



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

**Veterans plant the national and tribal colors Thursday, July 29, 2021, during the Return to Am'saaxpa ceremonies just west of Joseph. The approximately 148-acre property was blessed as it was returned to tribal ownership.**

## Blessing:

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But in October 1877, following the Battle of Bear's Paw in Montana, Joseph was forced to surrender more than 400 tribal members to Brigadier Gen. Oliver O. Howard. That led to exile in Oklahoma and eventually to the Colville Indian Reservation in Washington, where Joseph died in 1904.

Before he died, he made trips to Washington, D.C., to plead the case of his people, with no success. According to historylink.org, in 1900, Chief Joseph received permission to return to Wallowa and make his case before the valley's white settlers. He told a large crowd that he had never sold his land and that he now wished to reclaim some of the prime land near his father's burial place, as well as some areas near Wallowa Lake and parts of the Imnaha Valley. He was met with jeers. They considered Joseph sentimental and delusional and expressed no willingness to sell him — much less give him — any land at all. A government inspector who accompanied Joseph recommended that he was better off staying on the Colville Reservation.

With his hopes dashed forever, he remained on the Colville with his small band, living in a teepee instead of the house that had been provided him.

### Tears of joy

Wheeler said that although many of their ancestors — living and dead — were unable to be there Thursday, their presence was felt.

"You may not be able to see them, but you can feel them, their tears and their smiles that they're sharing with us today," he said. "I think of my mother, she was unable to make the journey because of her age, but our family's from here ... she

cried when I left and I told her I was coming. She said, 'I will be there with you.' That's how all of us carry all of our family who aren't able to be here and all of our ancestors. She's carrying that blood with her and that's the same blood I have. That's what we're carrying here and that's what I felt when we were riding in."

The joy looks toward the future.

"We're glad we have the opportunity to do this, not only for our ancestors who had to leave and live all the years of exile and having all of our belongings taken from us and our land taken from us ... to be able to get to this point, it's hard to describe how I feel inside right now," Wheeler said. "I'll know more later on when our future generations are able to come here and live here and enjoy this land for what it is and bring back what is intended. We're just thankful to be here today."

He also told of a dream he had about 20 years ago that envisioned the day.

"I had a dream of our people walking out of the woods and walking into this valley," he said. "I didn't understand it at the time ... but as we got closer to this date, I understood more that it was a vision of coming home and our people needed to be here as the land was calling."

### One people

Tribal elder Allen Pinkham spoke of how the land must be valued by all people — Indian and non-Indian alike.

"I am descended from Chief Joseph's sister, Sarah," he said. "We became the Black Eagles and then Pinkhams. I am related to this people who lived here. I am glad to be home. I first came here in 1947 as a young boy."

Pinkham described a oneness that is key to being good stewards of the land and its resources.

"As a people, Joseph spoke of one thing that we need to be — one people," he said. "We started saying that in 1855. What this 'one people' means is we will not steal from each other; we will not take from each other and call it our own; and, we will not kill one another. ... When we become one people, what we can do is unlimited. As Nakia said, we want to be interested in the environmental conditions because we are of the Earth. So one day, maybe there can be common understanding between two kinds of people about what to do about the ecosystems that have disappeared."

### Hopes for the future

With all the reacquisitions of tribal lands the Nez Perce have made in recent years, there is even hopes such lands could be incorporated into the Idaho-based reservation.

"There is a mechanism to do that, and we will be pursuing that," Wheeler said.

Penney went into further detail. He noted that in addition to parcels in Wallowa County, the tribe has acquired lands elsewhere, such as about 15,000 acres near Clarkston, Washington.

"The land is still within the Treaty of 1855," he said. "There's a process where you take land into trust. ... Through the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, there's a process to handle acquisitions."

Much of the hopes for the future deal with stewardship of the land and the people on it.

"What we tell everybody is that just like our elders in times past told us is that the land and us are the same," Penney said. "What you call resources is a part of our life. So when we advocate for these resources, we not only advocate for our life but for all of humanity — that means all of you. ... Coming back home is a big testament to that time."



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**Shannon Wheeler, vice chairman of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, right, speaks Thursday, July 29, 2021, during the Return to Am'saaxpa ceremonies to bless the land recently reacquired by the tribe. NPTEC Treasurer Casey Mitchell listens at left.**

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2021 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**May**

Sun 5/2 Cowboy Fun Shoot  
Sat 5/8 NRL22 Match  
Sat 5/29 PRS Precision Rifle Match

**June**

Sat 6/5 Rimfire Fun Shoot  
Sun 6/6 Cowboy Fun Shoot  
Sat 6/12 NRL22 Match  
Sat 6/19 Old Soldiers Military Rifle Shoot

**July**

Sat 7/3 PRS Precision Rifle Match  
Sun 7/11 Cowboy Fun Shoot  
Sat 7/17 NRL22 Match

**August**

Sun 8/1 Cowboy Fun Shoot  
Sat 8/7 Rimfire Fun Shoot  
Sat 8/14 NRL22 Match  
Sat 8/21 PRS Precision Rifle Match

**September**

Sat 9/4 Rimfire Fun Shoot  
Sun 9/5 Cowboy Fun Shoot  
Sat 9/11 PRS Precision Rifle Match  
Sun 9/12 PRS Precision Rifle Match  
Sat 9/18 Fall Youth Shoot  
Sun 9/19 Hunter Sight-in Day/Public Open Range Day  
Sat 9/25 NRL22 Match  
Sun 9/26 Hunter Sight-in Day/Public Open Range Day

**October**

Sat 10/2 Rimfire Fun Shoot  
Sat 10/9 NRL22 Match  
Sat 10/16 Old Soldiers Military Rifle Shoot  
Sat 10/23 PRS Precision Rifle Match

Event dates are subject to change. For more information, contact MJ Van Dine-Match Director at (541) 975-3000.





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