

# MINAM: Expects to open next spring

Continued from 1A

the necessary power.

The cost will be steep — roughly \$500 a night to rent a large cabin — and that does not include the cost of getting there. Ellis expects he will help many of his customers charter a plane from Enterprise, Joseph or La Grande to fly into the lodge. (See Page 1C for more on landing on a backcountry airstrip).

Others will hump it. The closest trailhead is Moss Springs, about 8.5 miles away, and some will travel the route on horseback while others will use their own two feet. For the more economical traveler, Minam River Lodge will offer raised platform beds with linens, in a teepee or wall tent, for roughly \$100 a night. That allows customers to make use of communal showers and a wood-fired hot tub.

Ellis imagines the lodge as a place where both types of people will meet, converse, dine together and enjoy the natural world arrayed in front of them. The Minam River can be seen from the currently-under-construction deck, water that both threatened salmon and bull trout call home. Hunters will be another main customers base since they have nearby access to elk, bear, cougar, deer and more.

Ellis envisions visitors forking over \$500 a night to fly in from places like Portland or Boston and stay for a week, while others will arrive sweaty and hungry and looking for a place to rest their head for the night.

But first they've got to build the thing.

Isaac Trout has served as an on-site construction superintendent, living and working at the site for much of the year. An avid outdoorsman, he used his bow to bag a mammoth elk within hiking distance from the property last year.

He said the opportunity to live and work in such a beautiful, wild place has been incredible, as is building "something that will be historic."

It hasn't been easy. Trout and Gates have had to figure out how to erect their lodge without the use of cranes and lifts and other benefits of modern construction. Getting the main joist in place with just a few hands and little more than an ATV took some planning and ingenuity.

But that has brought another kind of benefit. "It has forced us to plan in the way that contractors always want to do, but never have time for," said Gates. There is no running to a hardware store for an extra box of nails or sheet of plywood — and the waste of hours that entails. Everything had to be accounted for and planned in order to get rigged up for a helicopter ride and then its final place on the construction site.

"We've been pretty good and pretty lucky," Gates said. "We don't have a lot of waste and we don't have much extra."

Sweyn Wall, of the U.S. Forest Service recreation program, said the lodge has been good neighbors with the Forest Service. There are a few other inholdings within the 361,000-acre wilderness area, including a few in the upper Minam area.

Wall said Barnes and the lodge have been "partners on a variety of projects, and we consider ourselves good neighbors." He said there are important issues that the lodge and USFS must stay on the same page on, especially the water system that originates on Forest Service land and the sewage system, as well as how they operate along a Wild & Scenic River.

But Wall sees benefits to inholdings and commercial operations such as the Minam River Lodge.

"One of the main challenges we face as an agency is trying to keep folks vested," said Wall. "The more we can encourage people to use and appreciate wilderness, the stronger the argument we have for it."

The construction project is halfway complete, and crews expect it to be open next spring. It is unknown if the lodge will open year-round, but when it is operating it can house up to 30 guests and will employ 11-12 people full-time. Other contractors will see benefits from the business, including pilots and horseback outfitters who will help ferry and entertain guests.

The massive project is a financial risk, Ellis admitted. But once people see the view from the lodge — and the lodge itself — he thinks they will have a hard time leaving, especially after they contemplate that 8.5-mile hike back out to civilization.

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**— Ben Gates, UP Construction**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Solar panels on the greenhouse power fans inside the structure. The lodge has no external power supply and will rely on solar power and generators for electricity.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Jacob Stevens of Elgin strips the bark off logs that will be used to rebuild the barn at the Minam River Lodge.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

In addition to the lodge, guests will be able to rent cabins during their stay.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Jeff Spath of Gaston watches as A.J. Plummer of Elgin uses an excavator to remove a boulder from the old barn at the Minam Lodge in the Eagle Cap Wilderness area east of La Grande.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The finished interior of one of the cabins at the Minam Lodge east of La Grande.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Daniel Iacob of Moscow, Idaho, and Cassandra Mohr of Enterprise cut pieces of wood for roofing materials at a mobile sawmill while rebuilding the Minam River Lodge.

## Lodge hosts Labor Day open house

The Minam River Lodge will host a community potluck and offer a sneak peek of the new lodge over Labor Day weekend.

The property will be open Sunday afternoon until Monday afternoon for the event. It will feature roast pig and entertainment by the Minam Construction Team Jug Band, as well as an opportunity to see and hear about the construction project.

Guests are asked to register for the event at [www.theminamlodge.com](http://www.theminamlodge.com), and are invited to bring a side dish if possible.

Camping sites will be available by the river, but no lodge facilities will be available.

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