

# A Texan takes the reins at Wallowa Lake State Park

By Ellen Morris Bishop  
Wallowa County Chieftain

There's a new manager at Wallowa Lake State Park these days.

Mac Freeborn arrived in April, and has picked up the management reins at one of eastern Oregon's most popular and revered state parks. The 216-acre reserve serves more than 400,000 day-use visitors per year, and its popularity is growing. It's currently the 12th most popular place to camp in all of Oregon's State Parks, serving almost 90,000 campers in 2018, up 6% from the previous season.

Freeborn hails from Texas, where he worked in and managed a number of parks and recreation areas. Most recently, that included the Guadalupe Mountains National Park, as well as other state and local facilities. Most were parks that included water and boating, which makes him a natural



Mac Freeborn, the new manager at Wallowa Lake State Park, inspects the foundation for the park's new micro hydro power generation plant.

for Wallowa Lake.

Freeborn is enthusiastic about his new position and about being in Wallowa County. "It just seems like

a place where I belong," he said. "Everyone has been friendly and helpful. The staff here is really connected to this place, and so for now,

I'm just listening and learning from them. They are really the ones who know the park and are running it." Freeborn and the park

will be undertaking two major projects in the next year. There is the realignment of the Wallowa River's channels, which will include re-allocating about 30 percent of the river's flow to an old and soon-to-be-refurbished channel that runs through the central portion of the day-use area. That will include construction of new pathways and pedestrian bridges to cross the stream, establishment of riparian vegetation, some re-sizing of parking areas, and new interpretive signs, all of which are presently being designed.

Freeborn is enthusiastic about this project. "It's going to be great to connect our visitors more closely with the kokanee and the river," he said.

Establishing a new "micro-hydro" power plant is another "green" project that has just started at the park and will be completed under Freeborn's tutelage.

Developed in collaboration with Wallowa Resources and Pacific Power, the project will pipe the park's water from its source higher on Chief Joseph Mountain into a turbine located near the park's old amphitheater.

The turbine will be housed in a small log cabin and will be visible to the public, complete with an interpretive sign that explains its functions. The 150 kilowatts per year that this micro hydro project produces will save the project's owner, the Wallowa Lake Service District, a municipal water and sewer entity managed by Wallowa County, about \$15,000 a year in energy costs.

Freeborn is looking forward to learning more about his park and enhancing its roles in Wallowa County.

"We are one of the major attractions here," he said. "We can help people connect better with this incredible landscape."

# Gov. Brown reverses state's position on wolf delisting

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
EO Media Group

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is urging the federal government not to lift Endangered Species Act protections for wolves, contradicting an earlier position taken by state wildlife regulators.

Gray wolves are currently classified as threatened or endangered across most of the country but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed delisting the species because it's "thriving on its vast range" and doesn't face imminent extinction.

The decision initially won the support of Curt Melcher, ODFW's director, who wrote in a May 9 letter that Oregon's wolf population is projected to continue expanding regardless of federal ESA status and that a federal delisting is

warranted.

Brown has now sent a letter to Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, who oversees the Fish and Wildlife Service, to "clarify and correct" ODFW's position by opposing the delisting proposal.

Although the "success of wolf recovery is unquestioned" and ESA listing within Oregon isn't necessary, the state's efforts "cannot protect imperiled wildlife beyond our borders in other states," which necessitates federal listing, according to Brown's May 15 letter.

"Unlike salmonids and sage grouse, the principal reason for the decline of the wolf across the Western United States was deliberate extirpation," she said. "We are not yet far enough from that cultural history to warrant confidence that wolf recovery is inevitable."



Two adult wolves from the Walla Walla Pack in northern Umatilla County, Ore.

Representatives of the Governor's Office and ODFW did not respond to requests to explain the discrepancy between Brown's and Melcher's positions.

Brown is known to meet regularly with the heads of state agencies, so it's not likely Melcher's support for delisting was a surprise,

said Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association. "I would find that highly unusual for her not to be aware of that."

It's more likely that Brown's thinking was swayed by the outcry from wolf advocates, who recently held a rally against delisting,

**'THEY'LL WORK FOR A TIME BUT THEY'RE JUST NOT REALISTIC!'**

Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, on non-lethal wolf control measures

as well as public criticism of Melcher's decision by Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., Rosa said. Blumenauer represents Portland.

"I think this occurred because of pressure from the environmental community and some in the Oregon congressional delegation also," he said.

Oregon is currently estimated to have at least 137 wolves that primarily inhabit the northeast corner of the state, though some have become established in central and southern portions as well. The species is already delisted at the federal level in the eastern third of the state.

Ranchers support federal delisting because the state government has more staff and resources available to devote to wolf management, and because the change in status would allow for lethal control of wolves that attack livestock, Rosa said.

Non-lethal measures aren't effective across vast landscapes, particularly in Western Oregon where dense underbrush impedes the visibility of wolves, he said. "They'll work for a time but they're just not realistic."

The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group, is pleased by Brown's decision to retract support for the "premature and unlawful" proposed delisting, said Collette Adkins, the organization's carnivore conservation director.

"It's clear wolves haven't recovered nationwide and recovery has just begun in places like Oregon," Adkins said.

Adkins said she doesn't know what led to the inconsistency between Brown's and Melcher's positions but said the governor's tone indicated she was "taken aback" by the letter, which was presumably sent without her authority.

A similar proposal to delist wolves in 2013 was withdrawn due to public opposition, so the Fish and Wildlife Service will hopefully abandon the plan again due to the letter from Brown and others like it, Adkins said.

"Time will tell, but the same legal flaws that existed then exist now," she said.

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