

# Sports / Local

## Natural Resource Advisory Committee meets

BY TODD ARRIOLA  
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The Baker County Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) met for a regular meeting on Tuesday, February 27, 2017, 3 p.m., in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse, which included Coordination, Mining Advisory, and Sagebrush Focal Area Mineral Withdrawal discussions.

Present from the NRAC were Chair Doni Bruland, Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey, NRAC Coordinator Eric Wuntz, Cookie Long, Alice Knapp, Jan Alexander, Arvid Andersen, Ken Anderson, Laurene Chapman, Dick Fleming, Chuck Chase, Lyle Defrees, and Jake Bingham. Public attendance included Wanda Ballard.

Bruland called the meeting to order, followed by Public Participation, for which there was no comment offered. The minutes from the Tuesday, January 24, 2017 meeting were approved, with a motion from Long, and a second from Alexander.

As part of the agency-to-agency Coordination progress update (also a regular segment, along with Harvey), Wuntz, referencing a handout he provided copies of, said that the process will include meeting with, among others, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision (BMFPR) Team

Leader Victoria Anne, to discuss the consistencies and inconsistencies between the BMFPR, and the County's Natural Resource Plan (NRP). Harvey said that the USFS will need to show why there are inconsistencies between its plan and the County's, and why, according to law, the USFS can continue with these inconsistencies in place.

Wuntz said that there had been a high turnover rate in the leadership and team members, of the Eastside Resiliency Project, though, about half of the staff is being pulled from that, to work on the BMFPR (which he said isn't necessarily a bad thing). He said getting out on some field trips with USFS staff in the spring and summer, to discuss treatments, is something he's looking forward to.

Wuntz said the Pine Valley Range Allotments Draft EA (Environmental Analysis) is expected soon, there was very little, if any, issue noted during the scoping phase, and it probably won't change much, as far as animal grazing numbers. Harvey emphasized that the County is not going to allow the retirement of any allotments, and Long commented that BLM (Bureau of Land Management) allotments can't be retired, without action from Congress.

Wuntz said that the La Grande Ranger District is working on the Sparta Project Draft EA. A new project, the Two Eagles, on

the La Grande Ranger District, and in Baker County, will involve discussions soon with the NRAC, before the scoping phase, with the public, and will also involve field trips, to discuss treatments proposals.

The Patrick Project, a new forest improvement project, is one the Whitman Ranger District is working on, in the Whitney Valley area. Alexander asked what "forest improvement" means, and Wuntz said normal treatments, like logging, thinning, aspen enhancement, etc. Long asked why there's such an emphasis on aspen enhancement, and Wuntz said that aspen volume is about 10% of what it used to be, and that it's important for wildlife. He said that a NOI (Notice of Intent) to prepare the Powder River Mining EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) is expected soon.

Bingham said, in reference to grazing allotment fees and the effects of the BMFPR, he'll be attending a March 13 meeting in La Grande, after which he'll have more information to share with the NRAC.

Doni began a discussion regarding the NRAC's draft advisory letter, about mining concerns, on BLM's Proposed Withdrawal from Mineral Entry in Sagebrush Focal Areas, which Bruland had presented to the County Commission, during its regular session, on Febru-

ary 1, 2017 (the Commission Board approved to forward this correspondence to Congressman Greg Walden, as well as to the White House, during that session, for which Bruland congratulated the NRAC). As discussed during the Tuesday, January 24, 2017 NRAC meeting, she said that no withdrawal is planned currently for Baker County, however, support should be given to other counties, and her main message, per the letter, is that federal agencies need to adhere to their own rules. She detailed many different issues in the letter, and she recommended a no-action alternative, saying that the BLM should not be allowed any more leeway.

Following a lengthy discussion, during which many issues were pointed out regarding the proposed withdrawal, a no-action alternative recommendation to the County Commission Board for comment was unanimously approved, with a motion from Andersen, and a second from Fleming. Ballard had also provided her input, which aligned with the committee—stick to your guns, and say everything you need to, and more.

A discussion regarding the draft NRAC By-Laws was scheduled, however, this was postponed, with a motion from Long, and a second from Knapp. The next NRAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 28, 2017.

## Huntington middle school basketball



Eileen Driver / The Baker County Press.

Powder Valley and Prairie City square off in the final game.

BY EILEEN DRIVER  
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The 54th Annual Huntington Middle School Basketball Tournament was held on February 24th & 25th. The tournament which was scheduled for 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday was extended several hours each day as the close competition took longer than expected when a number of games went into overtime before the winners could be determined. In the end battling it out for first place in the Girl's Bracket were the Prairie City Panthers and the Powder Valley Badgers. At the half the score was Prairie City 8 and Powder Valley 14 with the teams battling it out the score became as close as one shot apart before Powder Valley poured on the steam and took the game with a final score of 29-17.

In the Boys Bracket we again see a battle between Powder Valley and Prairie City the score at the half was Powder Valley 17 and Prairie City 13. In an intense game during the 3rd quarter Prairie City put on an impressive push and ended the 3rd quarter with a 29-24 score. The 4th quarter was equally intense with both teams giving it their all. At 1 minute left in the game it looked like we were headed for overtime again since the score was 36-36. Powder Valley player #1 Justin Ash pulled off the win for his team by making a last minute 1 point foul shot bringing the final score to Powder Valley 37 and Prairie City 36.

Trophies awarded were Girls Bracket:

First Place Powder Valley, Second Place Prairie City, Third Place Jordan Valley, Consolation Willow Creek.

Boys Bracket:

First Place Powder Valley, Second Place Prairie City, Third Place Cove, Consolation Willow Creek.

Sportsmanship Trophy: Huntington.

## Durkee Cafe is back in business

BY CHUCK BUCHANAN  
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The tiny ranching community of Durkee is one of those places that "if you blink you miss it" as you're traveling Interstate 84 between Baker City and Ontario.

But in a town where it's been said that there are more dogs than people, pulling off of the highway and into the parking lot of the Ranch Hand Cafe` is an unexpected pleasure for the hungry traveler.

Durkee has been without a restaurant for five years, so Cecil and Darla Sangston's re-opening of a staple of the valley is welcome.

While Darla has never been in the food business before this adventure, Cecil grew up working in his mom's cafes in livestock sale yards in California.

"My mom has pictures of me standing on the oven door to cook eggs when I was five years old," Cecil says. "She had several cafes` at different saleyards so she'd cook one day at this one, then the next day at another one. I started working the flattop grill when I was ten."

He remembers getting up at 4 a.m. to clean the rocks out of fifty pound sacks of beans and to peel potatoes for that days cafe` meals, because "everything was done from scratch." And that's how the Ranch Hand's food is prepared today.

From hand-pressed burgers to freshly mixed fry sauce, the Sangston's are doing their best to make their cafe` a place people



Eileen Driver / The Baker County Press.

Cecil and Darla Sangston.

will want to come back to.

Cecil and Darla, their son Daniel, 16, and daughter Emily, 13, moved to Durkee "looking for space for our cows" and other livestock. In addition to beef cattle the Sangston's also have horses and goats.

Darla makes goat's milk soap that Cecil says is great for bowhunters because it not only is good for your skin but it contains no chemicals, only essential oils, so it masks human scent.

They are bowhunters themselves so they know what hunters need. "Cecil shaves with it, too," Darla says.

When asked why they decided to open the cafe` after it sat vacant for so many years, Darla said that Cecil "kept driving past it, waiting for it to open, and it never did. So he decided that we needed to open it ourselves."

The couple hated to see such an ideally placed establishment sitting vacant and run down and wanted to do something about it.

They spent several weeks cleaning up the building, which sparkles with fresh paint inside.

There are plans in the works to re-open the Country Store in the summer of 2017 in addition to the

small RV park area behind the store.

At the cafe`, Cecil says that they are working with a USDA certified meat packer to start a program to feature beef from a different local ranch each month.

In addition to a menu of juicy hand-pressed burgers and assorted other hot sandwiches and "breakfast served all day" the Ranch Hand Cafe` offers free Wifi for travelers who need to keep up on the weather and road conditions.

They are open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

## BTI unveils heavy equipment training program

In an effort to provide relevant workforce training and provide career opportunities that promote thriving eastern Oregon communities, on March 1, Baker Technical Institute (BTI) unveiled plans to offer heavy equipment operator training.

Wednesday's unveiling of a CAT® Hydraulic Excavator marks the first simulator that will be part of BTI's expanding programs to offer a variety of career and technical education programs. The CAT® Hydraulic Excavator Simulator was made possible through the Leo Adler Foundation, which funds worthy projects instituted by organizations who benefit Baker County and North Powder, Oregon.

This announcement comes after months of discussions with industry leaders like CAT® Simulators. A division of Caterpillar, CAT® Simulators provide hands-on learning in a safe and economical way to enhance traditional operator training programs. CAT® Simulators is partnering with BTI to provide next generation training tools like the CAT® Hydraulic Excavator that will be showcased as part of the new heavy equipment Career Technical Education (CTE) program.

"BTI's goal is to give our best and brightest a place to learn the skills needed to start or advance in a career, earn higher wages and provide for their family without having to leave the region," says president Doug Dalton. "Heavy equipment operators are in short supply, and the trend is expected to grow as people retire at the same time as industries in road construction, forestry, general construction and agriculture are predicted to need more operators. BTI is helping meet workforce needs by providing state-of-the-art, high-tech equipment where students learn the latest techniques in high demand fields."

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