: \$38 Email: [cschnepf@uidaho.edu](mailto:cschnepf@uidaho.edu)

Friday, July 13

Forest Root Disease Workshop. 8 a.m.-4 p.m. UI Extension, Kootenai County, 1808 N. Third St., Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. This program is aimed at both forest managers and forest landowners who are interested in

learning more about forest root diseases. The event spends the morning indoors learning about the basics. The afternoon is spent outside in the forest. This workshop is limited to 35 participants. Cost: \$20 by mail, \$22 online. Website: <http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/>

### Friday-Sunday

#### July 13-29

California State Fair. 11 a.m.-10 p.m. California Expo Center, 1600 Exposition Blvd., Sacramento, Calif. California's state fair brings out the best in the state's agriculture. Website: <http://www.castatefair.org>

### Wednesday, July 18

Blueberry Field Day. 1-5 p.m. OSU North Willamette Research and Extension Center, 15210 NE Miley Road, Aurora, Ore. This is the annual field day for commercial and backyard growers. Sponsored by Oregon State University. Website: <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/NWREC/>

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N. Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the fifth session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost: \$38 Email: [cschnepf@uidaho.edu](mailto:cschnepf@uidaho.edu)

### Friday, July 20

Agriculture Law Seminar 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Oxford Hotel, 10 NW Minnesota Ave., Bend, Ore. This program will examine key legal issues affecting Oregon agriculture including issues related to the environment, water, land use, employment, and bankruptcy. The program will include a timely recap of the 2018 legislative session, and a look ahead to the 2019 legislative session. Attendees will also benefit from a special presentation from representatives of the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon Farm Bureau Federation, who will provide an industry update. Website: <https://bit.ly/2L8dE0D>

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