

Nash reflects on first year as county commissioner

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

More than a year ago, rancher Todd Nash was looking for a way to help the county benefit from sustainable management of its abundant natural resources. An opportunity arrived when former county commissioner Mike Hayward suddenly resigned his post in late 2015.

Wallowa County resident John Lawrence temporarily filled the position. Nash gathered grassroots support and was easily elected to the post winning 62 percent of the vote in the May 2016 primary. He took office in 2017 at the conclusion of Lawrence's term.

After a year in the post, Nash reflected on his expectations, what he's accomplished and his political future.

"I think the old standby applies of drinking from a fire hose, certainly the first six months," Nash said with a laugh. "There's still a tremendous amount to learn. The complexities of this job can be a little overwhelming at times."

Nash said he eventually learned from State Sen. Bill Hansell that he didn't need expertise in everything and needed to rely on experts for some things, something Nash took to heart, along with his pledge to voters regarding public lands.

"When I took this job, I intended to dedicate time to public and federally held lands as well as problems we deal with on a weekly basis," Nash said.

He noted that more than 60 percent of the county's lands are federally held.

"I still believe that's Wallowa County, not another nation," Nash said. "We are cooperators, and all the agencies that hold those properties need to cooperate with us."

According to Nash, perhaps the biggest contribution he's made to the county thus far is his input on the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision and seeing some major changes in the way that it addresses grazing.

There was more than one unexpected discovery along the way.

"There's a lot of stuff: From the complexities of the Association of Oregon Counties and going to Salem on a regular basis, to the different departments within the county and regional departments and eastern Oregon counties," he said. "I said at the beginning, and I stand by what I said, 'There'd be a lot more of a lot more than I thought there would be.'"

Among the biggest problems the county is facing is housing, according to Nash. He said that affordable housing for people in the service industry is lacking, along with the inadequate use of natural resources, including both harvest and thinning of overstocked timber and areas that could and should be grazed. Nash sees a change for the better coming.

"I'm absolutely committed to seeing those through," he said. He added that he didn't think his original focus has changed.

"I've become a better listener, but I don't think I've changed my focus," he said.

His hopes for change mainly center around the utilization of resources.

"I'd like to see within that opportunities for young people to become entrepreneurs," he said. "We can help them get out of the service-based economy they're stuck in. I think the housing issue is a grand part of the failure of having a community that is tourist based. When you have the conversion of these rentals to bed-and-breakfasts that provide more money to the owners, not that I begrudge them, you end up inadvertently causing a housing shortage."

After spending time in Salem, Nash concluded the supposed rural and urban divide between western and eastern Oregon isn't as insurmountable as some make it.

"We have to be passionate, articulate and ask exactly what we want,



Steve Tool/Chieftain

Wallowa County Commissioner Todd Nash recently finished his first year in office.

and we can accomplish some things over there," he said. "We have great leaders in Sen. Hansell and Rep. Greg Barreto, and if we can have buy-in from them, we can accomplish much here."

Commissioner Susan Roberts said that Nash has put his nose to the grindstone.

"For someone who hasn't held office, there's a learning curve," she said. "He's working hard and gaining perspective, even on the minutiae. It takes several years to learn this job, and he's working his way through."

Commissioner Paul Castilleja echoed those thoughts.

"He's a good addition and he's doing a good job as far as I'm concerned," he said.

Nash, who's never held public office, said he's not considered running for state or higher office and that even if he seeks reelection, he'll have a couple of stipulations.

"It has to be community driven a little bit. That's why I jumped in here to begin with," Nash said. "If the community doesn't want me here, then it's the last place I want to be."

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Todd Nash

Commissioner appears in HBO documentary

By Steve Tool
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County Commissioner, local rancher and co-chair of the Oregon cattlemen's Association Todd Nash has made a name for himself as an advocate for ranchers battling wolf encounters with livestock. For Nash, who has been filmed for many Oregon news stories, the national spotlight was a different experience.

Nash participated in the filming of an HBO documentary, "The War Between Cattle Ranchers And Conservationists Over Wolves," released last month.

"They interviewed me for about five hours, and in the end, they took out the part they wanted," he said. "It didn't misrepresent me, but it didn't get to the crux of the matter ... ranchers having the authority to shoot wolves."

The newest change in the state's wolf management plan only allowed ranchers to shoot wolves if they were in amongst their cattle on ground the cattle legally occupied. He added that he was misrepresented saying in the video that he had 100 head of cattle killed by livestock.

"I told them I had lost 100 pounds per head, and I gave them the equation I came up with, a \$50,000 loss," Nash said.

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