

The long road to resiliency

Several dozen Wallowa County residents showed up March 29 for our local version of the latest public meetings regarding the U.S. Forest Service’s regional Forest Resiliency Project. The project is intended “to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration in the area, restoring the Blue Mountains to healthier condition and lowering the risk of severe wildfires.”

As the price we pay each wildfire season seems to grow exponentially, it’s refreshing to hear federal officials discussing strategies for dealing with the wildfire threat before it happens rather than simply accepting a role as fire responders.

The federal presence on March 29 at Cloverleaf Hall was impressive — about one USFS representative for every two residents. If you had something to say about the forest plan that night, you were bound to be heard.

The Forest Resiliency Project is a massive undertaking that covers three national forests — Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Ochoco — and is expected to take at least 15 years once initiated. It paints forest policy in broad strokes. It’s about new ideas, and it doesn’t address implementation at all; that will be decided by individual forest supervisors. That’s more good news for those who are fed up with the cookie-cutter approach to forest policy.

One thing that was clear that night, however, is that patience among local residents is in short supply. A majority of comments had to do with implementation, which the plan does not address. Who gets the work? How do we increase access to firewood? Will you try to preserve huckleberry patches? How will the project affect hunting opportunities?

Wallowa-Whitman Supervisor Thomas Montoya, who was in attendance, said he expects implementation of the project to begin in spring 2018 at the earliest. That’s assuming all goes smoothly, which is rare when you’re talking forest policy. Montoya also pointed out that implementation would begin slowly with small pilot projects.

Until that time, many local comments on the project will have to be tucked away and dusted off years down the road when theory finally gives way to reality in our federal forest land.

Meanwhile, Ed Sparks of Wallowa is doing exactly the kind of restoration work on private land that the Forest Resiliency Project potentially has in store for federal land. Sparks was featured in a March 30 article by Chieftain reporter Kathleen Ellyn about his success in finding a profitable route back into our forests. He’s working a portion of Galen Williams’ 1,880-acre timberland in the Shell Resources Management Area north of Wallowa. It’s a win-win situation. Williams protects his investment by creating forest stands that are healthier and more fire resistant at almost zero cost. Sparks turns a profit by reusing just about every scrap he pulls out of the forest to produce and sell posts, poles, stakes, retaining wall timbers and more.

So while we wait at least two years for the USFS to launch its 15-year project in baby steps on public land, it’s great to see proactive approaches on private land. And Williams isn’t alone. Sparks has been contacted by other private landowners interested in low-cost restoration, and he says he already has enough work lined up to last him until retirement.

Fatalists will say the feds are out to keep everyone off of public land and that the days of earning a living in the forest are over. It’s a message that doesn’t get through to Ed Sparks, who can’t hear you over the hum of his machinery.

— Scot Heisel

Clarification

An article last week about Northeast Oregon Network (NEON) and upcoming Community Health Worker training sessions omitted contact information. For details, please visit www.neonoregon.org or contact Vixen Radford-Weeks of NEON at 541-398-2539 or vradford@neonoregon.org.

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Swept away on a splendid day

I got pushed into the Wallowa River the other day. So rude. The worst part is, it was the river itself that pushed me in. I’m just glad it didn’t steal my lunch money, too. I was wading a little bit too far out, evidently, so I’ll take responsibility. The water was up to my ribcage with a couple of inches between the top of the river and the top of my waders. A little deep, but boy howdy, if I could just reach a cast out a li-i-i-ttle bit farther I’d be drifting through primo steelhead water. Just knew there was a fish in there. If it didn’t have my name on it, it had my initials at the very least. I found a solid rock on the bottom to brace one foot against. Got settled in with the current nudging me down and the rock holding me back. Got a cast off — just inside where it needed to be. Ball one.

The second cast zinged out and settled right above the business district of steelhead boulevard, starting its drift toward a good chance at good things. The clouds had just let the sun through for a quick visit after a couple of days of sideways spring snow. Birds were chirping. New grass was poking up next to outbound snow. On the drive to the river I’d smiled at the awfully cute new lambs and calves getting acquainted with their legs. Good stuff. And here I was, a little bit cocky about getting ready to set the hook on a silver torpedo any second now. If it was going to happen it would likely happen

AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

right abouuuut ... I went horizontal as the current lifted my legs off the bottom and a sinking feeling, combined with actually sinking, collided with the great mood from half a second earlier.

I tell you, that is confusing. To be so pleased with the world and then so underwater all in the same motion. There had been just a gnat’s eyebrow worth of friction keeping the felt sole of my wading boot against that rock. I shifted just a tiny bit, anticipating a fish, and whoop! — see you later, sturdy rock. Hello, water rushing in my armpits.

This would be a great time for a public service announcement about wading belts. You should wear one. My little slip and dip was no big deal. I flailed around for a few seconds but got back on my feet pretty quick. I mean, sure, maybe I pulled a hamstring a little bit during the thrashing around that was totally no big deal. Yeah, my cotton sweatshirt weighed 45 pounds after sponging up the Wallowa River. Yes, my fleece pants absorbed more than a little moisture and I squished around with every step the rest of the day. But at least my belt

prevented most of the water from getting inside the wader legs and causing more than just wetness. I see folks now and then on the river in waders with no belt. Maybe they’re not wading out too far because they have an abundance of common sense. I don’t know. But, still. Wear a belt.

I squeezed five pounds of water from each sleeve of my cotton sweatshirt and looked back at that enticing water I’d just been swept away from. Hey, this is America. We don’t quit. A bald eagle flew over. Somewhere. Not over me right then, but I’m sure a bald eagle somewhere was flying over something. I squished my way right back upstream, waded out there again and I am proud to tell you that I started getting pushed downstream again and said, “forget this,” and gave up on that spot. But I kept fishing, you see. And I was cold. And wet. And I am proud to tell you I squished around all day like that and when you refuse to give up, sometimes that’s when you still don’t catch a fish. At all. All day long. Just, you’re pretty cold. And really wet.

There’s probably a moral or something in there. A takeaway message of some kind. I don’t know. I don’t want to get too deep. So, happy spring. Good luck fishing. Wear that belt.

Jon Rombach is a local columnist for the Chieftain.

High praise for superintendent process

LETTERS to the EDITOR

The Enterprise School Board is due a huge thank you. They took what could have been a closed-door search for a new superintendent/elementary principal and turned it into a process that included parents, community members, teachers and students.

The “round-robin” interview Tuesday of the three candidates allowed those in attendance to listen to questions and answers with all three, after short introductions by each of them.

We were also encouraged to judge the candidates on different points and turn our thoughts in at the end of the evening. Thank you for knowing that this process is important not only to the administration, but also to students, parents, teachers and the community as a whole. And thank you for allowing us to be a part of it.

Well done, school board. Well done.

Kannon Miller
Enterprise

Spending cuts at what cost?

I received an unsolicited letter from Oregon Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) dated Feb. 15 that lists the very

things we should question about the current Congress. The letter is too long to list in its entirety in this forum, so I am quoting one issue at a time. This week, the budget:

“Congress continues work to reduce wasteful spending and balance the federal budget. In recent years, we’ve enacted the most significant spending reductions in modern history, and the House and the Senate agreed to the first balanced budget agreement since 2001. That’s progress, but Congress still needs

Submit a letter

Letters are subject to editing and should be limited to 275 words. Writers should also include a phone number with their signature so we can call to verify identity. The Chieftain does not run anonymous letters.

You can submit a letter to the Wallowa County Chieftain in person; by mail to P.O. Box 338, Enterprise, OR 97828; by email to editor@wallowa.com; or via the submission form at the newspaper’s website, located at wallowa.com. (Drop down the “Opinion” menu on the navigation bar to see the relevant link).

to pass a Constitutional Amendment to require a balanced budget so that taxpayers are protected no matter who is in control in Washington, D.C.”

If a man is defined by his actions, this Congress has been so defined. No reference in this letter has been made to national infrastructure (see America’s infrastructure report card, D+, American Society of Civil Engineers), family services (14.8 percent of U.S. families are impoverished, according to the Census Bureau), education (U.S. children rank 14th in a field of 40 global nations, via ranking.america.wordpress.com) or renewable energy.

It seems apparent that increased funding for the military and veterans benefits was accomplished at the expense of every fabric of our nation while Congress enacted “the most significant spending reductions in modern history.”

Congress has given us a global police force to the detriment of national health.

If you think I am being critical of Rep. Walden or his letter, that is not the case.

The entire Congress must be questioned, and we voters need to be more selective of our representatives.

As my dear ol’ Daddy used to say when exasperated with my brothers and myself, it is time to “clean house.”

David Ebbert
Enterprise

Where to write

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1129. Fax: 503-326-2990.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R — (Second District) 1404 Longworth Building, Washington D.C. 20515. Phone: 202-225-6730. No direct e-mail because of spam. Web site: www.walden.house.gov Fax: 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 North Central, Suite 112, Medford, OR 97501. Phone: 541-776-4646. Fax: 541-779-0204.

Pending Bills: For information on bills in Congress, Phone: 202-225-1772.

Salem

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Oregon Legislature — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Web site: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).

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