

# Forest owners' group revived

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

Private forest owners in Baker County are reviving an organization that helps members better manage their timber ground, and this version has expanded its geographic boundaries considerably.

The newly constituted Northeast Oregon chapter of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association covers four counties, said Jacob Putney, extension forester for the Oregon State University Extension Service in Baker and Grant counties.

Besides those two adjoining counties, the new chapter includes members in Union and Wallowa counties.

"We all share the Blue Mountains, and although there are differences, for the most part the forest types are somewhat similar," Putney said.

Baker County has a lengthy history of having an active local chapter of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association. The statewide organization lobbies in the Oregon Legislature on behalf of its members and also offers

advice for private forest owners about how to manage their properties.

Putney said the Baker County chapter, which added Grant County members when the latter county's chapter dissolved in 2011, gradually cut back on its activities around 2018, when his predecessor, Bob Parker, retired.

Putney said he convened a meeting of the local chapter in early 2020, just before the pandemic started.

This was not the best time to try to restart the group.

Or any group, come to that.

But more recently the effort to reconstitute the chapter has gained traction, something Putney attributes largely to Debi Lorence.

Lorence and her husband, Walt, moved in January 2021 from Washington County, where they raised Christmas trees and were active in the Small Woodlands Association chapter there for about five years, to Halfway.

Debi Lorence is the president for the new Northeast Oregon chapter, which met most recently on Thursday, Sept. 2.

Although the Lorences' 17-acre property in Pine Valley near Halfway didn't have a single tree when they moved in, Debi said they have planted a couple thousand seedlings, including ponderosa pines and tamaracks, on 2 acres. The remainder of the property is growing alfalfa.

Debi Lorence said she was eager to become involved with a local group of tree owners, and potentially pass on some of the knowledge she had gained through her participation in Washington County's Small Woodlands Association chapter.

"It helped me as a young tree grower to understand everything I was getting into," she said.

When she learned that the local chapter had mostly gone dormant, Lorence said she talked with residents who had been involved with the chapter about the prospects of reviving the group.

"I just wanted to get it going again," she said with a rueful chuckle. "And now I'm the president."

Putney said this is an excellent time to encour-

age forest owners to join the local chapter. He emphasized the adjective "small" in small woodlands.

"Even if you own an acre of trees," he said.

Lorence amplifies Putney's point.

"You don't have to own a forest," she said. "Even if you have a tree on your property and you like it and would like to protect it, OSWA will help."

With wildfires becoming an increasingly widespread threat to forests across the West, both private and public, Putney said it's natural that woodland owners would be interested in learning how they can protect their trees.

"Managing for reducing wildfire risk is always a major motivation for small woodland owners," Putney said. "Having a place where woodland owners can get together and talk about the challenges is beneficial."

Although expanding the local chapter's footprint to include Union and Wallowa counties will create some logistical challenges in scheduling meetings — it's a pretty long drive from, say, Enterprise to John Day — Putney said the chapter, as in the past, will also strive to schedule field trips and other outdoor events where members



Baker City Herald, File

Lyle Defrees stands on his family's forested property in Sumpter Valley, about 20 miles southwest of Baker City.

can gain practical knowledge.

Strolling through somebody's stand of ponderosa pines, for instance, is inherently more useful than sitting at a table and talking about those trees.

The Defrees Ranch in Sumpter Valley, about 20 miles southwest of Baker City, is likely to be a destination for a field trip.

Dean Defrees, whose family has been involved in the Baker County chapter of the Small Woodlands Association for many years, said he's excited about Lorence and Putney working to revive, and expand, the chapter.

"I think it's a very good deal," said Defrees, whose family was named the Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year for 2016 by the American Tree Farm System, out of 74,000 entries. "It's good to get things put back together and rolling again."

Defrees encourages all

private forest owners to consider joining the chapter.

Lorence said field trips and similar events are integral to the mission of the Small Woodlands Association.

"It's a hands-on organization," she said. "It's not supposed to be about a bunch of meetings. It's supposed to be about participating and learning from each other. We want people who have been doing this a long time to share that knowledge."

Lorence also hopes to spread the word in local schools about the association's work.

"With the drought showing no signs of ending, the need is greater than ever for knowledge, and for getting the message out about how important trees are," she said.

More information about the Small Woodlands Association is available by emailing Lorence at [debilorence@gmail.com](mailto:debilorence@gmail.com) or by phone at 541-604-1151.

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## IN BRIEF

### COVID-19 cases slowing in county

The rate of COVID-19 cases in Wallowa County is still high, but may be starting to come down from its peak in August.

The Oregon Health Authority reported three new cases of COVID-19 in the county over the weekend. That is on the heels of nine cases on Friday, three cases Thursday and two Wednesday. The total now in Wallowa County since the start of the pandemic is 482.

The OHA in its Monday report noted the number of hospitalizations is down from its peak, though still high. There were 1,075 patients in the hospital in Oregon due to COVID-19 as of Monday, and 274 in ICU.

The state reported 4,700 cases over the weekend and surpassed 300,000 since the start of the pandemic.

### Council OKs new agreement with Enterprise airport

ENTERPRISE — A new agreement with the Enterprise Municipal Airport was approved during the Enterprise City Council's meeting Monday, Sept. 13, according to a press release.

Councilor David Elliott, who also serves on the Airport Committee, reviewed changes within the Airport Operating Agreement with the council. Among those changes are:

- An increased fuel sales tax of 2 cents per gallon to 1.25% of all fuel sales.
- The removal of rodent/

### KEY COVID-19 CASE DATES

Below are the reported dates of key COVID-19 numbers in Wallowa County dating back to the start of the pandemic. The county has reported 482 cases since the start of the pandemic, with 180 of those coming during August and 63 so far in September. The amount of time between the dates is also included.

**First case:** April 8, 2020

**50th case:** Oct. 30, 2020 (205 days)

**100th case:** Jan. 26, 2021 (88 days)

**150th case:** April 2, 2021 (66 days)

**200th case:** July 19, 2021 (108 days)

**250th case:** Aug. 5, 2021 (17 days)

**300th case:** Aug. 17, 2021 (12 days)

**350th case:** Aug. 24, 2021 (seven days)

**400th case:** Aug. 30, 2021 (six days)

**450th case:** Sept. 7, 2021 (eight days)

Source: Oregon Health Authority

varmint control as the city's responsibility from the agreement.

• Removing the airport vehicle from the agreement.

• Adding an annual mandatory meeting and review of the agreement.

In another matter, the council was read an email from the office of state Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, requesting a meeting with the council to discuss certification requirements by the

state Department of Environmental Quality, housing and any other concerns the council may have. City Administrator Lacey McQuead said she would facilitate such a meeting between Levy and the council.

McQuead also said she will facilitate a meeting between the Terminal Gravity Brewery and the city's Public Works Committee to find a solution for TG's "extremely high sewer equivalent dwelling units," the release stated. As a result, Resolution 670, which would deal with sewer rates for the brewery, was tabled until the Oct. 11 meeting.

In other matters, the council:

• Approved a liquor license application submitted by the Red Rooster.

• Planned to hear a formal recommendation from the city's Planning Commission on the parameters for either allowing or denying future vacation rentals within the city. The recommendation will come after a public hearing scheduled prior to the Oct. 11 council meeting.

• Reviewed a Community-Economic-Tourism Related Activities grant application from the Wallowa Valley Community Ice Rink. After McQuead read a letter from Andie Lueders, it was agreed the Motel Tax Committee would review the application and make a recommendation during the October meeting.

• Heard department reports.

• Set the next council meeting for 6:30 p.m. on Oct. 11.

— Chieftain staff

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