

ENTERPRISE

Wild mustangs on the job in national forest

Horses trained by inmates in Nevada

By **GEORGE PAVLEN**
East Oregonian

Eleven wild mustangs have arrived in northeast Oregon from Nevada to assist summer trails crews working in Hells Canyon and the Eagle Cap Wilderness on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

The horses came from Carson City, Nevada, as part of the Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horse and Burro Program. Both the BLM and Forest Service are required to follow the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, which provides for the management of unbranded and unclaimed horses on public lands. That partnership allowed the mustangs to transfer from one agency to the other at no cost to taxpayers.

John Hollenbeak, trails coordinator on the Wallowa-Whitman forest, said the horses will be used as pack animals to bring in tools and equipment during routine trail maintenance. They could also be used to pack out firefighting gear in the event of another active wildfire season.

"It's impressive how well they act," Hollenbeak said. "This stock has particularly



John Hollenbeak, left, and Curt Booher, with the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, work with mustangs brought up from Nevada to help pack in loads of gear for summer trails crews.

Photo contributed by Matt Burks

good training. I have a lot of confidence in them."

The Forest Service will chronicle the horses' adventures with photos and video posted to Facebook throughout the summer. There's Bojangles, who is described as having a little bit of fire, but mostly gentle

to be around. Then there's Ringo and Heart, and some of the wilder ones including Oden, Jed, Batman and Gil. Studley, Joe Kid, Spanky and Rupert round out the group, which will get to work out on the trails by next week.

"It usually takes a little while to get them acclimated

to the type of work they're doing, and camping out for up to seven nights at a time," Hollenbeak said. "Usually, they are built to survive this kind of deal. They're tough. They tend to learn very well."

Alan Shepherd, Wild Horse and Burro Program lead for the Nevada BLM,

said each mustang already has about 120 days of training under their belt thanks to the Saddle Horse Training Program at Northern Nevada Correctional Center. Inmates at the prison work with about 100 horses every year to get them ready for adoption.

"The inmates have given

them enough foundation training to be ready for packing and riding," Shepherd said. "Now, they are working in some of the most rugged country in Oregon."

Hollenbeak went down in March to pick up the animals and bring them back to the Wallowa-Whitman. Most of the mustangs are 7-8 years old, and will work alongside the existing horses and mules on the forest — some of which are now into their 20s and 30s. Hollenbeak figures some of those animals will be retired by the end of the year.

Usually, a three-person trails crew will be accompanied by at least riding animals, and three pack animals, depending on the job.

"We have been struggling with having enough horses to keep a couple (trails) crews going," he said. "We just didn't have enough stock."

By partnering with the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program, Hollenbeak said it is a win-win situation for both agencies.

"They are now mustangs with jobs," he said.

To follow the mustangs on social media, visit www.facebook.com/WallowaWhitmanNF, or www.facebook.com/BLMNevada.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

BLOOMIN' BLUES



Photo courtesy Bruce Barnes

Redstem Spring Beauty

Redstem Spring Beauty in eye of the beholder

By **BRUCE BARNES**
For the East Oregonian

Name: Redstem Spring Beauty

Scientific Name: *Claytonia rubra*

This unusual-looking plant is fairly common, and is found from British Columbia to California, and east to North Dakota and Colorado. It is quite similar to the better-known "miner's lettuce," but the coloring makes it stand out.

The color of the leaves and stems of this plant is variable, and can range from brown to bright pink or pale reddish, to a sickly pale yellowish and even seldom-seen shades of green. The stems tend to be a pale pinkish color regardless of the color of the leaves. The example pictured here shows the characteristic pink stems, and the leaves vary from pale green to a faded salmon color.

The plant is typically spread out and somewhat flattened on the ground, with

stems a few inches long. Leaves arising from the roots are egg-shaped or spoon-shaped. The flowering stems have only one leaf, which encircles the stem just below the flowers. The flowers are quite small and have 5 white petals that often have a pink stripe down the center.

Redstem spring beauty is also known as redstem miner's lettuce. It is very closely related to other species of miner's lettuce which make a great succulent and mild-flavored addition to salads and soups. Though the common name of miner's lettuce came from use of several species of *Claytonia* during the gold rush, the plants have been in use long before that by Indian tribes across the west.

Where to find: This plant can be found already in lower-elevation stream valleys and woods, and should very soon be spotted at middle elevations as well. The unusual coloring makes it very easy to spot.

Fires create gaps in Pacific Crest Trail

CABAZON, Calif. (AP) — Vast wildfires have created lengthy gaps in Southern California sections of the famed Pacific Crest Trail, which hikers must bypass via shuttles or alternate routes to avoid dangerous conditions like unstable trees and loose rocks.

Long-distance backpackers must be shuttled by van around the closures or risk incurring \$2,500 fines, the *Riverside Press-Enterprise* reported Monday.

To get around a 15.5-mile gap caused by a wildfire last year in the San Bernardino National Forest, hikers are driven from the Whitewater Trail House in Cabazon to Onyx Summit on State Route 38, where the trail reopens.

About 14 miles of the trail approaching the mountain town of Idyllwild are closed three years after a blaze scorched more than 27,000 acres. Each year, thousands trek sections of the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail, which runs from Mexico to Canada.

Some of the adventurers — who often take on nicknames for their journeys — aren't thrilled with the idea of getting into a van after retreating into the wilderness. Last week in Idyllwild, Bruce "Man in Black" Cornish of San Diego planned to research an alternate hiking route to bypass the closed section while waiting for friends.

At 59, he retired early from a job as an eighth-grade science teacher to hike the entire route after dreaming about the trip for 20 years.

"The philosophy of this trail is,



Frank Bellino/The Press-Enterprise via AP

This July 2013 file photo a water tender makes his way back to the Mountain Fire near Lake Hemet. Vast wildfires have created lengthy gaps in Southern California sections of the famed Pacific Crest Trail, which hikers must bypass via shuttles or alternate routes to avoid dangerous conditions like unstable trees and loose rocks.

"Hike your own hike," he told the newspaper. "If people want to hitch ahead, that's cool. It's just not for me."

Danger in the unstable areas can come from falling branches dubbed "widow-makers," dead giant trees with weak roots that can fall and crush hikers, the U.S. Forest Service said. Loose rocks, debris including rolling logs, flash floods, trailside stump holes and slippery ash can also pose a danger.

Crews are working to remove charred trees and fill in holes to make the trails passable again. While some hikers are impatient for the work to

"Hike your own hike."

— **Bruce Cornish**,
PCT hiker

finish, others don't mind catching an occasional ride.

"I know some other people who are what we call 'purists' — want to hike every inch of the trail," said Robert "Bobcat" Donnellan, 38, of Asheville, N.C., sitting at a picnic table outside the Whitewater home where he was staying April 13. "I personally don't care."

Trophy trout could win anglers \$50 Visa gift card

East Oregonian

LA GRANDE — Anglers could be fishing for more than just trophy trout this spring at Phillips Reservoir.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife will stock the reservoir with 4,000 trophy-size rainbows in early May and June. Of those, about 400 of the fish will be marked with tags good for a \$50 Visa

gift card. The reward is meant to encourage anglers to report tagged trout to ODFW, which helps the agency determine catch rates.

"We want to make sure that the majority of the trophy trout that are released into the reservoir actually end up in the creel of our anglers," said Tim Bailey, district fish biologist in La Grande.

The reward tag system

has proven to be a cost-effective method for determining catch rates in other areas of the state, according to Bailey, which is why they chose to try it out at Phillips Creek.

"Using this method allows us to collect information that just was not possible with more traditional methods due to their expense," Bailey said.

Tagged fish can be caught and released,

and still be eligible for prize money. If the fish is released, ODFW says to cut the tag off at its base rather than try to rip it out. Anglers can also report tags in person, by mail, over the phone or at the ODFW website at www.dfw.state.or.us.

Reward tags must be returned either in person or by mail to ODFW's East Region Office, located at 107 20th St. in La Grande.

BRIEFLY

ODFW sets salmon seasons on Columbia

Fisheries managers in Oregon and Washington have announced summer and fall salmon fishing seasons on the Columbia River.

Summer chinook fishing will begin June 16, with a daily bag limit of two hatchery-born fish. The season should remain open through July 31.

Anglers will also be able to keep sockeye and hatchery steelhead on the Columbia from the Astoria-Megler Bridge upstream to the Oregon-Washington border. The season is closed for coho.

Fall chinook season is based on a strong anticipated return of 960,000 salmon.

About 93,000 fish are expected

to reach the upper Columbia — a strong return, but not as strong as last year's record 127,000 upriver fish. Anglers will be allowed to keep chinook, coho and hatchery steelhead from Aug. 1 — Dec. 31 from Warrior Rock to the state border, with a daily bag limit of two adults and five jacks.

Regulations could be subject to in-season modifications.

Human waste, trash ongoing problem at Oregon hot springs

PORTLAND (AP) — A scenic natural hot springs in Oregon's Cascade Mountains is now closed to overnight camping because of ongoing problems with human waste, trash and other damage.

The *Oregonian* reports the U.S.

Forest Service has been tracking the problems at Umpqua Hot Springs for a year. Diamond Lake District Ranger Jimmy Tyree told the newspaper that campers have been tossing trash on the ground, cutting down trees and leaving behind incredible amounts of human waste.

The hot springs will remain open for use from sunrise to sunset, but overnight camping is banned for now. Tyree says the goal is to get the site cleaned up and allow the land to recover.

Trash and waste is a frequent problem at hot springs in the West. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management considered closing Skinny Dipper Hot Springs in Idaho last year partly because of the mess. That decision was later put on hold, however.

New ski lift planned for Mt. Bachelor

BEND (AP) — Mt. Bachelor plans to build its first ski lift to new terrain in two decades.

The *Bulletin* reports that the resort says the new Cloudchaser lift will climb 1,448 vertical feet, opening up 635 acres of skiable ground. The resort said in a news release that the lift will make Mt. Bachelor the fifth largest ski area in the country.

Interim General Manager John McLeod says construction will begin this summer. The resort hopes to have the lift ready for skiers and snowboarders by Christmas.

The construction won't affect mountain biking, disc golf or other summer activities on the mountain.

2 Malaysians plead guilty to wildlife smuggling

PORTLAND (AP) — Two Malaysian nationals pleaded guilty to smuggling wildlife into the United States and were sentenced by a judge in Portland to six months in federal prison.

The investigation began three years ago, when authorities found a helmeted hornbill mandible while searching an international package headed to Forest Grove. Undercover agents then purchased orangutan skulls, bear claws, a wild pig skull and other parts.

Prosecutors said the men owned an online business that was responsible for smuggling \$95,000 worth of endangered wildlife parts into the U.S. since 2004.