

Bottom: Wallowa Lake holds 'interesting things'

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investigating the lake bottom for the past four years. What they, and the EPA dive contractors have found is a bit astonishing.

"There's a lot of interesting things down there," said diver Lisa Anderson, who is also a retired Oregon State Police Senior Trooper. Up in the northeast end of the lake the divers have found what appears to be the remnant of an old lifeguard stand that was toppled into the lake. It may date to the 1920s when there was a swimming area there rather than closer to the dam. Several large water pipes remain under water on the northwest end, including three that are wooden, and two that have metal bands around the pipe to hold them together. There's also a two-wheeled horse cart, or what's left of it, that sits in about 50 feet of water, and the remnants of a horse-drawn plow.

But much of what's on the lake bottom — at least at dive-able depth — includes old tires, rolled-up remnants of carpet, and some batteries and car parts. "There's

what looks on the ROV's sonar like an engine block," said one member of the EPA-contracted Global Divers and Salvage team. "And the ROV video also showed a lawn chair, in not quite a hundred feet of water, just sitting there, upright, waiting for someone to plunk themselves down in it."

Blue Mountain Divers have also found some disquieting things besides the drum that once held herbicide. That includes the pipe bomb that they located just offshore from the County Park on the north end of the lake in 2016. On their most recent trip to Wallowa Lake they discovered a World War II-era flare—or at least its corroded shell, complete with stamped metal label that reads "Hot UM-1-315, 1945."

But there are also more benign and useful treasures to be found. On Saturday, while diving at the county park, Blue Mountain Divers were quite popular. "We got flagged down by three different people who said they had lost prescription eyeglasses off the dock," Anderson said. "We were able to get all three!"

Fire season starts Monday in Northeast Oregon

By Katy Nesbitt
For the East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Due to recent wildfire starts across the region, Monday is the official start of fire season for Northeast Oregon.

Fire managers and weather forecasters look for an average fire season for the Blue Mountains, but dry conditions are attracting concern for large wildfires between the Cascades and the Oregon Coast.

Dan Slagle, forecaster at the National Weather Service in Pendleton, said there is no strong signal that the summer weather patterns would be unusual, but July and August are predicted to be warm.

"We are trending toward cooler and drier weather the next one to two weeks, but longer trends favor warmer than normal conditions," he said.

Lightning storms this past week started fires in Central Oregon, but Slagle said the storms didn't come with much wind so the fires were extinguished while they were still small.

Mid-elevation snowpack stayed around a couple weeks longer than usual,



E.J. Harris/East Oregonian

A firefighting air tanker drops a load of fire retardant into a draw in Harrington Canyon as a large wildfire burned out of control Friday, Aug. 17, 2018, southwest of Pilot Rock.

according to Brett Thomas, fire staff officer for the Umatilla National Forest, and the latter part of May had cooler temperatures and a lot of rain. He said he expects an average fire year, as well.

"It could change if June turns off, but it is supposed to mellow out to 70s and 80s for the rest of the month," he said.

According to Jamie Knight, who handles public affairs out of Oregon Department of Forestry's La Grande office, dryness and warming temperatures at lower elevations warrant declaring fire season.

"Typically we go into fire season any time between the middle of June and the first part of July," she said.

The state has kept records of the beginning of fire season dates since 1977, when fire season started May 1, Knight said. In recent years, the date has fluctuated — in 2014, the official start was June 11, while last year a cool, wet spring put it off until June 28.

Restrictions in effect

Starting Monday, fire prevention restrictions on landowners and the public go into effect as do regulations

on industrial logging and forest management activities on 2 million acres of private, state, county, municipal and tribal lands within the Northeast Oregon Forest Protection District.

During fire season permits are required for burn barrels, and for all open burning, except campfires, on all private forest and rangelands. Logging and road building operators need to have fire tools, water supply and watchman service when those operations are occurring on lands protected by the state.

Knight advised that people who burn slash piles in the winter or spring should check to make sure they are completely out — sometimes fires can smolder for weeks or months and dry conditions and wind can whip them up to an uncontrolled burn.

"By going into fire season we are trying to reduce the number of human starts," Knight said.

As seasonally employed firefighters are starting their training, a few state and federal fire professionals have been dispatched to Arizona and Alberta, Canada, to help with early season blazes.

Firewood: Commissioner pitches in on salvage trip

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the group to the ranger station on the way to Hoodoo Ridge, where the group met up with other USFS employees, including acting district ranger, Katie Richardson, who normally serves as the forest environment coordinator.

After introductions and brief talk, both groups caravanned out to the ridge area and examined several stands of burned trees. At the first stop, Schmidt asked Nash, who had brought his chain saw on the journey, to fall several to see if the trees were worthy of salvage nearly four years after the fire.

After obtaining permission from the agency personnel, Nash fired up the saw, felling three smaller trees, two fir and one lodgepole. Examination indicated the trees had weathered well and could be harvested within the the next few years while still retaining merchantable value, in this case, as firewood.

As thunder rumbled and the skies glowered with more rain, the groups visited one more site before disbanding for the journey home.

Although nothing was set in stone, the agency appeared amenable to some salvage logging on the fire complex. They did mention possible sales would be limited to 250 acres in size as it can be harvested without a NEPA evaluation as their size qualifies them for a Categorical Exclusion, which allows the sale to proceed without an Environmental Impact Statement.



Steve Tool/Chieftain

Wallowa County Commissioner Todd Nash falls a burned tree on the Umatilla National Forest near Troy where the Grizzly complex fire burned several years ago.

Richardson said she's never taken a group out on a tour before, but it's a common practice at the agency, especially with groups interested in Farm Bill CEs. She enjoyed the experience.

"It was interesting for me because I wasn't aware of what kind of material we had for the firewood industry to use," she said. "I learned what's valuable to them today."

She also noted that many such field trips are open to the public.

"Some of them are advertised with our scouting notices, so if they're interested, people can check those out in the East Oregonian (newspaper)."

Nash said he was somewhat disappointed with the trip. With more than 80,000 acres burnt, (a portion which was inside the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness Area) the commissioner said that it sounded to him that little of it would

undergo salvage. He also learned that the newly allowable 3000-acre Categorical Exclusions allowed under special circumstances would not apply to the Grizzly fire.

"Salvage continues to be an ugly word when we try to re-purpose anything on the face of the earth," he said. He also stated that he thought the agency operated out of a fear of litigation rather than what was best for the economy community and forest health.

Schmidt said that he went along on the trip because he looks at it as part of his job to know what timber is out there and let the agency know what he's looking for. Not because the USFS needs to figure out anything for his company, but so the agency can know the market conditions. He has about 23 employees, and the mill is dependent to a certain point on what the agency has to offer.

"Our two primary product lines are firewood and post-and-pole, and post-and-pole requires a lot of lodgepole and for firewood our highest value product is dead or diseased trees," he said. "If you think about these things, they're on Forest Service, not so much on private ground. Our product lines were built around what the Forest Service has and needs to remove for forest health."

The mill owner said that he came away from the journey with the idea that the agency wants to get work done regardless of their limited resources.

"My takeaway is that they were grateful to get an understanding of what kind of product fits our marketplace," he said. "I was grateful they took the time to listen to what was important to our county and our community and our business. It was a good sharing opportunity."

Hillock thought the field trip a positive experience and thought those who attended would take the message back to Rassbach that the county was receptive to the agency's ideas. "We'd like to work with them and do some good things for both the forest and the county."

"I've spent the last 40 years trying to help out people in the local job force," he said. "I felt it was important to not only help those people in Wallowa with jobs, but to conserve natural resources, and after going out to look at those trees today, we've got good trees that can be used at that mill that would go to waste if we don't harvest them."

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Sculptor: Josephy Center installs bronze by Nez Perce sculptor Doug Hyde

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The name of the sculpture is 'etweyé-wise, which means, in the Nez Perce language, "I return from a difficult journey."

The artist is Nez Perce tribal member Doug Hyde, who was born in Hermiston and raised on the Nez Perce Reservation at Lapwai, Idaho.

He attended the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe at 17 years old, is a Viet Nam veteran and is now one of the leading sculptors in the country.

Almost two years ago the Josephy Center for Arts and Culture received a large "Creative Heights" grant from the Oregon

Community Foundation for a bronze sculpture by a Native American artist.

The Josephy Center pointed out that although many bronze statues lining Joseph's Main Street depict Indians, none are the work of Indian artists.

The Center issued a call to Plateau Indian artists across the Northwest. Two artist finalists were selected by jurors representing the Umatilla Reservation in Oregon, the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho, and the Nez Perce people on the Colville Reservation in Washington.

Doug Hyde's winning design, which will be installed at the Josephy Center this week, features

a large slab of granite with the outline of the Wallowa Mountains carved at its top and the outline of a Nez Perce woman carved from its center.

The life-sized woman, in bronze, is walking towards the granite, returning to her homeland from a difficult journey.

This sculpture is a highlight and reminder of the many places where the Nez Perce presence is strong in Wallowa County, including the Wallowa Band Nez Perce Interpretive Center and Tamkaliks celebration in Wallowa, the Nez Perce Friendship Feast at Chief Joseph Days, and the Nez Perce Fisheries offices and restoration projects.