

# Nez Perce stage blessing ceremony on traditional homeland

By ERIC BARKER  
Lewiston Morning Tribune

JOSEPH — Quincy Ellenwood smiled as a pair of young Nez Perce men rode their horses across a hay field in Joseph Thursday, July 29.

Their pace — slow and steady — quickened without warning. Soon the two men, one shirtless and the other wearing a beaded vest, raced across the grassy slope.

“There they go, look at them. They get to do that now,” said Ellenwood as he fanned himself with an eagle wing. “Can you imagine how a whole camp was here and boys and young men and young ladies would ride their horses all around. It was like that all day, every day.”

As he spoke, other Nimii-puu people sang, danced and drummed in a longhouse, celebrating and blessing the 148-acre property the tribe purchased last December.

“The people are excited to come back home,” said Casey Mitchell, a member of the tribe’s executive committee. “When we sing our songs and we dance, we are letting our ancestors know we are back and that our love for this land will never die.”

Known as Am’sáaxpa, or place of the boulders, the land is a traditional campsite and one of the last places occupied by Chief Joseph



August Frank/Lewiston Tribune

**Nakia Williamson-Cloud leads horseback riders on Thursday, July 29, 2021, down West Wallowa Avenue in Joseph. A special ceremony occurred in Idaho on July 31 to rename a historic collection of artifacts the Nez Perce Tribe owns.**

and his band before they left the Wallowa Valley and their Northeastern Oregon homeland under threat of military force in the spring of 1877.

The Army was forcing them to live in Idaho and within the boundaries of a reservation defined by the 1863 Treaty. At just 770,000 acres, it was a fraction of the territory they were prom-

ised in the Treaty of 1855 and smaller yet than the tribe’s 17 million-acre traditional homeland.

Tribal Chairman Samuel Penney said to this day Nez Perce people call it the “Steal Treaty” because few of the tribe’s bands signed on to the rushed agreement precipitated by pressure from settlers and the discov-

ery of gold near Pierce. But in the government’s eyes, the treaty was valid and Nez Perce from places like the Wallowa, the Salmon River, White Bird and the Palouse were forced to relocate.

Later that summer, friction over the treaty and the forced exile led to war. A faction of the tribe engaged with the army in a series of

battles that stretched nearly 1,200 miles across Idaho and Montana. Chief Joseph eventually surrendered in the Bear Paw Mountains. He and many of his people were never allowed to return to the Wallowa Valley.

Despite the official exile, other Nez Perce people have been coming to the valley for more than a century to practice their religion, visit grave sites, hunt, fish, dig roots and pick berries. For decades they have participated in the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo that is being held this week. But the purchase gives them a place to stay, to be more than visitors in their own homeland.

“We are resilient people. We were forced out of here, but now look, we’ve come back,” said Ellenwood, also a member of the tribe’s executive committee. “We never really left but now it’s in black and white. It’s ours.”

A few hours earlier, tribal leaders on horseback headed a procession of riders and walkers from Joseph High School west along Wallowa Avenue, following the tribe’s traditional Imnaha Route to the property. Some wore traditional dress while others stuck with modern outfits.

Among the crowd were elders, toddlers and every age between.

“I think it’s really cool seeing all of us come together

and being able to walk on our homelands and take back our culture,” said Gabby Lewis, 23, of Spokane.

The short, 1-mile ride and walk was a symbolic nod to the heartbreaking trip Joseph and his people made as they left the scenic valley framed by towering peaks.

“There was a point where our elders turned back and thought they would never come back to this place and many never did,” said Nakia Williamson, director of the tribe’s cultural resource program. “As our people left on horses, we wanted to return on horseback.”

It was also a day for healing. Some of the differences and rifts — brought on by those who signed onto the 1863 Treaty and those who didn’t, those who practice traditional religion and those who follow Christianity — have persisted. The nontreaty Nez Perce were sent to Oklahoma and later to the Colville Reservation in northeastern Washington.

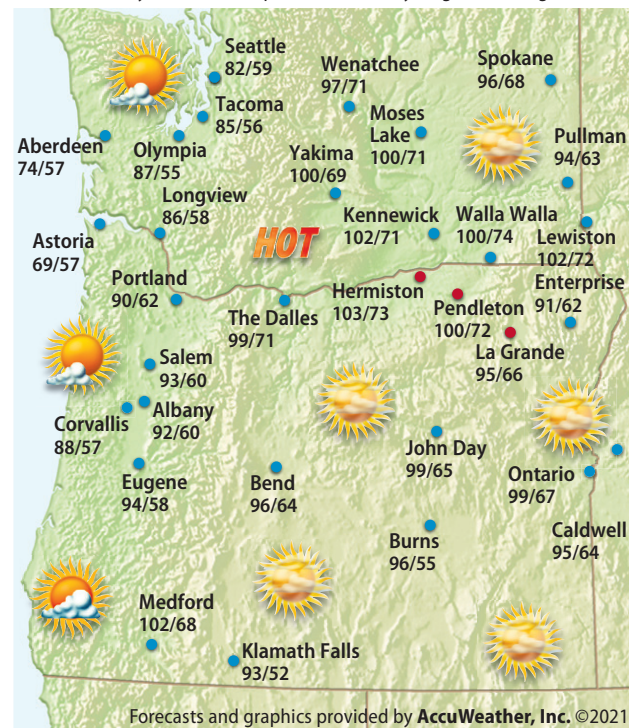
“Our people are buried in different areas, but this is where they are from,” said Jewie Davis, a Nez Perce man who lives at Nespelem on the Colville Reservation. “Those of us descended from Nespelem and those from Lapwai and those from Pendleton — there needs to come a time and a day when there is healing between all of us.”

## Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>HOT</b>	<b>HOT</b>			
Hazy sunshine and very hot	Partly sunny and very hot	Partly sunny and not as hot	Breezy; a shower in the morning	Partly sunny and nice
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
100° 72°	99° 70°	91° 67°	81° 60°	80° 60°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
103° 73°	103° 71°	95° 68°	85° 62°	84° 63°

## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



## ALMANAC

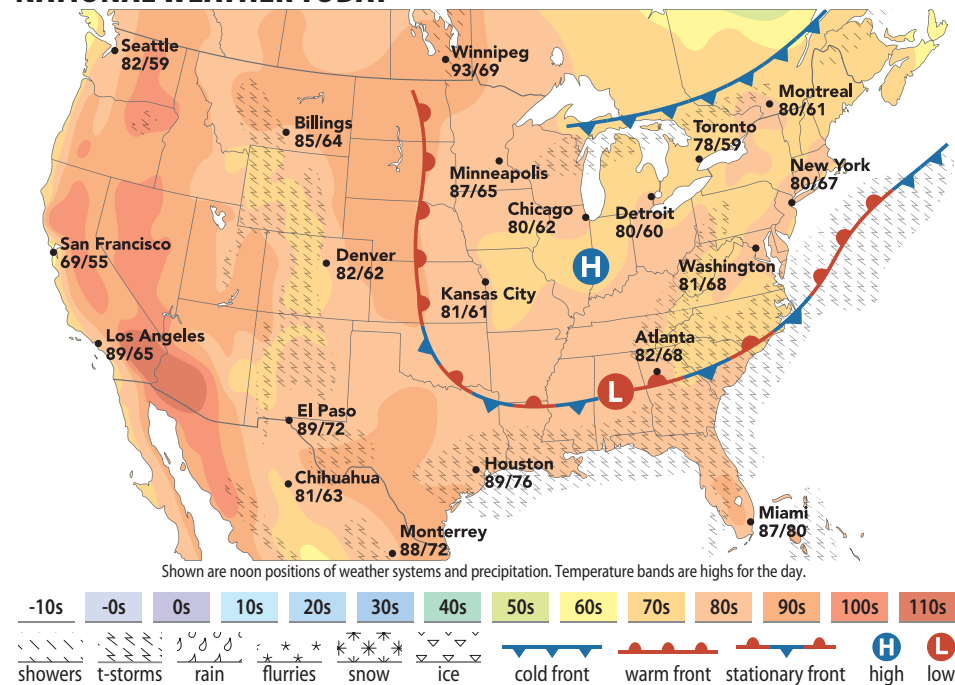
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	97°	66°	
Normals	91°	60°	
Records	107° (1898)	40° (1897)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.01"		
Normal month to date	0.02"		
Year to date	4.37"		
Last year to date	8.63"		
Normal year to date	8.33"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	97°	69°	
Normals	94°	60°	
Records	104° (1965)	44° (1987)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.00"		
Normal month to date	0.01"		
Year to date	1.93"		
Last year to date	1.66"		
Normal year to date	5.15"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	Wed.		
Boardman	SSW 4-8	WNW 4-8	
Pendleton	NNE 6-12	NW 4-8	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	5:41 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	8:21 p.m.		
Moonrise today	1:07 a.m.		
Moonset today	5:05 p.m.		
New First Full Last			
Aug 8	Aug 15	Aug 22	Aug 29

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 115° in Thermal, Calif. Low 38° in Stonington, Mich.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



## MERA open for nonmotorized uses

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE— Forty-five miles of trails are again available to hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders in the western Grande Ronde Valley.

The Mount Emily Recreation Area opened for day use on Saturday, July 31, for nonmotorized activities after having being closed completely the previous 10 days because of high fire danger due to hot and dry conditions.

The Union County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday, July 28, made the decision to partially reopen MERA via a 3-0 vote.

No motor vehicles of any kind are now allowed at MERA under the partial reopening rules, and smoking, campfires and overnight camping still will be prohibited. Smoking and campfires are banned under Oregon Department of Forestry regulations.

Mountain biking, hiking

and horseback riding are among the nonmotorized activities people can enjoy at MERA.

The commissioners voted to partially reopen MERA after receiving emails from hikers and mountain bikers asking for it to be reopened for nonmotorized use. Commissioner Paul Anderes said mountain bikers and hikers campaigned the hardest to get MERA partially reopened.

Anderes, who proposed the partial reopening, said the input did not influence his decision. He said his decision was based on information he received from the Oregon Department of Forestry, the U.S. Forest Service and county officials. He said the guidance provided from them made proposing the partial reopening of MERA appear to be the right move.

The decision the county board made to close MERA completely on July 21 also was proposed by Anderes, who helps oversee MERA in

his position on the board. He said his decisions to recommend the complete closure of MERA and then its partial reopening were very difficult.

“They have been the hardest I’ve made since becoming a commissioner,” said Anderes, who joined the Union County Board of Commissioners in 2019.

Emails read at the July 28 meeting said the MERA closure was hurting tourism in La Grande because travelers who would normally stop to visit MERA were traveling through the area and going elsewhere.

Other emails supported reopening the recreational area to motor vehicles. One stated that most wildfires are started by lightning and that only a small percentage are ignited by motor vehicles.

Sean Chambers, Union County parks coordinator, said since MERA was closed July 21 he knows of only one person who tried to use it.

“People have been very respectful,” he said.

## IN BRIEF

### OCA seeking donations to support farmers affected by wildfire

SALEM — The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association is seeking donations for its Wildfire Stewardship Fund to support producers who lost profit as a result of recent wildfires.

In 2020, 15 farmers impacted by wildfires requested over \$258,000 from the association, which was able to distribute \$45,000.

This year, requests are expected to be even higher because of the drastic effects of the Bootleg Fire, according to Robyn Smith, communications director of OCA.

“It’s really important because they’re going through so much this year, with drought conditions and insects and pest issues because of the high heat,” Smith said. “Any help would be valuable. It’s going to be a tough year.”

The organization also is accepting supply donations, such as medical supplies for cattle, nutritional supplements and fence material.

Grange Co-op has pledged to match up to \$5,000 in relief funds donated by customers at any of their Oregon locations.

Donations can be made online at orcatle.com, or mailed to the association at 1320 Capitol St. NE, Suite 150, Salem, OR 97301. —EO Media Group

**CORRECTIONS:** The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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