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It's Good News: Sage Grouse Not Listed Under the Endangered Species Act

By Gina Perkins

Baker County Livestock Association president, Jake Bingham, isn't the only one thrilled about Tuesday morning's announcement that the sage grouse will not be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

"It's always a worry that politics will get ahead of science, but I think all of the proactive measures taken by district to help with conservation efforts paid off. A lot of the turmoil which was expected to follow if they were listed will be avoided. It's good news," said Bingham.

Ryan Phillips, of the Phillips cattle ranch in Keating said, "We were worried [about what might happen] with all the fires. We saw a group of nine sage grouse when we were out gathering cows--we see them all the time. We are really happy."

Commissioner Mark Bennett has been the point person for the county on the sage grouse issue and said he's been involved with the process for the past five years.

He said that at many times during the past five years he has felt extreme frustration but says he's proud of the fact they always remained polite and professional throughout the process.

"The process, as painful and seemingly ridiculous as it can be, really can work," Bennett said.

"It's really exciting. They listened to us and all of the ranchers. There aren't any caveats to the listing," Bennett said, emphasizing the importance of this.

He also echoed Bingham's sentiments about the important role ranchers and landowners played as they were proactive with juniper removal, providing escape ramps from water tanks and other conservation efforts.

Bennett also believes the actions by NRCS, OWEB, SWCD and Baker County, all working together, was important. He had special praise for Holly Kerns, Planning Director.

"Holly did so much behind the scenes. Everything from mapping, reviewing plans, preparing documents, helping to edit position papers. I can't thank her enough," Bennett said.

Senator Jeff Merkley released the following comment, "Today's news is a victory for conservation and a huge relief for so many of our rural Oregon communities. A sage grouse listing could have been devastating for many Oregon ranchers, and for the economic vitality of Eastern Oregon. I applaud everyone who worked together and engaged in this unprecedented collaborative effort so that we could protect our local economies and our natural heritage at the same time."

Bennett stated that one of the concerns he had if the bird had been listed was how it might have adversely affected property values and the ability to obtain financing.

"Today's decision also keeps landowners and ranchers from having to constantly look over their shoulder, worried they're going to run

afoul of the Endangered Species Act. There was a lot of negative spin off that could have come from this," Bennett said.

Jan Kerns, a member of the county's NRAC committee said, "This was many, many years of hard work and a collaborative effort by many different segments of industry which would have been affected including mining, ranching, oil. It shows what collaboration can accomplish."

Representative Cliff Bentz said he is happy the hard work paid off. He stated it also shows there is some local control after additional land restrictions were put in place by BLM and the Forest Service across the 11 western states.

"Within the BLM plans are new restrictions where mining operations can be placed," Bentz stated as an example.

While not a fan of additional land use restrictions, Bentz did say, "Because of these and additional restrictions along with proactive conservation efforts including the CCAAs that many land owners entered into, it removed the need for Fish and Wildlife to add yet another layer and kept the sage grouse from being listed."

Bentz and others who actively sought funding solutions to help support rehabilitation efforts also influenced the decision that a listing was not necessary, Bentz said. He also thinks investments into rural fire protection districts to help control fire, which is the biggest threat to the habitat for the bird, continues to be important.

"Working together prompted this decision," Bentz stated.

And while Bentz considers this a really good start, he reminds everyone there are no doubt people who are not happy about the decision.

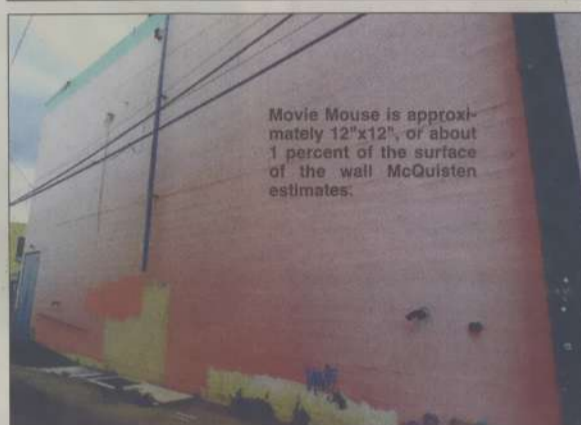
"We're not done," Bentz cautioned. "There could be litigation. We don't really know at this point what will ultimately happen. But today, I'm really happy."



Submitted photo
Rep. Cliff Bentz

Movie Mouse: Graffiti or Alley Art

Story / photos by Gina Perkins



Movie Mouse is approximately 12"x12", or about 1 percent of the surface of the wall McQuisten estimates.

As they say, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Such appears to be the case with 'Movie Mouse,' which first made an appearance on the back side of the Eltrym building in the alley five years ago, according to Dan and Teresa McQuisten, owners of the theater and the building.

Movie Mouse is a small painting of a rodent holding a paint roller and can of blue paint with the word "MOVIE" in blue just to the left of the mouse. The image is small, especially considering the wall is 50 feet wide and approximately 25 feet high, or 1250 square feet. The mouse is located on the bottom right corner of the building in the alley.

See **MOUSE** on page 2

A Plan in Progress

Story / photos
by Gina Perkins



Commissioner, Bill Harvey made the motion to adopt the 2015 Natural Resources Draft Plan as written.

Ramona Creighton expressed her frustration to the commissioners (and namely to Tim Kerns) at the close of the Sept. 16 regular Commission meeting stating that "by not adopting the 2015 Natural Resources plan, you are keeping the county from having a seat at the table as equals with the Forest Service."

Wanda Ballard stated she could not understand why there were continued roadblocks and Chairman Harvey's wife, Lorrie, made comments in support of the volunteer Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) which she said had spent a great deal of time on the plan and had brought it forward for the commissioners to adopt.

The plan was referred back to the committee at the last Commission meeting because public meeting notice had not been given, making prior votes of the commissioners and NRAC committee members void. Commissioners at that earlier meeting had voted to accept, but not adopt the plan. Bennett and Kerns had changes and edits they wanted to see included and they also objected because the public had not received the opportunity to see or weigh in on the plan.

The NRAC committee voted again to approve the plan with 12 in favor, four against, and one abstaining, according to Chairman Bruland. The names of members approving, abstaining, or dissenting were not provided despite being requested.

Not all of the requested changes were reflected in the document at Wednesday's meeting.

Commissioner Harvey stated the fault of not giving proper public meeting notice for the NRAC meeting fell on his shoulders because he and other staff had been busy with the fires.

Harvey made a motion at the Sept. 16 Commission meeting to adopt, as written, the NRAC plan. Commissioner Kerns offered an amended motion to adopt it minus the energy portion of the plan because he believed that section needed clarification in some of the language.

See **PLAN** on page 5

Special County Commission Meeting Thursday

A special County Commission meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 24 at 9 a.m. in the Commission chambers of the Baker

County Courthouse. Scheduled business begins at 9:05 a.m. with discussion of the Baker County Natural Resource Plan. Other scheduled

business includes Resolution 2015-1005: A Resolution Supporting Malheur County's Opposition to the Owyhee Canyonlands Designation.

Attend Unity Harvest Bazaar

Saturday, Oct. 3 from 9-4, the Unity Community Hall will be hopping with a Harvest Bazaar according to Joan Towell.

The bazaar not only showcases the variety of talented local artists and craftsmen, but will be a chance for people to start their holiday shopping.

"There will be iron work, handmade wooden items, hand crafted leather, jewelry, quilts, pies

and more," said Towell. She also said pies will be on hand and a special drawing for which people need to be present at 2 p.m. "It [the drawing] will be of interest to men," Towell commented.

The Burn River FFA kids will have food concessions, including lunch which will be a fundraiser for the chapter.

People with questions may call Towell at 541-446-3314.



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**Elkhorn Grange
Fall Festival**
in Haines
Oct. 10 • 9-3 p.m.
Vendors call
541-856-3435

**Taste of
Baker**
Saturday,
Oct. 3
4 - 6 pm
Baker City

**Halfway
Fall Festival**
Saturday,
Oct. 3
Halfway



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