

Bah, the wildfires are back

Don't look now, but fire season's arriving, however much too early this may seem.

Our local area this week received a grim reminder of what's in store for us again this summer in terms of burning public lands. On Monday morning, June 15, nearly a full week before the summer solstice, fire was spotted on Little Basin Creek in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. By the time the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest issued its first public statement on the blaze Monday afternoon, it was already reported at more than 100 acres, burning in grass, and by Tuesday morning the acreage total had reached 500.

The U.S. Forest Service and Oregon Department of Forestry were deploying an assortment of resources in response, including two helicopters and an air tanker, but Monday's press release also noted that it was early days yet in the 2015 fire season and "not all firefighting resources are in active duty status."

If we're truly fortunate, the Little Basin Fire will eventually be noted as an aberrant blip preceding the onset of the summer's heavy burning by many days, but we should also realize that, from here on, we're largely at the mercy of the elements — namely, the occurrence or absence of lightning strikes — and the same recent heavy spring rains that have modestly improved our irrigation outlook have also juiced the growth of grass.

"That grass will eventually dry out and it is a fuel type that really helps spread fires," said Brian Goff, fire management officer for the Umatilla National Forest, during a pre-season conference call last week with area media, hosted by both the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla national forests and joined by the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Officials say an average fire season in the Northeast Oregon/Southeast Washington zone served by the La Grande-based Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center (BMIDC) sees 301 actual fires (as differentiated from mere "smoke chases") and last year's tally stood at 365. Most fires occur sometime between mid-July and late August and the majority are lightning-caused.

We can take some comfort in learning same-day containment is achieved for fully 97 percent of reported blazes, using primarily local resources for these Type 4- and Type 5-classified fires, and, if initial attack isn't so successful, extensive regional resources are usually available, including aircraft based at La Grande and Walla Walla.

About those aircraft: Bret Ruby, fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, worries they may at times become abruptly grounded by private, drone-owning citizens who decide to fly their unmanned hobby craft above a fire. He mentions a YouTube-posted video someone captured from an unmanned aerial vehicle flying high above a fire last year near Bend. "It took quite a panorama of what this fire was doing," Ruby said.

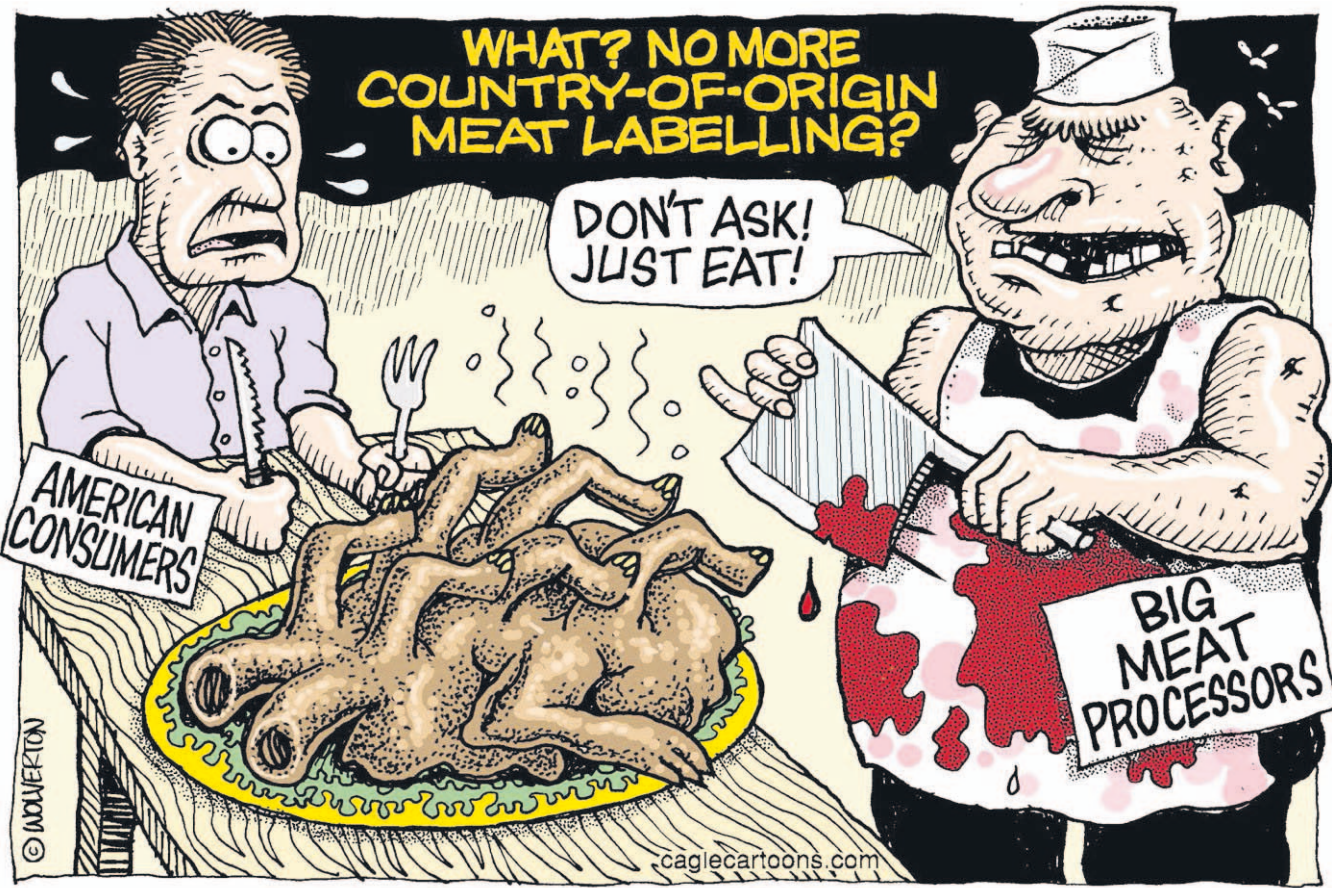
Anytime fire managers learn there's a drone flitting about, Ruby says, their only recourse is to "shut down all aircraft use over the fire." In explanation he adds, "A collision between one of our aircraft and one of these drones would be catastrophic."

And we all know that UAVs' popularity is only soaring. Want to aid the firefighting cause? If you own a drone, you can start by not hindering efforts. If there's a fire, keep your craft well away. If you have a UAV-owning friend, double-check that he or she understands the importance of this issue.

The rest of us will content ourselves with following the calendar and watching the skies, trying to finally imagine some way of warding off lightning for a good long period of days.

—RCR

EDITORIAL
The voice of the Chieftain



Tribe's local past still resonates

A few hundred Nez Perce Indians called this Valley home for thousands of years. They called themselves Nimipu ("the people") and identified with this place, their families, their band and its headmen (Young Joseph, Old Joseph, Wal-lam-wat-kain, and on and on) more than any larger tribal group.

European horses and diseases got here before Europeans did, and then the fur traders, who probably had seen a couple of Indians in buffalo country with dentalia they had picked up at Celilo through their nostrums, and put the Nez Perce name on them. This all before 1805 and Lewis and Clark. The fur men, migrants themselves, many from France and Scotland, trapped, traded, traveled and married with Indians. They had posts in Spokane and made it to the Pacific just five or six years after the Corps of Discovery.

Historian Grace Bartlett says there were a couple of Frenchmen living in the Wallowa Valley with Indian wives when the first settlers came in — that was all the way up to 1871, when all manner of people were rattling around what some call Salmon Country — the lands from the British Columbian coast to the Northern California coast, and from salt water to the Rockies.

Settlers came after fur men, missionaries, surveyors, treaty makers, and gold seekers. It's a long complicated story — thousands of years long and the length of rivers and mountain ranges, and the Nez Perce National Historical Park collects the pieces and tells the story in places across four states — Idaho, Ore-



MAIN STREET
Rich Wandschneider

gon, Washington, and Montana. They're headquartered in Spalding, Idaho (ironically, named after the early missionaries to the Nez Perce) and are celebrating 50 years of work. One of the ways they are celebrating is with a show of "gift art," the beaded bags, cradleboards, flutes, and moccasins Indians made and still make for children, sisters, and friends. And, fortunately for us here in Wallowa County, the first showing of this work is at the Joseph Center on Main Street in the town of Joseph (named, of course, after the last Indian headman who lived here).

It came on May 30 and will be up until the June 28. On the opening day we celebrated with Indian singers and drummers and artists and interpreters telling us stories. Happily, May would have marked the 100th birthday of Alvin M. Joseph Jr. the man who told the Nez Perce story in exquisite detail, told it with the background of horses, diseases, fur traders, "discoverers," missionaries, treaty makers, gold strikes, the Civil War, etc., told it, as much as he could, through the eyes and voices of the people themselves. On May 31, we celebrated his centenary.

There were still three survivors of the War of 1877 alive when Alvin began his work, and he spoke with them. When

the Nez Perce returned to the Northwest in 1884 from the place they still call the "hot country" (Leavenworth; Indian Territory), the young men and those closest to Joseph were sent to Colville, in Washington — there was still much fear of Indians in Idaho and Oregon. Alvin went to hear the stories in Colville too. And in 1965 he published *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, still — 50 years later — the acknowledged starting point for book learning about the tribe and culture.

The drummers stayed and played for the Joseph party. Gordy High Eagle, one of the drummers, had been a "camper" at the Joseph house in the earliest days of the Chief Joseph Summer Seminar, then known as the Day Camp. Indian kids came for several summers, and always stayed at the Josephs'. Another camper, Albert Barros, is now on the tribal council in Idaho. He brought a proclamation from the Tribe honoring Alvin. Betty Joseph, Alvin's wife, was honored too — Albert called her "mom."

Bobbie Conner, who is now the director of the Tamástlikt Cultural Institute on the Umatilla Reservation and is of Cayuse and Nez Perce descent, spoke movingly of listening as a child as Alvin talked with her grandfather.

She also spoke movingly of this Wallowa land, thanked those of us who live here for loving it and taking care of it, reminded us why her people tried so hard to hold onto it.

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Mindsets dismissive of our streets

Why Joseph residents vote against street improvement

GUEST COLUMN

Evelyn Swart

I am disappointed that Joseph residents voted down the street improvement project, but I am not surprised. These are some comments I have heard from Joseph residents as reasons they would not vote for street improvements. They were made by individual residents and are not a consensus of the community.

1. We don't need to raise money from the residents to improve the streets. Each resident can fill the potholes in front of their own lots.

2. There are plenty of retired people in the community who have little to do. They can fill the potholes.

3. The city crew does not keep the streets maintained. Until they maintain the streets, I will not vote for street maintenance.

4. The street proposal calls for an inferior quality road that will not last.

5. We do not need fancy expensive streets.

6. If the city would keep the trucks off residential streets, we wouldn't have

potholes.

7. People who own large properties would be charged too much if the city charged by property value.

8. People who own smaller lots shouldn't have to pay as much as those people who own large properties.

9. A lot of older retired people in Joseph are on a fixed income and cannot afford to pay for street improvement.

10. Bills for street improvement should not be attached to the water bill.

11. Why can't we get a grant to improve the streets?

12. People from all over come to Joseph and use our streets. They should help pay for the streets in Joseph.

13. Our city maintenance crew could pave the streets. We should not have to pay someone else to come in and do it.

14. The county could pave the Joseph streets.

15. "I'm okay with gravel streets. Gravel streets don't have potholes and they are easily fixed by graders."

16. There were no paved streets in the

1880s. What was good enough for them is good enough for us.

17. The newcomers are trying to make Joseph look like Los Angeles.

Reasons to vote FOR Joseph street improvement

In response to so many complaints regarding poor streets and great potholes, the city council tried to help the residents make a decision to remedy the situation. However, it is easier to find negative reasons than it is to come up with positive ways to accomplish any project. The number of positive reasons to improve Joseph streets is not limited to this list which is entirely my own creation.

1. The potholes cause vehicles to require repairs.

2. Traffic on the poorly maintained streets kick up a lot of dust causing problems for asthma victims.

3. House cleaning is very difficult when so much dust from the streets is filtering in.

See STREETS, Page A5

Sheriff an enforcer, not a judge

To the Editor:

It feels a bit silly to write this, as what I'm going to say is so blatantly obvious, but unfortunately there seems to be a need to say this. The sheriff's job is to enforce laws, not act as a judge as to whether the laws are constitutional — that's what the judicial system is for. Having a law enforcement officer unilaterally declaring a law unconstitutional is blatantly unconstitutional in itself and is more akin to totalitarianism.

If the law in question is indeed unconstitutional, then all it takes is one person, charged with breaking the law, contesting its constitutionality in court. If the courts find the law constitutional, it stands. If it's found to be unconstitutional it's gone. That's it, plain and simple. No matter how you feel about the Sec-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ond Amendment or gun control, you have good reason to find the sheriff's disregard for the rule of law and the U.S. Constitution very troubling.

Leon Werdinger
Joseph

Hats off to car show folks for a job well done

To the Editor:

I wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge the extraordinary and exceptional job that Chuck Garrett and

his volunteers did in producing last weekend's car show. We at the Tram have the opportunity to talk to a lot of patrons and most often we ask some basic questions.

It was heartening to hear their praise for the organization and overall production of the car show event.

These same patrons also were very complimentary of the community overall and, of course, the beauty of the Wallowa Mountains and Valley. Also, very often, they remark that they are becoming more aware of our tourism venue because of the Seven Wonders campaign sponsored by Travel Oregon.

Again, hats off to Chuck and his crew.

Michael Lockhart
Wallowa Lake Tramway

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