



Ellen Morris Bishop/For the Wallowa County Chieftain
Wallowa Memorial Hospital's new ambulance shows off its lights on Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021. It may look like any other ambulance on the road, but its four-wheel drive, high-tech capabilities and its ability to navigate roads in bad weather elevate it above the rest.

Ambulance: A smooth ride like the 'family van'

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to meet the needs of Critical Care Transport. It gives caregivers complete access to the patient critical care including IV therapy, mechanical ventilation and blood work.

The new blue-and-white vehicle has the chassis, drive train and engine of a Chevrolet K4500 4x4. But that's where the resemblance to an ordinary truck ends.

This ambulance has a computer-controlled hydraulic suspension called a "liquid spring." It levels out bumps, adjusts vehicle height automatically for road conditions, and can be raised and lowered with a manual control as well.

"The crews keep remarking on the smooth ride and ease of driving — some say it drives like the 'family van,' but it's truly been an important upgrade to patient care as well as safety for everyone onboard," Peck said.

There's a built-in electric generator that provides ample electric-system support, including a standalone heating/cooling system with UVC light that helps kill airborne viruses, which is especially important now, Peck said. The compartment configuration was designed to

meet the needs of Critical Care Transport, with added safety features for patient and crew members. For example, the seat belts and shoulder harnesses for the EMT's allow them to stretch forward and move to treat the patient while remaining safely seat belted.

The new ambulance's cost was covered by local fundraising efforts, led by the Wallowa Valley Health Care Foundation, including the Healthy Futures Dinner Auction in 2019 and a \$20,000 grant from the Lewis and Clark Valley Health Care Foundation, that raised over \$152,000 with a matching grant from the Murdock Charitable Trust for \$152,000. The ambulance itself, including the major equipment, cost just over \$300,000.

Although the hospital has two other 4x4 ambulances, this one greatly enhances our transfer capability in extreme weather, Peck said.

"We feel very fortunate to serve in a community that supports our mission with equipment that provides safety for the patient and crew, as well as allows the crews to provide the highest levels of prehospital care possible," he said. "Without community support, our mission would struggle."

Lostine: 'It's going to look like a park'

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Pro Thinning Inc., operated by Zacharias' sons Tom and Seth Zacharias, has been contracted to do the harvesting.

"This number is a 'total,' and lumber is only one of numerous forest products that may be produced out of this total," Moeller said.

The smaller logs are going to Schmidt's IBR mill in Wallowa, while larger "saw logs" will be sold on the open market. Schmidt said some are going to Jim Zacharias' Jay Zee Lumber in Joseph, some to the Boise-Cascade mill in Elgin, some to Woodgrain in La Grande and some to Idaho Forest in Lewiston, Idaho.

Nils D. Christoffersen, executive director of Wallowa Resources, said the project has been sought for more than 15 years.

"When I chaired the county's first community wildfire protection plan processes back in 2005-06, this area was one of four areas that emerged as the highest priorities based on the risk of fire, and the potential consequence that a wildfire would have on people's lives, our community and a wide range of environmental values at risk," Christoffersen wrote in an email. "That risk assessment, and the potential consequences in the Lostine Corridor, have not changed — if anything they have risen. If a fire broke out in the corridor last summer, when the parking lots were filled beyond capacity (from recreationists) and hundreds of additional cars were parked along the side of the road, it could have been catastrophic. Evacuation routes would have been clogged, and access by firefighting crews blocked."

Howard, of the ODF, agreed. Earlier he noted that it's not "if" wildfire comes to the area, but "when."

"We're a fire-dependent ecosystem; we have wildland fires in this county every year. The Lostine Corridor is not free from that," he said, noting that "fire-dependent" means fire helps maintain forest health.

"As long as summer thunderstorms keep rolling through, we're going to have fires, and fire's a normal part of the ecosystem," he said. "When we say 'fire-dependent,' we mean our forests depend on that as part of their normal cycle."

But neither recreationists nor landowners want to see a wildfire get out of control.

In a *Chieftain* story from February 2020, Michael



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

"It's going to look like a park," said Jim Zacharias, after viewing a section of the Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project, that had been cleared of dense timber and underbrush Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021.



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

A forwarder unloads logs to the roadside Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021, to await loading onto log trucks in Lostine Canyon. The forwarder brings the cut logs from where they were felled to the roadside.

Eng, of the Lostine Firewise Community, said approximately 110 properties with 120 structures make up about 15 square miles, or 9,600 acres, south of Lostine. About 45 landowners are participants in that Firewise Community.

"Fire is good for the ecosystem but when you put 'catastrophic' in front of it, that's a whole new formula," Howard said.

But the project hasn't been without controversy. Earlier in the process, two environmental groups — Oregon Wild and the Greater Hells Canyon Council — went to court to stop it because they said they objected to some of the aspects of the then-proposed project and to some procedural concerns.

Rob Klavins, Northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild out of Enterprise, said the environmental groups — and some area residents who opposed the project — were in favor of the aspects involving removing hazard trees, adding natural

firebreaks, the helipad and thinning around structures. But portions appeared to be going too far.

"Concerned about a majority who seemed more about getting logs to mills than safety concerns," Klavins said last week.

He said the procedural concerns involved including "really important stakeholders, ourselves included," in the decision-making process that he believed were overlooked.

As a result, the groups took their objections to court, ultimately seeing an unfavorable decision in the 9th U.S. Court of Appeals.

Klavins called the project "a dramatic overreach from their stated purpose."

He also said his group only went to court reluctantly.

"If they had done this properly, there were lots of portions of the project we could've supported," he said.

Klavins said after they took it to court, the Forest Service scaled back the project. He said he plans to go up there this week to see what changes were made.

Still, the project remains multifaceted.

"Everything we're doing here on the federal side, it fits to a 'T' into our community wildfire protection plan ... the common pieces are fitting together," Moeller said. "The primary goal of this project is public safety. Preventing catastrophic wildfire is a piece of that, but that's not the sole purpose of this project."

Schmidt agreed that the hazard trees remain the most constant danger. He and his family often recreate in the area and told of a time last summer when high winds added to the danger.

"It was scary as hell; trees were falling all around us," he said, adding that a woman packing stuff out on her horse was four hours behind because she had to cut trees that fell across the trail.

Jim Zacharias, in his capacity with Wallowa Resources, spoke highly of how the project fits into that group's mission.

"Wallowa Resources is really community oriented. We really support what this is designed to do," he said. "Plus, it's supporting the local economy in creating jobs. Wallowa Resources is about the human resource, too. With Pro Thinning, there are five people directly on their crew, plus a half-dozen truck drivers who are hauling the logs and David (Schmidt)'s operation that has 30-something employees. Then there's a trickle effect: They're all eating at M.Crow store and buying Copenhagen at the Little Store."

Zacharias was pleased with the results he saw in areas that had been completed.

"It's going to look like a park," he said.

March is National Problem Gambling Awareness Month

If you or someone you know has a problem, support is available. Visit OPGR.org for support including a 24/7 helpline staffed with professionals to answer questions and guide you to resources.

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Signs That Gambling May Be a Problem

- * Spending more and more time gambling
- * Increasing gambling time and places
- * Increasing bet sizes
- * Creating special occasions for gambling (canceling other plans)
- * Increasing Intensity of interest in gambling (constant high tension/excitement)
- * Gambling to escape problems or when there is a crises
- * "Chasing" losses with more gambling
- * Boasting about winning and evasive about losing
- * Exaggerated display of money and possessions
- * Decreasing desire to engage in other activities and interests
- * Frequent absences from school, work and home
- * Withdrawal from family and friends
- * Diversion of funds earmarked for other purposes

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