BLOOMIN' BLUES

Photo by Bruce Barnes

Fendler's Pennycress

Early start to wildflower season

By BRUCE BARNES
For the East Oregonian

Name: Fendler's Pennycress
Scientific Name: *Noccaea fendleri*

Yes! The spring wildflowers are out, and at least two weeks earlier than last year. The last four or five years the flowers were rather late, but the weather is responding to the changes in ocean currents, and we are expected to have even earlier springs for the next several years.

A trip up the Umatilla River to Umatilla Forks a week ago revealed that some of the very earliest plants are already nearly done blooming. Plants in full bloom included Bluebells, Wallflowers, Lomatiums, Buttercups, Waterleaf, Balsamroot, Yellow Fawn Lily, and Blue-eyed Grass.

The plant featured in this article is found from British Columbia to California, and east to the Rockies. For many years its scientific name was *Thlaspi fendleri*, but this was changed as botanists continue to struggle with how to classify plants. The name *Noccaea* is for an Italian botanist, and *fendleri* is for a botanist in New Mexico and Texas, both from the 1800s.

Fendler's Pennycress is not one of the earliest spring plants to flower, but it's in full bloom at low elevations. The plant is in the mustard family, but is not at all weedy like some mustards are. It stands about a foot high, with showy white clusters of flowers at the top. The leaves at the base are somewhat spoon-shaped and a bit toothed along the edges. The leaves on the stems are oval, with the base of each leaf noticeably clasping and nearly surrounding the stem. The fruits of the plant are flattened, oval, about a quarter of an inch long, and rounded at the tip.

This plant has been used by at least three Southwest Indian tribes. The uses included a lotion to treat itching skin, or as a lotion to prevent injury from deer. It was also used to ward off witches, and in ceremonies.

Where to find: The plant pictured here is at its peak now, usually on the rock cliff faces along the road at Umatilla Forks. This is also a great place to get your spring fix of wildflowers.

Ranchers express concern about Owyhee

By HUNTER MARROW
The Argus Observer

JORDAN VALLEY — About 300 concerned ranchers, residents and county officials piled into the Jordan Valley high school gymnasium over the weekend to participate in a town hall held by U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., on the topic of federal land management policies in the Owyhee Canyonlands.

Everybody who spoke expressed some degree of disagreement with a proposed 2.5 million acre national monument in the area. A coalition of environmental groups is advocating for a monument, which can be created by the president of the United States.

The issue raised by ranchers who attended the event came down to the effect that possible future regulations on grazing would have on their livelihoods if the canyonlands monument proposal comes through. Environmental groups have maintained no such regulations would come into play if the monument is created.

"The canyonlands proposal would encroach upon 100 percent of my land," said Elias Elguren, a cattle rancher and treasurer of the Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition. "If this went through, I would need to reconsider my entire business."

The coalition he is part of is being built with local communities in mind and has started a fundraising campaign in that effort, "to ensure that local communities are included in the future of the Owyhee Canyonlands and that Congress has a vote in the process," according to a news release by the coalition.

Klamath Falls Herald and News

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden speaks recently during a public meeting in Klamath Falls.

While the president can declare an area a national monument — President Barack Obama has approved 19 during his time in office — it takes an act of Congress to create wilderness. An alternate proposal by the Owyhee Coalition, led by the Oregon Natural Desert Association and other environmental groups, seeks a combination of wilderness, wild and scenic river, and conservation designations. That totals 2.5 million acres.

Walden, when told of the Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition, praised the group for its efforts and added his own two cents into the mix.

"We ought to have a say at the congressional level," he said, earning a round of applause from the crowd. "However, at the very minimum, we ought to have a say at the local level."

Environmental groups have raised concerns in the past that those living on the lands aren't being good stewards, a notion local ranchers brought up and dismissed Sunday, citing the land's current good condition.

Walden agreed.

"I think we all do a pretty good job of taking care of the land," he said, to short cheers and murmurs of agreement. "This is one of the most beautiful places. I think that is in part because of how it is being managed."

Hazel Johnson, a 96-year-old local resident who homesteaded on the land in 1942 when "there wasn't much to brag about," said she saw the land improve firsthand and agreed with Walden's sentiments.

"If this goes through,it will take away the privilege of living here," she said.

State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, asked Walden what to do about the issue that the Canyonlands proposition has turned into an "us versus them" mentality. Walden acknowledged this and called for cooperation between all sides for any possible resolution to be made.

> "If this goes through, it will take away the privilege of living here."
>
> **— Hazel Johnson,** 96-year-old who homesteaded in the Owyhee Canyonlands in 1942

"We can't create this bunker mentality," he said. "We need to work together, and we need to be unified."

Walden said he was looking to get other congressmen on board along with changing language in the federal Antiquities Act of 1906, which allows Congress or the U.S. president to make monument designations. He also, along with Malheur County Sheriff Brian Wolfe, called for local communities to spread the word and educate others on the canyonlands proposal and to write letters to state officials expressing their concerns.

"The size of the crowd was the second largest turnout I've been in," he said. "That, in and of itself, reinforces the idea that the government needs to hear this and listen."

Most Malheur County citizens have expressed clear opposition to the canyonlands proposal. In a nonbinding advisory vote in early March, 90 percent of the 54 percent of Malheur County residents who voted opposed creating a national monument.

Group gathering signatures to expand outdoor school

CORVALLIS (AP) — About half of all Oregon students participate in outdoor school at some point in their education.

But Save Outdoor School for All, a Portland-based political action committee, is gathering signatures to create a new fund that would expand the opportunity.

Their proposal is Initiative Petition 67, which would require that about $22 million in lottery funds be set aside each year for the purpose of giving all fifth- or sixth-graders in Oregon one week of outdoor education. The petition must be signed by 87,000 registered voters to earn a spot on the November ballot.

Caroline Fitchett, campaign director for the political action committee advancing the petition, said the initiative had its origins in parent groups in Portland that had to raise money so their local schools could offer outdoor school programs, where kids get science-based education curriculum while staying at a camp for few nights.

According to reports filed with the Oregon Secretary of State, the campaign has received more than $251,000 in cash contributions thus far.

The PAC's largest expenditure to date is nearly $148,000 to Fieldworks, LLC, an organization that advertises on its website that it provides canvassing operations using both volunteers and paid workers to gather signatures for ballot initiatives.

So far, Fitchett said, the campaign has gathered about 15,000 signatures.

If the measure makes the ballot and is approved by voters, Fitchett said the funds needed to run the outdoor school programs would be taken from Oregon lottery funds presently allocated for economic development. According to the Oregon Lottery's website, 57 percent of lottery funds already go to education, 27 percent is allocated for economic development and job creation, 15 percent goes to state parks and natural resources, and 1 percent goes to treating problem gambling.

According to state of Oregon budget documents, for the two-year budget period of 2013-15, the lottery contributed $125 million to economic development. A representative of Business Oregon, the state's economic development agency, said about 25 percent of its budget comes from lottery funds. According to Business Oregon's annual report, in 2015 it created more than 2,200 jobs.

For visitors, Fort Stevens is always in season

By KYLE SPURR
EO Media Group

WARRENTON — Fort Stevens State Park no longer has much of an offseason.

Traditionally slow winter months have sped up at the state park with more visitors braving the weather to recreate or deciding to stay warm inside new deluxe cabins. Consistent visitation leaves little time for park rangers to finish maintenance projects in time for the peak summer months.

"There were the times when some parks even closed in the winter on the coast," Fort Stevens State Park Manager Teri Wing said. "Not any more. We are open year-round."

Attendance peaked last year in July, when 15,921 campsites were occupied. On some days in the summer, the park's population mirrors the largest cities in Clatsop County.

While the park expects high turnout around July, the usually quiet months between November and February have seen visitor increases in recent years.

Campsites occupied in those four months increased from 5,184 to 6,644 between 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. That is an increase of 1,460 campsites used in one year.

This past winter saw a consistent turnout of more than 6,500 campsites used from November to February.

What was considered a four-month offseason has shrunk to December and January, when visiting dips below 2,000 full campsites each month.

'Cozy and warm'

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Visitors looks for clams to dig along the beach at Fort Stevens State Park.

Since the park added 11 deluxe cabins five years ago, Wing said, more visitors have been enticed to stay during the winter.

The deluxe cabins, which sleep four to five people, have a living room, bathroom and kitchen. The living room has a futon couch and flat screen TV with a DVD player. No linens or utensils are provided, but the cabins have electricity and heat.

"It gives people an opportunity to visit year-round that they couldn't do before," Wing said.

Before the cabins, Wing remembers the park having 42 tent sites. Those tent sites sat empty until June each year because most people do not camp in tents on the coast in the winter. The park now has just six tent sites, as more visitors are opting for the cabins.

Wing said the deluxe cabins give people a whole new perspective of the park in the wintertime. They are ideal for storm watching, she said.

"It's kind of a neat way to view the storms and still be cozy and warm," Wing said.

Paddle away

Along with inviting people to storm watch from a cabin, the park has focused on offering more recreational opportunities in the offseason.

The park is forming a partnership with Clatsop Paddle Co. to offer adventure packages that bundle a stay at the park with paddleboarding on Coffenbury Lake. Details are being worked out to launch the pilot program this summer.

In addition, rangers are starting to lead kayak tours on Trestle Bay.

"We are just trying to offer some different opportunities to people," Wing said. "It's all about getting people out and interested in the outdoors."

Given the opportunity, Wing said, visitors around the state are willing to recreate in rain or shine.

"If you are an Oregonian, you recreate in the rain," she said.

Finding the time

Ranger Supervisor Michael Simonsen said the park's staff has to find the time to finish maintenance projects while also catering to visitors.

The window to finish projects such as improvements to cabins and trails is shrinking.

This year, the park was gearing up for thousands of visitors for spring break, then the Astoria Warrenton Crab, Seafood and Wine Festival, before summer is in full swing.

"We get a little lull through May, then school is out and we are wide open until October," Simonsen said.

This winter, park staff was able to finish a flurry of maintenance projects. The most noticeable may be the restoration of the boardwalk that leads to the wildlife viewing bunker off Parking Lot D near Social Security Beach. The boardwalk was built nearly two decades ago.

"It had been a few years, and everything had rotted out," Simonsen said. "We just came in and redid it."

It took more than four months to finish the boardwalk, working on and off for a year. The boardwalk was left half done all last summer.

Park staff recently went through all of the bike trails to remove any roots protruding out of the ground. Since the bike trails are popular, staff had to work in sections to clear the trails. The bike trail project took about three months.

The park has nine full-time rangers, 26 seasonal workers and up to 60 volunteers. The park operates on a biennial budget, and has $150,000 budgeted for projects in 2015-2017.

"All of our projects are decided then (in the budget)," Wing said. "It's just getting them completed that can take a little bit of time."

Wing, who has worked with parks for 27 years, became the park manager in 2004. Her father worked at Fort Stevens while she was growing up. Wing said it was inevitable she would pursue a career at the park.

She enjoys getting to share her love of the park with more visitors each year. Most people who visit are on vacation and in a good mood. Seeing visitors appreciate the park makes the work year-round worthwhile, she said.

"You feel pretty lucky to work in place people pay to recreate in," Wing said.

SKI REPORT

Spout Springs
Tollgate, Ore.
CLOSED FOR SEASON

Anthony Lakes
North Powder, Ore.
CLOSED FOR SEASON

Ski Bluewood
Dayton, Wash.
CLOSED FOR SEASON

Ski Fergi
Joseph, Ore.
CLOSED FOR SEASON

Mt. Hood Meadows
Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: None
Base depth: 113"
Conditions: Slushy spring snow both on and off groom.

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