

STUDY

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There are many applications for biochar. As a soil augmentation, the benefits include water and fertilizer retention and reduced acidity of the soil.

Some manure-based biochars have also been shown to add nitrogen to the soil, according to the Colorado State University Extension.

Among the farms joining the program this year are Woody Wolfe of Wallowa, Dave Flynn and Cory Carman’s Carmen Ranch of Wallowa, Joe Dawson’s Double D Ranch of Joseph, Mark and Anna Butterfield’s farm in Joseph and Kevin Melville of Enterprise and Joseph.

“We’re experimenting in using biochar to raise the pH rather than using lime,” Melville said. “The number-one problem we have is soil pH getting lower. As you use commercial fertilizers over time, the soil pH goes down.



Matt King of Wallowa Resources delivers the bags of biochar for the Wallowa County agricultural studies.

Kathleen Elynn/Chieftain

Soil pH value is a measure of soil acidity or alkalinity, which directly affects nutrient availability. The pH scale ranges from 0 to 14, with 7 as neutral. Numbers less than 7 indicate acidity while num-

bers greater than 7 indicate alkalinity.

Melville said his numbers were at seven or eight and now they’re dropping down to six. “Then you start getting more aluminum and alumi-

num toxicity,” he said. “It’s a big deal. There are a lot of very complex problems that go on there.”

Melville is also interested in seeing a product that could be produced locally and hopes

DITCH

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of the 100-year-old Wallowa Lake Dam south of Joseph.

They came before the county commissioners April 17 to reveal the new water district and confirm proper boundaries had been established, that the requisite number of owners of land had signed the petition to fold the five ditch companies into the new district; that Wallowa Valley Improvement District had agreed to an overlap of boundaries and that plans had been announced in the newspaper of record twice (March 22 and April 2).

The commissioners approved an order calling for the formation of the district and further approved the group moving forward with a vote of the entire membership.

“We had meetings to explain it, and we felt like we got a good feel of response,” said Associated Ditch President Dan Butterfield. “We figure we talked to at least 100 of the people who are here in the winter. We did not run into a



Kathleen Elynn/Chieftain

Mark Butterfield explains details of how the new ditch organization will operate as Dan Butterfield, president of the Associated Ditch Company and Joe Dawson confer. OSU Extension agent John Williams (right) also attended the presentation to the commissioners.

single person who was against us.”

Ditch Master David Bates called the move “pretty monumental.”

“It’s likely been a while since this has been done in Oregon,” he said.

The irrigation district will be composed of five newly drawn subdivisions with a director of the district coming

from each subdivision. The five separate ditch companies will then dissolve.

The new divisions have been carefully drawn out so that each has — as near as possible — the same acreage under irrigation, Butterfield said.

A contingent of farmers, all of whom had fathers or grandfathers or both who served as presidents of ditch companies

in past years, attended the commissioners meeting to answer questions for the commissioners and show their support for the district plan.

Repair of the dam has been a crucial consideration for years and along with avenues for funding. Last year the company realized augmentation (to be able to allow the water to flow downstream and sell it) as a means of raising the approximately \$15 million required repairing the dam, which would allow self-funding, said Joe Dawson, president of Dobbin Ditch Company and a member of the Associated modernization committee.

A new study of what will be required to repair the dam, and fresh estimates of cost are in the works, according to Dawson. Associated has hired former Enterprise resident and engineer Mort McMillen at McMillen Jacobs Associates Inc., water resources and hydrology specialists from Boise, Idaho.

The lake storage has been held to 72 percent capacity for almost 40 years.

“We’ve had to restrict water

for better water retention.

“Any time you can irrigate less you save money,” he said.

For the project, the farms are treating about an acre each, King said.

“Four of those farmers are no-till, so they will use a seed drill to get the char into the ground. Butterfield tills, so we’ll be using a manure spreader there,” King said.

The crops being planted in the treated fields include alfalfa, mixed forage and wheat.

The project agrees to test the process cost-free.

“We’d like to see some enhanced yield the first year,” said King. “The value of the product comes down to the economic bottom line. We definitely expect to see increased growth, retaining of fertilizer benefits, retaining of water and other benefits.”

Since learning is the primary goal of the project, biochar may also be applied for a second year to determine the best application amount and frequency — although studies indicate that the char will re-

main viable, doing its job, for up to 100 years before breaking down.

Biochar is also touted as having a carbon sequestration benefit, which is part of the equation that might, in the future, result in carbon offset credits to help pay for biochar application. However, some international studies question carbon sequestration benefits of biochar when mixed with compost or soils.

If there is success, the second step for Wallowa County participants would be determining if making biochar makes economic sense.

Integrated Biomass Resources owner/operator David Schmidt said his company has a vested interest in whether the farm trials are successful.

“We have a lot of material from both forest service and private forest land that ends up as hog fuel,” he said. “If we find a better value for this material, it’s good for everyone. But we’re just assessing its value to farmers at this point.”

Preliminary hearing for Harshfield delayed

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

A Wallowa County man is suspected of poaching and wasting at least a dozen elk on his property — and perhaps 13 more found dead on adjoining land.

Larry Harshfield, 69, was arrested April 8 and charged with 12 counts of taking elk out of season and 12 counts of wasting elk.

The charges stem from a Feb. 11 search of the Harshfield Ranch, located in the city of Wallowa. During the search, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife troopers located 25 dead elk, 12 of which were located on Harshfield’s property and 13 others were nearby.

The elk carcasses appeared not to have had any attempt to salvage meat from them, according to ODFW.

A preliminary hearing was originally scheduled for April 19; however, a delay was requested and a new hearing date was not available prior to publication deadline.

Harshfield was charged with poaching the 12 elk on his property and was lodged at the Wallowa County Jail. Additional charges for the 13 dead elk on the adjoining property will be referred to the Wallowa County District Attorney.

Mike Hansen, assistant district wildlife biologist for ODFW, said that the department can issue a kill permit or a hazing permit for elk that cause consistent damage to a farmer’s crops. Hansen said Harshfield had contacted ODFW about the permits. The kill permit requires the farmer to field dress and skin the animal and take it to a meat processing facility.

“He did not want to do that,” Hansen said. “We gave him a haze permit.” A haze permit does not allow for any killing.



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