

Enviros worsen wildfire problems, Walden says

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — U.S. Rep. Greg Walden spoke to an enthusiastic audience during a town hall meeting on Sept. 14 at Community Connection. While Walden covered several issues during the meeting, management of U.S. forests and that relationship to growing wildfire problems in the West predominated.



Walden

Walden did not criticize the U.S. Forest Service itself, but pointed to environmental groups that use lawsuits to stall or halt USFS efforts to maintain healthy forests. "These fires are dangerous and devastating and shouldn't be occurring at this level. It's happening in part because we're not giving the men and women in the agencies the tools they need to do the work," he said.

Walden touted bill HR 2647 that passed through the House and would fund some wildfire fighting through the Federal Emergency Management Agency by treating wildfires as a natural disaster. The bill also reforms the National Environmental Policies Act and streamlines the process to begin logging and thinning federal lands. The bill requires replanting

within five years in areas impacted by wildfire, and limits lawsuits filed by environmental groups by requiring the posting of a bond before proposed litigation. It also makes changes to salvage practices after wildfires.

Walden said this is the third consecutive year the House has passed legislation that allows for healthier forest management practices. He blamed the Senate for letting the proposed legislation get bogged down in committee. Walden also said Oregon senators Merkley and Wyden were not on board with the bill. "I'm just saying, some of them have their own bills and all that, but even those never got to the floor of the Senate," he said.

In relation to farm and ranch recovery from fires, Walden said that several government agencies, including the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the USFS could offer assistance. "They have programs, and they're ready to help any way they can," he said.

The forest fire issue hit home with Troy ranchers Buck and Chelsea Matthews, who run cows on Eden Bench near Troy, which the Grizzly Bear Complex fire nearly

destroyed. Buck Matthews addressed Walden, saying many roads in the area that could have been used to provide quicker access to the fire were closed off by the USFS. "If those roads would have been accessible, the fire could have been stopped long before it was," Matthews said.

Matthews also alleged that USFS fire mismanagement cost him a significant portion of grazing land for the family's cattle, and possibly some cattle as well. The USFS started a backburn to combat the main fire, which possibly left some of the Matthews' cows caught in between to fend for themselves. Also, the main fire never reached the intended backburn, which destroyed a large portion of the family's grazing for their cattle.

A possible wolf attack also injured the family's much-needed cow dogs. "It feels like our hands are tied by people who have no skin in the game," Chelsea Matthews said.

A sympathetic Walden urged the family to document their losses for the purpose of reimbursement from government programs.

Walden held out some hope that the devastation from the year's fire season could clear the way for making progress with federal forest lands management. "The public is with us. You can't look at these fires and say, 'That's a good thing.' You can't ingest this smoke and say, 'That's a healthy thing.' There's a lot of built-up energy to go do what we want to do; we've just got some people in the way," Walden said.

Community Calendar: Supermoon eclipse talk

Wednesday, Sept. 23
Town Hall with Sen. Bill Hansell and Rep. Greg Barreto, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., Tomas Conference Room at the Wallowa County Chamber office, 309 S. River St., Enterprise. Hansell and Barreto will talk about 2015 legislative session — the "good, bad, and ugly" of what was proposed, and field questions from constituents.

Sept. 24-27
Oregon's Alpenfest, multiple locations. Thursday in Enterprise: 3:45 p.m. Main Street procession; 5:30 p.m. accordions at Terminal Gravity. Friday at Edelweiss Inn, Wallowa Lake: 6 p.m. polka lesson, free; 7 p.m. performance, \$15 admission, \$7 for kids. Saturday at Edelweiss Inn: 8-11 a.m. breakfast; noon and 6 p.m. polka lessons, free; 1 and 7 p.m. performances, \$15, kids \$7. Saturday at Joseph Visitor Center: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., accordionists. Sunday at Edelweiss Inn: 8-11 a.m. breakfast; 11 a.m. polka lesson, free; noon performance, \$15, kids \$7.

Saturday, Sept. 26
Enterprise Cemetery Fall Cleanup Day, 9 a.m. to noon. All are welcome to participate. Info: Sondra Lozier, 541-426-3229.

Evening Under the Stars Dinner and Auction, at Tamkaliks grounds in Wallowa. Annual fundraiser organized

by Friends of the Wallowa School District. Social hour at 5 p.m., dinner 6 p.m., auction 7 p.m. Music students provide entertainment. Tickets at Blonde Strawberry and Wallowa Library. More info: 541-886-4501. Note: In event of inclement weather, gathering moves indoors to Beth Johnson Room at the school.

Sunday, Sept. 27
Supermoon eclipse events, sponsored by Wallowology: 5:30 p.m. presentation at Wallowa Lake Lodge by Eastern Oregon Astronomy Club, includes refreshments; 6:30 p.m. gathering at Iwetemlaykin State Park to watch partially eclipsed moonrise over the east moraine. Binoculars recommended for the moonrise viewing. Attendees of the Lodge gathering can take a shuttle or drive from there to the Iwetemlaykin gathering.

Wednesday, Sept. 30
Oregon's Alpenfest volunteers' thank-you potluck, 5:30 p.m., Edelweiss Inn at Wallowa Lake.

Saturday, Oct. 3
Open House at Wallowa County Humane Society Information Center, 104 N. River St., Enterprise. Including an adoption day for foster animals, and a celebration recognizing humane society volunteers, among other activities. Center to operate for extended hours this day, further details to come. Info: 541-432-1630.

Saturday, Oct. 10
Founders Day in Lostine. Four sites with different times. Lostine Community Marketplace, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.: collectibles, antiques, Shabby Chic sidewalk sale; quilt show and sale; Grange Rada knife sale; artisan demos, live sheep exhibit, wool fibercraft demos. M. Crow & Co., 3 to 5 p.m.: free drinks, snacks, good company. Lostine Tavern, all day: sheep-herder drinks, lamb dinner special, late night entertainment. South Fork Grange, 7 to 10 p.m.: Family dance with Home-made Jam; pie and ice cream social.

Oct. 26-27
Eagle Cap Shooters Association's annual "Sight in Your Rifle Days," 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. both days at range on Ant Flat. Free hot dogs, chips and drinks from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. both days.

The Community Calendar lists fundraisers, free local events and those with a nominal fee organized by non-profit organizations. Submit information to calendar@wallowa.com. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. To promote for-profit events, contact sales representative Brooke Pace at bp@wallowa.com.

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Join us for **SUPERMOON SuperEclipse**
Sunday Sept. 27th
Next SuperEclipse: 2033

5:30pm Astronomy at the Lodge
Join us at Wallowa Lake Lodge to learn about SuperEclipses, with SuperMaps of SuperMaria on the SuperMoon. Learn what's so Super about the SuperMoon? Come enjoy green cheese appetizers.

6:30pm • Eclipse Viewing at Iwetemlekin
Watch the maximum eclipse and and explore the sky with local astronomers **DJ Lincoln** and **Zeke Hale**. Bring your binoculars. If cloudy, then we'll get cozy with cocoa, watch *Cosmos* and ask questions.

Wallowology!
at Wallowa Lake Lodge
Natural History Discovery Center
508 N. Main • Joseph • Across from Coco's and Mutiny • wallowology.org

The Chieftain says,
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The Chieftain will be donating all pink ad color proceeds from the month of October to the Wallowa Memorial Hospital. The money will go towards mammography exams for those unable to afford them in Wallowa County.

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