

Experts discuss forest management on moraine

East Moraine walking tour looks at present, future

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA LAKE — Nearly a dozen people gathered at the south end of Wallowa Lake on Wednesday, Oct. 14, to learn more about forest management in the area, particularly on the East Moraine.

The East Moraine is largely a 1,791-acre parcel acquired by Wallowa County in January from the Ronald C. Yanke Family Trust. More recently, another 33 acres were donated to the county by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, bringing the total to 1,824 acres. The northern end is mostly grassland, while the southern end is forested.

It's the forested end that was the focus of those attending the Oct. 14 walking tour and the forest experts hosting it.

Nils Christoffersen, executive director of Wallowa Resources, said there's another privately owned 30-acre parcel that's being considered for donation, which would connect the two at the southeast end of the lake.

"It really doesn't make sense to come out here and plan a thinning that's tough to pull off logistically when



Larry Nalls, center, a consulting forester and Wallowa Resources Board member, discusses the viability of logging as part of a forest management plan Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2020, during a walking tour of the East Moraine. At left is Nils Christoffersen, executive director of Wallowa Resources, and at right is John Punches, a forester with OSU Extension.

we're going to leave a big hole in the middle," he said of the potential donation. "It'd be better to wait and see if that thing actually happens."

But that isn't holding back plans for forest management to be given serious consideration.

John Punches, a forester with Oregon State University Extension, discussed the health of the forest in the moraine, the types of trees there and the threats to their continued growth.

"There's going to have to

be a plan for continued management so we make sure (natural) regeneration comes in," Punches said. "We look at a stand now and we need to act now or it's going to really start to fall apart. ... Right now, it's primarily grand fir dying, but before much longer you're going to have (Douglas) fir dying, and Doug fir is the species that you can harvest out of here right now and pay the bill for doing the treatment of the site. You wait a whole lot longer and you won't have that sort of Doug fir."

The cost of forest management will largely be left up to Wallowa County. County Commissioner Todd Nash was among the group present for the tour.

He and Larry Nalls, a consulting forester and Wallowa Resources Board member, agreed thinning the stand is not about making a profit.

"This is obviously not going to be a moneymaker," Nalls said. "This is going to be for other reasons. There is the ideology out there that people want to cut to make a fortune, but that's not what's

going on here."

Those leading the discussion agreed any thinning must be for reasons of forest health and the potential of fire risk. In addition to the natural resource the forest presents, there are numerous homes and businesses at the south end of the lake.

Lisa Mahon, Wallowa County's Firewise Community coordinator working on establishing a new Firewise Community at the south end of the lake, said homeowners there are concerned that the forest gets managed like they want it managed.

"They realize the threat of sitting in a bowl," she said. "That's a topic every time we meet is how do we get ... some sort of fuel break. That is a concern on their minds."

Punches said that while the forest's health is currently fairly good, he's concerned that in coming years, falling dead trees will add to the ground fuels, making the area ripe for the kind of fire that hasn't happened there for about a century.

"Echoing what John just said, this could be an absolute disaster in 30 years," Nalls said, agreeing with Punches.

All there agreed a management plan needs to be developed.

"We're not doing this for the money," Nalls said. "We're just trying to make this a stand that is going to get us somewhere in the future.

From a political standpoint, this may be a tough sell. We're along a highway to a crown jewel and we're by a bunch of houses."

He said the area is at a critical juncture with critical issues.

"This is the interface between the private land and the national forest and so the risk of fire, insect, disease but particularly fire is highest right here," Nalls said. "The condition of this property is such that it's conducive to wildfire and it's also supporting, with this grand fir, the spread of that fir engraver beetle."

Punches hopes the forest management plan can include creating a buffer zone between the forest and private property. But thinning will bring changes.

"It's going to change the nature of the site somewhat because when we take out some of those trees, more light's going to hit the ground and your ground's going to go from being really stark and you're going to see more of the shrub layer develop and the habitat change in here, there's going to be more deer and elk in the area," he said. "It's going to mean more feeding ground and calving ground, so those types of structural issues are going to occur. ... There's going to be a more significant amount of natural regeneration. There's very little right now; it's just too dark."

Wolf shot and killed in eastern Baker County was breeding male from Cornucopia pack

Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Oregon State Police are investigating the unlawful killing of the breeding male wolf from the Cornucopia pack in eastern Baker County.

The wolf died from a gunshot wound on or about Sept. 24, according to OSP.

This incident occurred northwest of New Bridge in the Skull Creek drainage of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Forest Service Road 7741 accesses the Skull Creek drainage and the wolf was found off the 125 spur road. That's about 1 mile east of Eagle Forks campground. Anyone with information can contact OSP Sgt. Isaac Cyr through the Turn in Poachers (TIP) hotline at 1-800-452-7888.

Biologists from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) trapped the wolf and fitted it with a GPS tracking collar in December 2018.

According to ODFW, the breeding male and female of the Cornucopia pack bred for the first time in 2019. The breeding female is a radio-collared wolf that dispersed from the Pine Creek pack, also in eastern Baker County, and the breeding male that was killed in September had dispersed



A collared gray wolf was found shot and killed in eastern Baker County in late September.

from the Walla Walla pack in Union, Umatilla and Wallowa counties.

The pair produced three pups that survived to the end of 2019, according to ODFW. Data from the wolves' collars showed the pack used a 162-square-mile area in the Pine Creek and Keating wildlife management units, with 92% of the location points on public land.



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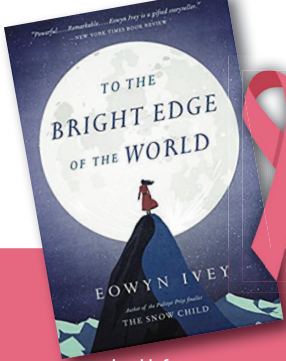
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