

Thankful for our public lands



BRAD TRUMBO

UPLAND PURSUITS



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

Marvin Shuttters and his mule, Peanut Butter, take a break after unloading camp supplies in the Wenaha Wilderness.

November is a special month. Not only because it's like an extension of October in the Walla Walla Valley, or that the late season big game hunts are open.

Rather, November offers a time of reflection as winter approaches and we gather with friends and family to give thanks. Given my love for fall, I spend many cool evenings reflecting on the outdoor opportunities I have been afforded over the years, and the magnificence of our nation's natural resources.

One extraordinary September evening a decade ago, 12 hours to the southeast of Waitsburg, I stood amid the roar of the Madison River in Yellowstone National Park. The sun had settled peacefully behind the western peaks while the cool humidity of fall sank into the river bottom. A soft, white haze began to form about 10 feet off the water as the cool air from above fought to smother the moderately warmer temperature and moisture rising from the river.

To my left was a house-sized granite boulder with a massive log jam against the upstream side. Twilight cast a dense glare across the river surface, but climbing up and standing atop the boulder, I could peer down and see a few very large mountain whitefish in the eddy on the downstream side. They darted swiftly in and out of the flow, nabbing a bedtime snack.

There was a glorious seam near a gravel bar across the current that was

too tempting not to fish. A tiny Adams fly was destined to be picked up by a feisty rainbow or brown trout.

Preparing to cast, I stripped out a fair piece of line and began loading the rod with short "false casts." Glancing left, the sight of my little blonde bride, Ali, waist deep in the current, laying out a dry fly brought a smile.

I stood momentarily entranced in the scene, but my revelry began to fade with the faint sound of a cow elk mewing, and then another, and yet another. Spotting movement behind Ali, I gawked awestruck for minutes as the dark evergreens under the fading light began to writhe with elk. Big, tawny bulls with rich, molasses manes, righthorns, cows and calves maneuvered among the trees on the opposite river bank. They slowly fed and drank directly opposite us as we remained stone still. I felt a fleeting sense belonging,

as if welcomed into their world. We were just part of the woodwork.

Daylight vanished with my rod held at my side. I drank in every precious moment of that scene as the final shred of visibility faded around a couple fly fishermen, engulfed by the ambient tumbling river and the screams of rutting bulls. We climbed from the chill of the river, stripped out of our waders and fired up the heat in our rig as we returned to our West Yellowstone hotel. That trip was noteworthy for a number of reasons, all of which are owed their own story, but fishing that evening hatch with my wife on the Madison will remain one of my fondest memories of Yellowstone.

Recalling that moment on the Madison conjures another elk story, only this one occurred closer to home.

It was modern firearm deer season and I had

packed into the Wenaha, spiked a camp and hunted the high ridges with my buddy, Marvin, in hopes of spotting a good mule deer buck and making a move. It was frigid for October and spitting snow. The Eagle Caps appeared as two small, snow-covered hummocks to the southeast. The atmosphere lit up around the peaks, pink as cotton candy from the few straggling rays of sun clutching the horizon. I could feel darkness approaching — an impenetrable cloak meant to shield the world from its own inhabitants.

In years past, I had seen mule deer in the familiar meadows, and packed a buddy's elk on a pack string after clawing our way up from the jagged bowls of the canyon bottom. My only encounter this day was cutting the tracks of a lone cougar and wolf, both on the same trail, and both the diameter of a softball. Worn

out and cold, I headed for camp only to suffer the fitful sleep of fall wilderness tent camping.

Awaking the next morning, the sky was incredibly clear with a billion shimmering stars. Within an hour, the warmth of golden sun would breach the eastern tree line, ending my frozen torment for 11 glorious, yet laborious, hours of searching for backcountry bucks. Standing peacefully over the hiss of my pack stove as the soothing aroma of hot coffee curled up, tickling my mustache, I stared wide-eyed at the first tinge of pink kissing the low horizon.

The black silhouettes of surrounding evergreens stood tall and firm like the sentinels of dawn. And unexpectedly, a bull elk let out a single bugle, not 100 yards from camp. His guttural squeal echoing around the edge of the meadow sent a chill down

my spine. I prickled with goosebumps.

Emotion spurred by a single, well-timed elk bugle brought a deep appreciation for our nation's wild, public lands. My love of the wilderness, fish and wildlife, and my thirst for these experiences are owed to my grandparents and the heritage they passed on. In that serene moment, I reflected on the teachings of my grandparents while waiting for coffee water to boil and Marvin's awakening. Somehow, his sleep came easy, and apparently sound, based on the rumbling snores that no doubt fended off the wildlife overnight.

Marvin and I packed out with nothing more than our camps on our backs, but there are many rewards to come from a wilderness experience, no tag-punching required.

These are merely two remarkable moments in a sportsman's life, where virtually limitless opportunities are available to all of us — the American public. As we share in our Thanksgiving feasts and late fall hunts, making new memories with friends and family, take a moment to give thanks to those responsible for setting aside our public lands and parks. Thank our military brethren who serve to ensure our freedom and opportunity to enjoy our nation's resources. Thank your friends and family who accompany you in the outdoors, perpetuating America's rich public lands heritage and opportunity.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington, where he also actively serves the Walla Walla-based Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever chapter. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.

Racism:

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is used to support administrative action and healing as well as prevent reoccurrence," the statement read.

According to the release, La Grande High School will administer implicit bias professional development for athletes and coaches at the school. The two school districts are making plans to hold a meeting between team captains, athletics directors and coaches.

La Grande Athletic Director Darren Goodman said the athletic department still is gathering facts. He declined to comment to preserve the integrity of the ongoing investigation.

The statement noted OSAA has been in communication with the game's officiating crew. Officials and chain crew members have sent their official statements to OSAA recounting their description of the on-field interactions.

"They're trying to get as many facts as they can," said Pete Caldwell, commissioner of the Northeast Oregon Football Officials Association.



Andrew Cutler/The Observer, File

La Grande's Jarrett Armstrong pressures Gladstone quarterback Brayde Owen during the first half of a first-round state matchup Nov. 2, 2021, at Community Stadium, La Grande.

tion. "My officials have given statements and participated in that investigation process."

The statement reinforces the use of OSAA S.T.A.R sportsmanship expectations, which promote sportsmanship and combats racism and discrimination during athletic events.

As the investigation continues, both schools are taking the extra steps to resolve any issues between teams and ensure a respectful environment during

athletic competitions.

While the two schools, along with the OSAA, have come to an agreement on programs moving forward, OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber said the issue is far from being resolved.

"We will be working with an independent investigator to see exactly what took place and act from there," Weber said. "To see the school districts looking into this seriously, and going forward, making sure this relationship

is repaired, is positive."

Weber said the steps La Grande is taking are encouraging, and has the support of Gladstone.

"They were supportive in signing the joint release," he said. "We have been working with both school districts and what steps can be done."

Weber said issues of racism, complaints and other incidents come across his desk during the school year. Each is thoroughly investigated.

"There are instances that schools deal with personally, or instances where they come to us," he said. "We work through it with everyone's best interest. We all want this experience (high school athletics) to be supportive for everyone — students, coaches and spectators. When that doesn't happen, that is something we take seriously."

— East Oregonian sports reporter Annie Fowler contributed to this article.

ON THE SLATE

SATURDAY, NOV. 20

Prep football

2A state semifinals: Heppner vs. Coquille at McMinnville High School, noon

College women's basketball

Eastern Oregon vs. Montana Western, Caldwell, Idaho, 2 p.m.

Lower Columbia at Blue Mountain, 5 p.m.

College men's basketball

Blue Mountain vs. Mountain Home AFB, 2 p.m.

SUNDAY, NOV. 21

College men's wrestling

Eastern Oregon at Spokane Open, Spokane, Washington, TBA

College women's wrestling

Eastern Oregon at Spokane Open, Spokane, Washington, TBA

College women's basketball

Clark at Blue Mountain, 2 p.m.

TUESDAY, NOV. 23

Prep girls bowling

Hermiston at Kennewick, 2:30 p.m.

TUESDAY, NOV. 30

Prep girls basketball

Hermiston at Davis, 5:45 p.m.

Prep boys basketball

Hermiston at Davis, 7:30 p.m.

Shell:

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to be one too. It stuck like glue. I was that little kid who didn't have the ball, I would go get a flower."

In addition to playing school ball with the Tiger-Scots, Shell also plays for the USA Explosion out of Connell, Washington. She is entering her third year with the team.

Shell also works with catching coach Jordan Schilling, who works at ai Sports in Walla Walla.

"I am the catcher I am today because of her," Shell said. "She is more than my

catching coach. She is my mentor for all things. She is truly amazing."

While summer ball can be cut throat at times, Shell enjoys playing with Tiger-Scots to balance things out.

"At Weston-McEwen, we still find really good competition in 2A," Shell said. "I still feel like I get good competition. I can just keep training and have fun with the game."

In an abbreviated spring season her junior year, Shell hit .440 with 22 hits, including five doubles and two home runs. She struck out just four times in 50 at-bats. She also had 15 RBIs, scored 24 runs and had six errors in 15 games.

"I met Madi as a seventh grader and we counted the

years until she got here and could catch for us," Griggs said. "We realized she had a lot more abilities than to sit behind the plate. At a school this size, you have to play more than one position. She has been a real benefit to us and we are certainly going to miss her when she goes. She leaves a good group behind her."

She also will leave her parents Rob and Trisha behind, but Shell knows she will see them in the stands as often as their schedules allow.

"My parents just want to make sure I'm happy and having fun with softball," Shell said. "They have been so supportive through all of this, which is fun to have."

Cutest Adopted or Rescue Pet photo contest





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View Rules and Prize information at eastoregonian.com/pet_contest