

# Students learn forestry skills, gear up for fire season

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*The Bulletin*

The students gritted their teeth as they pushed and pulled the cross-cut saw through a log in the field behind La Pine High School. Wood shavings fell to the snow-covered ground, mixing with the mud beneath their boots as they worked hard for the day's fastest time.

Nearby, other students hurled axes at targets. Even more were high up in nearby trees, using logging gear to ascend.

The students — central Oregon's only active team of Future Natural Resource Leaders — were preparing for their upcoming competition in Sweet Home. Students will go head-to-head in forestry-based events, from cutting through trees to identifying wildlife.

But for some students and the group's leader, Cameron Salvitelli, this program meant much more.

As concerns loom over potential wildfires this year amid multiple consecutive years of record-setting drought, La Pine High School's forestry and natural resource program is teaching students about caring and preserving the forests that encompass their town. And at least six of the program's students are using the program to help them prepare for their summer as wildland firefighters.

"We're very focused on fire as a whole, because fire affects La Pine immensely," said Salvitelli, who has taught a variety of career and technical education courses at La Pine like the forestry course, including manufacturing, construction technology and wood shop.

Looking out at his students as they raced each other over logs and up trees, Salvitelli reflected on the logging heritage that has been the backbone of communities across Oregon. He sees his class as a reflection of this industry, which has fueled La Pine's economy and employed the families of several of his students.

"We want to do our best to preserve and honor those traditions here in La Pine," he said.

Now, as fire becomes a yearly part of life in La Pine, Salvitelli says that it's more critical than ever for kids to understand the complexities of forest management and environmental issues. He wants them to know how, and why, they should care for the land.

Landen Roggenkamp, an 18-year-old senior from La Pine, came to love the forest through hunting, fishing, building forts and riding horses in the woods around La Pine. But in recent years, he has grown concerned about the fires that surround his town, saying, "some summers, you can't even breathe."

That's in part why Roggenkamp wanted to be a part of Salvitelli's team: to learn how he can play a role in preserving the forests he loves. He aspires to a career in natural resources and land management for the U.S. Forest Service, and he said he was proud to be on



Tiernan Ashcraft practices the crosscut saw with a classmate at La Pine High School.

Photos by Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

a team of students who care for the land as he does.

"If they can find the passion, they can be the change to keep forests around for generations to come," he said, adding: "This is the future, right here."

Salvitelli's program provides lessons on tree identification, flora and fauna, map reading, timber cruising and the Future Natural Resource Leaders team provides hands-on lessons in ax throwing, crosscutting with old whipsaws, pole climbing and choker setting. It even has lessons that examine the complicated opportunity costs between producing timber and enhancing biodiversity, an issue that has proven controversial in communities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

But one of the program's central focuses is fire. Students learn about tree thinning and other practices in fire resistance and protection. And it provides the training needed to go on and connect with private contracting companies that will get them out fighting fires in the summer.

Some of Salvitelli's students are already gearing up for their summer fighting fires.

Among them are Blayze and Blaire Buell, from Gilchrist. The brother and sister duo come from a family of firefighters, with their father, uncle and grandfather running things over at Walker Range Fire Patrol. The 14-year-old Blayze said he's been around firefighting since he was 5 years old. As a volunteer with the family business, he's taken on a number of roles, most often using the hose. This summer, he'll be out working from when school gets out in June until it's time to go back in the fall.

Blaire, 16, agreed that fighting fires is part of her family's tradition. She

called the adrenaline rush of fighting fires a blast, adding that, only a few days prior, they had been out on a trailer fire. Though she said she recognizes the inherent danger of being around fires, she feels a certain responsibility to help her community stay safe.

"I feel like I need to go," she said.

Those were among the reasons Blaire wanted to be part of the forestry program. That, and: "It's really fun to be outside and throw some axes with somebody."

The students gathered around a large fire in the back of the school, roasting hot dogs. To finish the day, they took turns racing each other in setting chokers, an activity that is meant to simulator cable logging. They sprinted down a small hill, leapt over a log while simultaneously tossing a choker chain underneath, pulled the chain through and around the log, and pulled it tight as they sprinted back to the start.

The students are competitive, and everyone laughed as they fell repeatedly over the log and into the dirt.

Meanwhile, the Buell children's father, Wesley Buell, rolled up in a company truck. He said he's glad to see the kids involved in the La Pine program. He said he's not concerned about his kids being out fighting fires this summer, but conceded that, in recent years, wildfires have gotten more extreme.

"They instantly take off," said Buell, protection supervisor for Walker Range Fire. "You're looking at 100 to 1,000 acre-fire in a few minutes. It's just so dry."



Gage Wilborn practices the arbor climb at La Pine High School.



Astoria AAUW

## CANDIDATE FORUM

**TUESDAY, APRIL 19**  
**7:00 P.M. TO 9:30 P.M.**  
**PATRIOT HALL, CLATSOP COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

The forum will be livestreamed at <http://kmun.org/election>

### CANDIDATES ATTENDING:

US Representative 1st District:

**Christopher Mann and Armidia Murray (Republican)**  
**Scott Phillips and Christian Robertson (Democrat)**

State Senator District 16:

**Suzanne Weber (Republican)**  
**Melissa Busch (Democrat)**

State Representative District 32:

**Cyrus Javadi and Glenn Gaither (Republican)**  
**Logan C. Laity (Democrat)**

Clatsop County Commissioners:

**District 1 Mark Kujala (unopposed)**  
**District 3 Pamela Wev and Nathan Pinkstaff**  
**District 5 Lianne Thompson and Stephen Dillard**

Forum presented by American Association of University Women, Astoria Branch in collaboration with Clatsop Community College, The Astorian and KMUN Coast Community Radio.

For more information contact:  
**Pamela Alegria at**  
**503-325-8024 or**  
**pamquixote@gmail.com**

A tradition for over 30 years  
THE ASTORIAN INVITATIONAL  
**TRACK MEET**  
2 P.M. THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2022  
ASTORIA HIGH SCHOOL  
Featuring boys and girls high school teams from throughout the Columbia-Pacific Region  
theAstorian

