

Wolves native to the county

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Elk most certainly were, and remain, natives. Place names like Elk Mountain, Elk Flat and Elk Creek make that clear enough. In addition, the Nez Perce, who were here since time immemorial according to their myths, or for 12,000 years if you believe our myths, had a month in their calendar called “the season of the elk calf” reflecting elk’s long history within the physical and cultural landscapes.

While it is true that elk were trained into Joseph, and subsequently carted to Billy Meadows, from Jackson Hole in 1912-13, there is little evidence that shows these elk are the majority of elk around today. Besides, that only bolsters the point that the problem here is our lack of understanding.

Why was there a perceived need to import elk here anyway? Why was there a need to reintroduce wolves? Why was there a need to crossbreed buffalo with cattle? Why was there a need to save the salmon? Clearly, there’s a problem, and the problem is us.

White settlers, starting in the late 1870s, did a remarkably quick job in practically eradicating elk. The Nez Perce and their ancestors lived alongside elk for a minimum of 12,000 years, and in a matter of 30 years of white settlement, elk were nearly wiped out. Fortunately, hunting was banned in the early 1900s, and most of the elk recovery can be attributed to that law.

I’ll concede that the standard stories that environmentalists spout regarding the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone can be overly romantic. The truth of the matter is that wolves are part of an insanely complex community of living beings.

Much of the research coming from Yellowstone over the past 20 years has highlighted the heavy hand of man in influencing natural patterns in direct and indirect ways. The spot of wolves as a driver of trophic cascade, however, is not much in question.

After wolves returned, beavers came back, as well as aspen. Willows, though, have not recovered as expected because they are intimately intertwined with the water-scapes that beavers create. In the absence of wolves, elk were more detrimental to willow populations than originally realized, and so beavers could not return in their cyclical way to re-dam rivers.

This is part of what ecologists call alternative stable states, and it illustrates the importance of both beavers’

and wolves’ impact on their surrounding communities.

When we remove our cultural blinders, to the extent we can, what we are doing to our home and all our relatives becomes quickly apparent, and it is appalling. There is a deep need in this age to resubjectify those around us, to recognize their agency as well as to respect their interdependence with us.

Now, more than ever, there is no need for wanton arrogance and ignorance. To maintain those positions only further harms those around us and ourselves. It is high time to replace hubris with humbleness.

Garik Asplund
Joseph

Wallowa history has integration

I enjoyed the column, “Wallowa County and Issues of Race,” published recently in the Chieftain.

My African-American family, the Marshes, lived in Maxville, Water Canyon and Wallowa 1937-58. We came to cut logs for Bowman Hicks Lumber Co. My brothers, Amos Jr. and Frank Wayne, graduated from Wallowa High School.

My grandparents, “Ma and Pa Pat” Patterson Sr., and cousin, Macie Hadnot, are buried in Wallowa, as are my uncle Alvie Marsh’s wife, Dorothy, and their daughter, Oredia.

There are about 15 first-generation descendants of African American loggers still living. For our families, Wallowa County was not perfect. To quote Joseph Hilliard Sr., upon arrival from Brookhaven, Miss., to Maxville, “Nothing up here but white people and sheep.”

But, for our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, it was life-changing freedom from the brutality, terror and hate of Jim Crow.

There were some white racists in Maxville and Wallowa. But there were many more good people who happened to be white. Here, our families found friendships at work, worship, leisure and school.

Before Jackie Robinson broke major league baseball’s color barrier in 1947, Wallowa fielded an integrated team in 1941 that played white teams around the region.

The descendants have assembled their memoirs and will be sharing them through the Wallowa History Center.

Pearl Alice Marsh
Patterson, Calif.



Trump to blame for racial unrest

Let me begin by tipping my hat to the Chieftain for its excellent editorial last week and to Rich Wandschneider for his most recent column, both of which focused on the white supremacist rally that shook the nation from Charlottesville. I will try not to rehash the salient points that were made in each of those pieces, but I heartily recommend that any reader who missed them look for them online.

My main focus in this column will not be primarily on the despicable aims of the Nazis, the KKK or other white supremacist organizations, or even on the more subtle, pervasive aspects of white privilege in America, but rather on Donald Trump’s culpability in doing what LeBron James so aptly accused him of — “making hatred fashionable.”

Let me review just a few of Trump’s transgressions as a purveyor of “hate speech” in the past few years. Even before he officially declared his candidacy for president, Trump won the hearts of many racists by being the nation’s most prominent champion of the Birther movement.

He added fuel to the fires of intolerance by lumping Mexicans together as murderers, rapists and drug dealers, by pledging to build a “great wall” between Mexico and America and by declaring that a judge of Mexican-American heritage was biased and unqualified merely because of his ancestry.

In his personal life and on the campaign trail, Trump routinely displayed behaviors and used language that denigrated women. He publicly insulted one opponent after another, belittling them



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

with nicknames like “low-energy Jeb,” “little Marco,” “lying Ted,” and “crooked Hillary.”

He crossed the lines of public decorum even further when he encouraged his supporters to get physical with opponents or protesters at his rallies. “Rough him up!” Trump would shout, to the delight of his crowd, and many in his audience laughed, while a few followed his directives.

Perhaps a lot of people saw his behavior as simply outrageous or entertaining, but Trump’s conduct was beneath the dignity of the office he was seeking, and more of his supporters should have been alarmed by it before they voted for him.

Since his election, Trump has waged an open war against the media, which he has termed “fake news” and “an enemy of the people.” This is behavior typically found in dictatorships or banana republics, not by presidents of the greatest nation on earth.

And despite many warnings from both sides of the aisle, Trump has also kept Steve Bannon among his inner circle of White House advisers, where the editor of the alt-right forum, Breitbart News, continued to promote the racial tension, economic resentment and nationalism that helped Trump wage a winning campaign.

So is it really surprising that the white

nationalist movement now feels emboldened or that racists such as Richard Spencer and former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke regard President Trump as a champion of their causes?

Yet even as millions of decent Americans were disgusted by a rally that featured swastikas and Nazi slogans like “Blood and Soil” along with hundreds of angry, heavily armed, white, mostly male torchbearers chanting “Jews will not replace us,” “White lives matter,” and “Take back our streets,” President Trump flabbergasted Democrats and Republicans alike by declaring that he saw hatred and violence at the rally “on many sides.”

Two days after the horrifying spectacle, which left three people dead and dozens of others injured, Trump issued a more carefully worded condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism, but he muddled the matter again the next day in a rambling CNN interview in which he once more tried to apportion blame equally on the neo-Nazis and on the protesters who opposed them.

That interview was supposed to be about infrastructure, but that purpose disintegrated even further when many CEOs on the president’s economic advisory councils resigned in protest of his waffling ineptitude, causing Trump to disband those councils altogether.

With each passing day, it appears that the “bully pulpit” of the presidency has lost its moral authority. The pulpit is vacant, and only the bully remains.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Solar eclipse was a bit anticlimactic

The solar eclipse of 2017 has come and gone. An eerie shadow was cast over Wallowa County, which was interesting to watch. It was dark enough to trigger security lighting in many spots.

The much-anticipated influx of tourists did not occur here. Sunday afternoon, we did a windshield tour of the lake and the state park.

There were many open camping spots and even fewer people out and about than normal for a Sunday. Hotel rooms were plentiful. There were no lines at restaurants. No massive traffic jams. The apocalypse did not occur.

Even our normally sketchy Internet service kept running all morning on Monday, and my cell phone functioned normally.

I couldn’t help but recall the hysteria that led up to Y2K. Remember that? The predictions were gloomy for midnight on Dec. 31, 1999. Everything from a major failure of the nation’s power grid to the implosion of personal computers was predicted. There was even a prediction that gas prices would rise to \$10 a gallon.

Got up Jan. 1, 2000, and none of the dire predictions had come true. Business as usual.

I couldn’t help but wonder what it must have been like for our ancestors to experience an eclipse. Having no way of receiving notice, it must have been fairly scary when the sun began disappearing in the middle of the day for no apparent reason.

Now back to everyday life as we know it.

I PROMISED to keep you updated on the journalism session we are producing in cooperation with Fishtrap.

It’s called, “Journalism: The Other Writing Genre,” a takeoff on the popular promotion “Pork, the Other White Meat.”



WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl



Courtesy photo

A group of Wallowa County residents (many from the Dragon Boat Paddling Club) watch the eclipse from Mt. Howard.

When someone says “writer,” most people think of someone who has authored a book or published a poem, but not everyone thinks of journalists as writers and certainly not “creative” writers. I would argue that journalism requires a great deal of creativity, especially in an age when reading is less popular than ever.

The class will be 6-8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 19 at Fishtrap, 400 E Grant St., Enterprise. It’s free, but registration is requested. Visit fishtrap.org.

One of our goals in producing this session is to begin dialogue with Wallowa County residents who would like to join our team of freelance photographers and

writers. If you’re interested, this would be a great way to make the connection. It will be a learning adventure and lots of fun.

SPEAKING OF freelance writers, we are in the process of replacing Katherine Stickroth’s “Wallowa Gal” column. Katherine is pursuing other projects. We will miss her take on life on Wallowa County.

Five individuals have proposed column ideas and are in the process of writing sample versions. We will be reviewing these over the next couple weeks with an eye toward making a selection by the end of the month.

We are trying to find a way to include a “people’s choice” vote in this process. Stay tuned for details.

A SHOUTOUT this week to everyone who participated in the Wallowa County Fair Livestock Auction. Bidding totaled \$266,755.70 for this year’s crop of beef, swine, sheep, goat and poultry. That represents tremendous support of our 4-Hers and FFAers who diligently pursued perfection.

Teagan Miller’s 27-pound turkey was one of the highlights of the auction.

I couldn’t help but feel a bit choked up during the auction as a number of participants sobbed at the thought of parting with their project. The critters become like family for many.

I believe everything available for results is in and either has run, is running or will be running.

Because of the way the information is submitted, we had to rekey the dozens upon dozens of names involved, so if we misspelled one or two, that’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

What a great crop of young people we have in Wallowa County.

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