

How to grow Pendleton: Just add whitewater

In the frothy, muddy mess that is the Umatilla River at high water, Richie Gardner's brightly-colored kayak stands out.

Often he drops in near the

Eighth Street Bridge to run the rapids to Main Street, then floats past Taco Time Falls and finishes his journey after the sometimes powerful rapids below Tenth Street.

And when the river is blown out from rain and melting snow — making the run fast and fun — Gardner will make the trip two or three times a day after work. It's a whitewater rush within Pendleton city limits.

Richie, a forester for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and his wife Sarah, a biologist for Whitman College in Walla Walla, are both experienced whitewater kayakers and rafters. They haven't found a boating culture in Pendleton, however.

That has its benefits — there are no crowds and no rules, and the excitement of doing something on your own and in your own way is important for an adventurer.

But it also has its detractions.

There is no one to boat with on days when the river is dangerous enough to require a partner. There is no one to carpool with, nor share experiences and advice. There are no boat ramps to easily enter or exit the river — and during spring runoff that is somewhere between impractical and downright dangerous.

Pendleton is lucky to have such a remarkable section of the Umatilla River float right through its downtown. Very few cities in Oregon can stake a similar claim.

Thanks to restoration and hatchery work, salmon and steelhead returns are steadily increasing for the first time in a century. It is not unusual to see the beaver that lives just downstream of



TIM
TRAINOR
Comment



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Richie Gardner of Pendleton surfs a wave in a kayak Wednesday on a raging Umatilla River in Pendleton.



More online

For GoPro video of Gardner kayaking through Pendleton, go to eastoregonian.com or visit the East Oregonian's YouTube channel.

the Main Street. Nor is it unusual to see its handiwork — riverside trees up and down the Umatilla have gnaw marks.

A wild waterway is an asset to the city and can be a real economic driver, but Pendleton has yet to take advantage. A plan to renovate commercial and residential riverfront property — even offering financial incentives for doing so — did not entice any developers.

Perhaps the recreation avenue

can be a cheaper way to influence the Pendleton economy, increasing livability and marketability along the way. It can also then provide a spark to private sector-led development, which here in Eastern Oregon we find a more comfortable driver of growth.

The city of Bend recently finished Oregon's first whitewater park, an in-town play area on the Deschutes River. It is funded in large part by a \$29 million parks

and recreation levy that was passed in 2012.

Pendleton is a far cry from Bend, but there are many other success stories. Reno, Nevada used a whitewater park to turn a dilapidated neighborhood into one filled with breweries and coffeeshops. Simple play features near a downtown park has helped keep Missoula, Montana a mecca for outdoors minded people, and Boise has gone that route as well. Even a small town like Evanston, Wyoming (population 12,000) has a remarkably simple but well-used whitewater park, creating a draw for a rural city trying to attract young, energetic residents and travelers.

Perhaps the city council and its economic development director should look to the river and make an effort to support what has drawn countless people to Oregon for generations: recreation, the environment and unique experiences.

A simple put-in and take-out, currently being considered, is the very least that can be done. But it would represent a start to revitalizing and re-hydrating a Pendleton that has become a little parched.

Tim Trainor is outdoors and opinion page editor for the East Oregonian.

All aboard the Wallowa Union rail and trail plan

6-mile pilot segment would connect Joseph and Enterprise

By SCOT HEISEL
EO Media Group

The Wallowa Union Rail Authority has given an initial green light to the first stage of an effort to create a 63-mile trail along the WURA line from Joseph to Elgin.

During its monthly meeting Feb. 9 in Wallowa, the WURA board unanimously adopted a resolution advancing the construction of a six-mile pilot segment from Joseph to Enterprise, the southernmost part of the six-segment proposal.

The pilot project was selected based on two surveys, comments made in public meetings and workshops, and comments received by e-mail and letter by the Concept Plan authors Rocky Houston of Oregon Parks and Recreation and Eastern Oregon University graduate student Dana Kurtz.

After the vote, the WURA board charged its existing Trail Committee (Mark Davidson, Stephen Adams and Wallowa County Commissioner Susan Roberts) to set the parameters for upcoming negotiations with JBTC.

Joseph Branch Trail Consortium, formerly the Wallowa Union Historic Trail Consortium, is a citizens group that supports the development of a viable multi-use plan for the Wallowa Union rail corridor.

JBTC board member Terry Ewaldson said Tuesday that he already has submitted a new memorandum of understanding to the WURA committee.

Ewaldson stressed that the Concept Plan isn't a blueprint and that many issues regarding the design of the trail and the actual route have yet to be determined. He said discussions about potential trailheads have centered on the area behind the Joseph Rodeo Grounds and somewhere in the southeastern section of Enterprise in the vicinity of the fish hatchery and Marr Pond.

Right now, Ewaldson said, manpower is what's most needed.

"We (JBTC) need to expand our membership so we have the people necessary to complete the planning work." He said that work will involve meeting with adjacent landowners and collection public opinion in developing specific plans for the trail.

"A lot of time goes into dealing with constituents," he said. "It's always best to have that communication form the foundation of the project."



The proposed trail would provide hikers with views of farmland and the Wallowas as it heads south from the Green Valley Road crossing just outside of Enterprise.



A whitetail deer doe pauses on her walk along the tracks. The segment of tracks and trail south of Steens Road offers opportunities for wildlife viewing.

The Concept Plan estimates a \$20 million price tag for the full 63-mile trail. Ewaldson said the pilot project estimate is about \$2 million and that JBTC already has developed a fundraising plan.

On Feb. 10, one day after the WURA vote, the Oregon Community Foundation announced the Cycle

Oregon Fund has awarded the Joseph Branch Trail Consortium \$7,500 to support the Rail with Trail project development.

JBTC President Penny Arentsen said in a press release: "The Cycle Oregon funds will be used to work closely with the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority (WURA) to develop a

Read the plan

The Joseph Branch Rail-with-Trail Concept Plan is available for review online at tinyurl.com/htfluab.

trail management plan and agreements necessary for trail development. The effort of the two organizations will focus on protecting the interests of the railroad, adjacent landowners, the Eagle Cap Excursion Train operators, the Joseph Branch Railriders owners, and the cities of Joseph and Enterprise while raising funds to develop a pilot project trail segment."

Ewaldson said he expects at least a full year of fundraising and design development before actual construction of the pilot segment begins — hopefully by spring 2017, he said.

"It's a tricky question. It depends on funding availability."

Throughout the process the WURA board set forward three basic tenets: the rails would remain in place, no funding would be provided by WURA, and a decision about whether or not to proceed would be made by WURA at the end of the concept planning process, which wrapped up in December.

The full 63-mile trail, if completed, would connect two state parks — Wallowa Lake State Park and Minam State Recreation Area — and would follow the Joseph Branch rail bed beside the Grande Ronde and Wallowa rivers.

SKI REPORT

Spout Springs

Tollgate, Ore.
New snow: Unavailable
Base depth: Unavailable
Conditions/events: Wet snow, open for night skiing Friday and Saturday.

Anthony Lakes

North Powder, Ore.
New snow: 2"
Base depth: 62"
Conditions/events: Fifth and sixth graders ski free on Sundays.
Wet snow, corduroy groomers.

Ski Bluewood

Dayton, Wash.
New snow: 1"
Base depth: 69"
Conditions: Machine groomed, wet snow. Some terrian parks closed.

Ski Fergi

Joseph, Ore.
New snow: Unknown
Base depth: 30"
Conditions: Good snow, groomed runs

Mt. Hood Meadows Government Camp, Ore.

New snow: 2"
Base depth: 92"
Conditions: Packed powder groom with a dusting of fresh on top. Refrozen snow with a dusting of fresh off the groom.

Timberline Lodge

Timberline, Ore.
New snow: 4"
Base depth: 105"
Conditions: Prime. Scheduled to operate lower mountain lifts from 9am - 4pm.

SPOUT SPRINGS

SKI AREA

Friday: 5 pm to 9 pm
Saturday: 9 am to 9 pm
Sunday: 9 am to 4 pm
All Holidays: 9 am to 4 pm

Night skiing starts January 1st and is Friday 5 pm - 9 pm & Saturday 5 pm - 9 pm