



Chieftain file photo

The historic J. Herbert Bates Lumber planing mill in Wallowa fell due to heavy snow in 2017.

## NATURE

Continued from Page A1

The summer that followed brought near-record heat and wild fires across Oregon and the Northwest. The county did

not suffer a reprise of the fire-fear of 2015 when the Grizzly Bear Complex Fire came within a few hundred feet of burning down the town of Troy and had ranchers scrambling to save cattle in the area. However smoke from

surrounding fires darkened the skies across the county, impacting the health of some and derailing adventures for some tourists.

Views from the Wallowa Lake Tramway were obstructed for several days.

## Library district makes it to the ballot

Wallowa County will have to wait until the May 2018 ballot to know the rest of the story, but a vigorous group of library lovers has been leaping tall hurdles in a single bound ever since the county announced the closure of the County Library in early June.



Chieftain file photo

**Enterprise City Librarian Denine Rautenstrauch, left, chair of the Wallowa County Library board Genene Kingsford and Wallowa County Librarian Susan Polumsky.**

Sanitary of Enterprise and Sheriff Steve Rogers made tough decisions.

The library issue remained in the news throughout the year.

A group of citizens created the Wallowa Valley Library

Foundation and determined a taxpayer-funded library district was the best bet to retain and grow library services. The group snagged a grant for a feasibility study and hired a consultant. Joseph, Enterprise and Wallowa opted to sign on to let their citizens vote. Lost-tine opted out.

Commissioners eventually agreed to keep the county library open with reduced hours until May.

Once the district made it to the ballot, the foundation formed a Political Action Committee to educate the populace and drum up votes. The PAC committee was in full swing as the year ended with a variety of committees headed by volunteers preparing to take the message to voters.

## Enterprise City Hall, fire station burns

It was as dramatic as it was surprising. On July 10, in the midst of a work session before Enterprise City Council was to convene, council member Dave Elliott left the chambers to retrieve papers and discovered thick smoke in the offices of city hall.

Enterprise Volunteer Fire Department firefighters, 19 in all, were on the scene within minutes and began to clear the adjacent fire hall and commence battling the blaze. Smoke was pouring out windows and doors. Soon Joseph Fire Department and another five vehicles and 11 more firefighters joined the fight.

After an investigation, it was determined the fire was caused by a faulty fluorescent light fixture in the city administrator's office. The hot ballast fell on a seat and the nearby air

conditioner fanned the embers into a full-blown blaze.

When the last smoke cleared, the crumbling 1957 building, its ceilings riddled with asbestos, was still standing. It was eventually deemed a total loss: the cost of repair would be more than it was worth.

What seemed like catastrophic news began transforming into something alive and vital over the ensuing weeks.

An insurance replacement limit of \$1.3 million will allow the city to build a new fire hall to replace the dangerously decrepit old fire hall and chances of getting a low-interest loan or grant to build a new city hall looked good in light of the disaster that had displaced city government.

In the meantime, Enterprise City Hall moved from



Chieftain file photo

**Enterprise firefighters Jake Schaefer, Trenton Neil and Tyler Micka gear up to go back into Enterprise City Hall in search of hot spots.**

around the corner to 117 Main Street — the recently vacated offices of a retired physician. New council member, Micah Agnew, offered space at the church he pastors at 207 E Main, a block away from city hall, as a council chambers.

City hall was open for business within seven days of the blaze.

## Memories in ashes: Boggan's Oasis burns

Say it isn't so! The nearly 80-year-old landmark business, Boggan's Oasis, burned to the ground Nov. 18.

Because of its remote location, along the rugged stretch of Highway 126 three miles north of the Wallowa County border into Washington, no fire service was available.

Boggan's was famous — a storied stop along the famous and infamous Rattlesnake Grade that stretches from Enterprise to Clarkston, Wash. The American Motorcycle Association calls that 80-mile drive one of the top 15 motorcycle rides in America. Boggan's sat right next to the Grande Ronde River.

It was a favorite stop for tourists and locals alike.

Inside, milk shakes to inspire epic poems and unforgettable memories were served along with hamburgers, fries and more. Walls were decorated with historic photos — many recording the achievements of steelhead anglers from the pages of both recent and ancient history.

Across the road, rafting companies picked up their clients after once-in-a-lifetime floats through wilderness on the Wenaha and Grande Ronde Rivers. Motorcycles and bicycles (thousands of Cycle Oregon bicyclist went this way in 2010) lined up in the parking lot. In fair weather, folks lolled outside at the little café tables and marveled at their good fortune.

An electrical short in a section of old wiring in the several-times-updated building most likely caused the fire.

Owners Bill and Farrel Vail live next door to the restaurant and also manage campsites, RV parking and cabins. They are in their mid-80s and were planning on a retirement at some point. Whether they will rebuild is still undecided. What doesn't need to be decided is whether fans of the business want it rebuilt or whether or not. Bill and Farrel said they would rebuild if they were a few years younger.

"We're more worried about our customers than anyone else; we're working on our third generation of customers," Farrel said.

# Wolf controversy continued

Wolves played a large part on the Wallowa County stage in 2017. Continued calls from ranchers to get rid of additional wolves were heard. Environmentalists pushed to protect wolves and railed against ranchers and their plans.

The year of controversy began when USDA Wildlife Services accidentally killed a Wallowa County wolf with an M-44 cyanide trap in February. That resulted in the agency's removal of all such traps in Wallowa County.

In March, the state moved into Phase 3 of its Wolf Management Plan as at least eight breeding pairs of wolves were found in the state for three consecutive years.

In April, the yearly wolf count by the ODFW showed



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**Wolves and their impact on Wallowa County dominated the news in 2017 with ranchers calling for their control and environmentalists pushing to keep them wild and free.**

an increase of two wolves. less large gains than in previous years. The agency said it did not believe the growth to be a trend and noted the loss of seven wolves from lethal take or other causes. It also noted that inclement winter

weather hindered sightings and that the 112 wolves were confirmed and other wolves were probably present but not counted.

Wallowa County ranchers suffered nine confirmed depredations by wolves. The Harl Butte Pack was responsible for most of them, resulting in the harvesting of four wolves from the pack by the ODFW. As depredations continued into the fall, the agency authorized more lethal takes of the pack but did not carry any out.

A long-awaited Oregon Wolf Management Plan was introduced late in the year. Dissatisfaction expressed by nearly all stakeholders in the document resulted in a temporary delay in its implementation until 2018.

## Challenge to find a place to live in Wallowa County

Wallowa County began tackling a long-standing housing crisis stifling economic growth with a series of Brown Bag Luncheons at the Joseph Center in Joseph in July.

Over the coming weeks and months, citizens learned that, contrary to economic development studies done years earlier, there was an across-the-board shortage of housing for all income ranges. Medical professionals were living in trailers at RV centers for more than a year, two-income families were moving from one substandard home to another, elderly and disabled sat on waiting lists for months for an apartment and families with three children stacked up in two bedroom apartments — all for the same reason, lack of affordable rentals.

Issues included a misunderstanding of what low-income housing was in comparison to subsidized or voucher housing; a belief that there was a "glut" of low-income housing available; a belief that trailer parks attracted the "wrong sort of people;" fears that changes in zoning to allow cottage-sized homes



Chieftain file photo

**RV resorts such as this one in La Grande may be in Wallowa County's future. The resorts accommodate disabled and retired people on fixed incomes, workforce families, two-income professionals and retired people with money to invest who can't find permanent housing.**

(less than 1,000 square feet) or tiny homes would lower property values for neighbors; zoning laws and square footage construction that no longer addressed modern buyers needs or desires; and a shortage of rentals for workforce.

Horror stories emerged about substandard rentals and landlords unprepared for their responsibilities, and double-income families abandoning Wallowa County in frustration.

The conversation con-

tinues, not just in Wallowa County, but nationwide.

In the meantime, local builder Andy McKee of McKee Brother's Investments is leading a one-man campaign to create affordable housing, working on approximately 20 improved or newly created apartments in Joseph and Enterprise.

Rotary Club of Wallowa County made housing its highest priority for the 2017 and pledged to keep working on the issue for years to come.

## Community effort builds new Joseph playground

Volunteers from Joseph and across Wallowa County converged on Joseph City Park to complete a major upgrade to its playground. More than 200 volunteers took part in everything from serving lunch to pounding stakes into the ground.

Armed with little more than an idea, four eighth-grade boys from Joseph Charter School — Tyler Homan, Trey Wandschneider, Steven Beckman and TJ Grote — appeared before the Joseph City Council in late 2015 with a proposal to upgrade the playground facilities.

The council heard the boys' proposal and offered help in the way eventually contributing \$2,500.

The idea later became part of a Family Career and Community Leaders of America



Chieftain file photo

**An army of volunteers like these did everything from ground prep work to finishing on the new Joseph City Park Playground Project.**

project. FCCLA leader Marla Dotson and community member Penny Arentsen combined forces to form a steering com-

mittee in October 2015.

One large grant and several smaller donations pushed the fundraising to a point where major construction could be planned. A presentation to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department netted the group \$130,000.

With Play By Design, a renowned playground design and building company from Ithaca, N.Y., selected to facilitate the \$210,000 project, everyone from school students to the steering committee to the city's mayor went to work. Thanks in large part to a \$130,000 grant from the state and immeasurable private donations and a multitude of fundraisers sponsored by nearly every class in the school, enough money was raised to see it mostly completed.

WALLOWA COUNTY  
**Health Line**

**MOTIVATIONS**  
Fitness Center, LLC

Keycode Entry  
Weight Room • Cardio  
Women's Circuit • Tanning  
202 W. Main, Enterprise  
541-426-0313

**Wallowa Valley Eye Care**

519 W. North Street, Enterprise  
541.426.3413  
Mon-Thurs 9 to Noon/1-5pm; Fri. 9-1

Wallowa County  
Health Department  
758 NW 1st Street, Enterprise, OR  
(541) 426-4848

We offer services to all ages and income levels including: WIC, family planning, immunizations, flu shots, restaurant and hotel licensing, community tobacco prevention and education, chronic disease prevention. We provide equal opportunity programs.

**Public Meeting: Thursday, Jan. 11, 7-9pm**

**The Future of Hayes Century Farm**

What's to become of Kirk & Mary's farm at the edge of Joseph?

Join us for an informational meeting with neighbors & local farmers  
Light Refreshments

**Wallowology!**  
Natural History Discovery Center  
508 N. Main • Joseph • 541-263-1663 • wallowology.org