

## Commission Hears Plans to Expand Anthony Lake Summer Activities and Add New Non-emergency Medical Transport System

By Emily Braswell

The Baker County Commissioners convened for their regularly scheduled Commission Session on Wednesday, June 1. Commissioners opened the meeting with public comment.

Victoria Valenzuela voiced her concerns about the minutes from the Commission meeting held on May 18, 2016, specific to the discussion regarding Baker County joining the Coalition of American Stewards of Liberty (ASL).

Valenzuela's comments were directed to Commissioner Harvey. "Last time, I specifically asked you if inaccurate information had been provided, and you said yes, that it had. You said no, no and then yes, because I asked the question three times. I think that is really important information to be in the minutes, and it's not in there."

Commissioner Harvey stated the minutes were simply an overview of the content of each meeting. Valenzuela acknowledged the point but stated, "I would like that put in the minutes simply because I think it's an issue."

Commissioner Harvey asked Valenzuela if she would like him to clarify the topic again, adding, "So that you can understand it?"

Commissioner Harvey clarified his point that the County is one of 30 members of a Coalition for a very specific purpose: "To gain the information because it was needed for our comment efforts for BLM. We were not a member of the Association. I've never said anything about joining their Association."

After several exchanges between Harvey and Valenzuela, Commissioner Bennett suggested they postpone approving the minutes of May 18, until the next Commission meeting. He added, "And if we've left some confusion because of the number of times we've discussed it, then let's just bring up whatever we said so then it's available, and so we can put the matter to rest, because it was confusing to everyone."

Commissioner Harvey was adamant that the ASL topic was not confusing. "No, sir, it was not! I appreciate your effort, but no, it was not confusing. I spelled it out, three different meetings, exactly what we were doing so there was no confusion in it, and I didn't solicit funds. Through the newspaper story, the funds came in."

Commissioners were provided an update regarding medical transportation options within Baker County. Several months ago, a medical transport group from North Powder approached the County requesting the ability to transport non-emergency patients. Concerns surfaced from both Baker County and Baker City medical personnel regarding quality of patient care and how best to ensure that was not jeopardized.

Commissioner Bennett reported that he had met with the City/County Emergency Management Team and the Med Transport representative, Chris Anderson. An interim plan has been developed, allowing the new transportation entity to be included in the existing emergency management system. It will handle excess, non-emergency transports. The plan ensures that Med Transport will not be used as an emergency transport within Baker County. Baker City will continue to field and receive all requests for non-emergency transports. In the event that Baker City is unable to take a non-emergency call, it would then be forwarded to Med Transport.

Commissioner Bennett moved to recognize and designate Med Transport as an adjunct, interim, non-emergency ambulance service provider within Baker County. The motion was passed.

Anthony Lakes General Manager, Peter Johnson, reported another prosperous ski season on the mountain. The mountain resort saw a 20% increase from previous years in the number of skier visits. That adds up to approximately 23,000 skiers visiting the area over the four-month season.

The number of people in hotels also showed an increase. The approximately 1,000 "heads and beds" numbers via the Lodging Partners for Anthony Lakes (PAL) program translates to \$350,000 in tourism monies spent within Baker County. According to Johnson, this number has increased each year since they started the PALs program.

See **MEETING** on page 4

## WOODLAND

Continued from page 1

However, it was the two local field trips that drew a very personal interest for woodland owners and members of the community.

### The Fires of 2015: A Very Personal Account

On Thursday, approximately 100 people boarded buses and vans to travel to Brent and Eileen Gyllenberg's Beaver Mountain Bison Ranch, located just above Beaver Creek Road.

The Gyllenberg's were center-stage for both the Windy-Ridge and the Cornet fires. While participants were awed by the magnificent view surrounding them, it was immediately clear just how lucky the family was to still have a place to call home.

With moments of clear emotion showing, Eileen Gyllenberg shared the personal journey experienced by her family as they prepared for the fire. The crowd, standing around a cement foundation that was once a shop, was silent as she told their story.

"The fire started Tuesday morning and by Tuesday afternoon we were already storing water," stated Gyllenberg. "We spent Tuesday and Wednesday building fire lines with our CAT, removing items from our home, evacuating our animals, watering down the haystack and the house, and just trying to do all that we could do."

Shifting winds played a large role in the fire's movement. Initially, with temperatures hovering around 90 degrees, 35 mile per hour winds played havoc with firefighter's attempts to establish a line. And while cooler temperatures were a welcome change, the shift in the winds' direction later in the week put the Gyllenberg home in the fire's direct sights.

As the audience listened, she pointed where the two fires started, in relationship to their home. One quickly took the idea what an ominous threat these twin infernos were to the Gyllenberg family. Unpredictable, strong winds

*Initially, with temperatures hovering around 90 degrees, 35 mile per hour winds played havoc with firefighter's attempts to establish a line.*

made things even more precarious.

They knew fire-fighting crews were already stretched. "At that moment, we (our family members) were giant fire plumes. It could look out and see two basic fire plumes. It was moving so quickly we had our son and his fiancé' serve as look-outs to make sure we could get out when we had to."

On Wednesday, "the kids left the property." On Thursday, only Eileen and Brent remained - along with their 100 head of bison.

"For a moment we thought we could move the bison down where they might be safe. However, we could see so many people, and so many vehicles trying to get out we knew it would not be safe."

Some members of the group shook their heads in shock as she recalled its intensity. "The fire was so large and had such a speed you could hear it coming for about three or four miles."

Taking a deep breath and a moment to reflect, Eileen recounted the moment she knew they had to leave. "I looked down, and I could see the fire approaching Beaver Creek Road. It was not just burning - it was exploding." It was time to get out by one of the other two routes they had available to them.

On Saturday, the family returned, hauling

supplies to fence in the bison. "The ground was still so hot you could not put anything in it," stated Gyllenberg. The 100 bison returned - one or two at a time - over the next few days.

When all was said and done - 200 acres of pasture and timber property burned. Their shop was gone. A snowmobile was reduced to nothing more than a 1x10 inch pile of metal. The haystack was a complete loss. Miraculously, their house remained, with only a small warp on an area of siding.

### Fast-forward 10 months: Restoration

Following a wonderful lunch of bison burgers (no surprise there) the group hiked several hundred feet from the home to see the regeneration work already underway. The deep green of the new spring grass and the vibrant yellow of the numerous wildflowers were in deep contrast to burned trees and charred areas of ground.

Since the fire, Eileen has planted 1300 trees that include a mixture of pine, fir, and larch. Her experience in a plant nursery prompted her to not stamp the trees in, but rather give them a good dose of water, allowing them to soak down into their new home. She created a catchment area for each and every sapling, ensuring any future water would be directed to the tree. She maintains a watering schedule for each tree for two years. "Nothing in Eastern Oregon dies from too much water," chuckled Gyllenberg.

Oddly, hundreds of green needles sprouted from dozens of badly-scorched trees that might

*What you can change at the last minute won't make a difference. What can make a difference is what you do to your property 4-5 years in advance of a fire.*

otherwise be given up for dead. Mother Nature was not done here. Gyllenberg said she too, was surprised that so many of the trees she thought would not recover were already beginning to show signs of life.

Wildlife has returned. Deer arrived in large quantities as their food supply was limited. That situation has evened itself out. Squirrels and rabbits have found their way back to the property. So too, have the weeds. "We have more white-top than ever."

Gyllenberg was optimistic about the idea of natural regeneration. "Folks might be surprised how much will regenerate on its own. The soil is a volcanic ash and there is a really good duff layer. I guess we will know in a couple of years."

When asked by a participant about the shop and when they might rebuild, she laughed and said, "I'm a contractor's wife - that makes me last on the list."



A little time, a lot of change

See more on the woodland story on page 8

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**June 17 - 23**

**FINDING DORY** PG  
FRI-THURS (4:10) 7:10 9:40

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE** PG-13  
After he reunites with an old pal through Facebook, a mild-mannered accountant is lured into the world of international espionage.

FRI-THURS (4:00) 7:00 9:35

**NOW YOU SEE ME 2** PG-13  
The Four Horsemen resurface and are forcibly recruited by a tech genius to pull off an impossible heist.

FRI-THURS (3:45) 6:45 9:30

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**Follow these tips if you encounter young wild animals:**

Never assume an animal is orphaned. Don't remove it from the forest, including your backyard. Female deer and elk and other mammals will often leave their young temporarily for safety reasons or to feed elsewhere. They will return when it is safe to do so (when people, dogs, or predators are not present).

- Call your local ODFW office, Oregon State Police, or a local licensed wildlife rehabilitation center when: 1) you see an animal that you know is orphaned because you observed the dead parent animal, or 2) the parent hasn't returned for several hours or even up to a day, or 3) if the animal is clearly injured or in distress.
- Bunnies are rarely orphaned; mother rabbits only visit den sites at dusk and dawn to feed her young.
- Keep your dog or cat away from young wildlife, especially in the spring.

Photo by Susan Wickert

**90 and Fabulous!**

Please join us for lunch to celebrate the 90th birthday of **Patricia Matheson** on Monday June 20, at the Grand from 12 to 3 p.m. at the Orange Park in Richland. For those who can't make it, please stop by Pat's home later. Party on! Best wishes only.