

# TOUR

Continued from Page A1

“Forest collaboratives are something I’ve viewed with a certain degree of skepticism, borne out of the fact that I wasn’t sure the state of Oregon should be spending money to do work I think the Forest service should be doing,” Johnson said. “After listening to people say the collaboratives may be the last best chance to put people to work, get money for local counties and reduce fire danger, I decided we shouldn’t let the perfect get in the way of the good.”

The event included a partial trip down Redmond grade to visit Troy for a firsthand look at some of the devastation caused by the Grizzly Bear Complex fire. Roberts stopped the journey about halfway down the grade, where the group got a clear view of some of the fire, including one home and property that bore the remnants of fire retardant. Chelsea Matthews, wife of rancher Buck Matthews, gave a compelling account of the family’s experience with the fire, and how two of their cowedogs were mauled by wolves in the aftermath of the blaze.

The tour traveled to Sheep Creek Hill, east of Joseph, where area ranchers expressed their frustration with wolves and getting the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to confirm wolf depredations. Johnson described the trip as an eye-opener. “I enjoyed the trip enormously, found it

informative, and preparations on the ground were terrific,” Johnson said. “A lot of people took a lot of time to help us understand the issues.”

Johnson also said that after listening to ranchers express their frustration about their



Courtesy of Cynthia Warnock

**Local cattleman Rod Childers holds forth on the problem of wolves at Sheep Creek Hill. Bruce Dunn of the Natural Resource Advisory Council towed a portable toilet for members of the delegation.**

lack of options if they disagreed with the ODFW about a questionable wolf depredation, she was in favor of creating a separate and neutral adjudicating body as an appeal avenue for ranchers. She also said she favored more

more successful. According to ODFW statistics 56,000 cougar tags were sold in 2014 but only 209 hunters successfully filled their tags. This is partly because 41,000 cougar tags were part of the Sport Pac, along with upland bird and waterfowl, spring turkey, general and controlled buck deer and elk and general or con-

whether it was the forest, fires or wolves,” Roberts said. “They engaged with the people of our county. In my opinion, it was more effective than some others we’ve done.”

Sen. Hansell, who initiated the event, said he was pleased with the results. “I heard nothing but very positive responses of my colleagues, about what they saw and who they met,” Hansell said. “They had questions answered and were already talking among themselves, asking what they could do legislatively to help.”

Hansell also said he was glad that several state departments sent key personnel as representatives.

“They’re the nuts and bolts who will implement the policies we hope to legislate,” Hansell said.

# COUGAR

Continued from Page A1

Wildlife Services State Director David Williams said the agency had “great certainty that the Canby cougar responsible was taken by the livestock producer.” It was a healthy, 126-pound male, age 3-4.

In response to the incident and subsequent cougar sightings, the west side of the state began to take a keener interest in the growing cougar population. An Oct. 20 Oregonian editorial revisited the idea of counties opting out of the ban on hunting cougars with dogs – revitalizing the discussion.

Four bills in the legislature that would allow this have already been floated – with identical wording, according to Brandon Pursinger, legislative director for Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena.

Sen. Hansell introduced

his bill (SB 126) last session. Other replica bills that have been introduced include those of Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, (SB 453), Rep. Wayne Krieger, R-Gold Beach (HB2050) and the House Committee for Natural Resources (HB 2181).

The wording of the bills allows counties to exempt themselves from the ban if the county passes a measure allowing the hunting of cougar with dogs.

The bills originally stalled because they went counter to the state ban, but the opt-out provision that applied to Measure 91, the law to allow the sale and use of medical marijuana, set a precedent that is now being tested in other areas.

State lawmakers may only introduce two bills each in the upcoming short session, and Sen. Hansell is committed to his two bills on management of wolves and compensation

for ranchers suffering wolf predation. He has a third bill related to human safety with regard to wolf conflict on his plate as well.

However, if the state Fish and Wildlife Commission withdraws Endangered Species Act protections for wolves during its Nov. 9 meeting, as recommended by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Sen. Hansell may be able to switch gears and reintroduce the opt-out bill on cougar hunting.

“It’s possible one of these bills can be reintroduced

in the short session, but we won’t know until December,” said Pursinger.

Hansell said that if the wolf is delisted animal activist groups most likely will file suit against ODFW and he will have to defend his stance, making it unlikely he will be able to put the cougar hunting ban on his short list of bills to present.


Wildlife Service officials are allowed to use dogs to hunt cougars that prey on domestic animals or stray too near to human habitation because the practice is

controlled bear hunting. Many hunters have no firm plans to hunt all of the animals in the Sport Pac, but want to be prepared if an opportunity presents itself.

Editor’s note: A previous version of this article greatly underestimated the number of cougar tags distributed by the state each year.

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