

6 Ranch receives award for river restoration project

Two projects in northeast Oregon -- including one in Wallowa County -- have received State Land Board Stream Awards honoring voluntary restoration efforts.

Wallowa River/6 Ranch Project II restored 1,800 lineal feet of the Wallowa River on the 6 Ranch to a more historic and natural condition. Functioning wetlands, an activated floodplain and a stable stream channel all resulted from the voluntary restoration work.

Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a member of the Land Board who presented the award, praised the public-private partnership that was established to implement the project. He commended 6 Ranch owner Liza Jane McAlister for her vision for “responsible stewardship, preservation of western ranching traditions, and production of healthy food.”

The design of the project uses an unconventional grazing management plan that will use high-intensity, short-dura-



Submitted photo

On hand for a recent awards ceremony for 6 Ranch were Secretary of State Dennis Richardson; Liza Jane McAlister; 6 Ranch; Governor Kate Brown; and Coby Menton; Grande Ronde Model Watershed.

tion grazing to control invasive Reed Canary Grass and promote desirable grasses and shrub species on the property.

“6 Ranch has often been described as an unconventional

ranching operation, though we see our goals as very similar to most ranching operations,” said McAlister. “Our belief is that restoration and ranching must work side by side for long-term

success. We hope to set an example of proactive, mutually beneficial relationships that result in improved landscapes in our beautiful region.”

Project partners include the Grande Ronde Model Watershed, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nez Perce Tribe and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Funding was provided by the Bonneville Power Administration, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Grande Ronde Model Watershed, based in La Grande, nominated the project.

The second award was presented to Catherine Creek Fish Habitat Restoration Project co-sponsored by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Union Soil and Water Conservation District. It was developed to restore floodplain processes and functions along a one-mile stretch of Catherine Creek in Union, east of La Grande.

\$145K Rural Entrepreneurship Challenge opens

Rural entrepreneurs are invited to compete for \$145,000 in startup funds from the American Farm Bureau Federation.

This is the first national rural business competition focused exclusively on entrepreneurs working on food and agriculture businesses.

The competition provides an opportunity for individuals to showcase ideas and business innovations that benefit rural regions of the United States.

Owners of all types of businesses across the food and agriculture supply chain are encouraged to enter the competition. Applications, which include a business plan, video pitch and photo, must be submitted online by June 30. Judges will review the applications and provide feedback to the participants.

The top 10 teams, to be announced in October, will be offered the opportunity to pitch to multi-million dollar investors, in addition to receiving education about venture capital and expanding their businesses.

Businesses related to food and agriculture include farms or ranches, value-added food processing, food hubs and community-supported agriculture programs, farm-to-table restaurants, farmers’ markets and craft beverage startups. Businesses can also support food and agriculture such as crop scouting, agritourism, ag advertising agencies and ag technology companies.

The competition timeline, detailed eligibility guidelines and profiles of past Challenge winners are available at strongruralamerica.com/challenge.

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With the help of real estate broker Diane Daggett, the application was finished March 17, just in time for consideration in the latest round of funding.

“I didn’t have the first clue about a grant,” Brann said, crediting Daggett’s help. He also praised Marko for assisting with a business plan and laying the groundwork.

Marko said there has been great interest in seeing downtown revitalization in Enterprise over the past several years. He added that rural communities group has coordinated with the program for four years to further Enterprise economic development,

downtown revitalization and for the OK Theater project specifically.

“It’s been a big part of my role with the Main Street program,” he said. “The theater’s unique, it’s a one-of-a-kind in the region.”

According to Marko, Daggett served as the local lead for the project as well as Enterprise city government. The project also received a dozen letters of support from various factions and individuals in the city.

“It really engaged the city as well as businesses to show support for the theatre, which helped get the grant,” he said. Marko also credited former Enterprise mayor Margie Shaw for initiating the grant.

“It’s super – just really exciting for us,” said Wendy

Stewart, head of Greater Enterprise Main Street.

Brann has the funds earmarked for specific projects.

“The first priority for the grant is installing ADA-complaint bathrooms,” he said, meaning they will be handicap accessible. “It’s always been a concern for me, and now we have a way to tackle it. This also helped pave the way for some updating of the electrical system.”

He was working with Wallowa County Grain Growers on installing a new heating and air-conditioning system as well as possibly installing solar panels. A new film screen is also in the works.

Brann hopes to initiate the restoration project in early December. There is a three-year timeline specified in the grant.

“The bathrooms aren’t scheduled for completion until sometime in late June or early July,” he said. “You won’t see any big changes until the bathrooms open. Basically we’re taking everything down and reframing.”

The theater is also required to contribute in the neighborhood of \$40,000 to the project, which can include labor and materials. Brann believes it’s possible to raise even more.

“We’re planning a grand reopening of the theater in the summer of 2019 to celebrate its centennial,” Brann said. “It’s been a real community effort to keep this going. We would continue with or without a grant to do what we’re doing, which is bringing quality shows into Wallowa County.”

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