

Hero:

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Feather of Achievement award by the Wallowa County commissioners.

“We really appreciate the above and beyond and your willingness to hang in there and keep a vital part of Wallowa County operating at the 911 station there,” Commissioner Todd

Nash said at the time. “You gave up family time in a time of trepidation where you could’ve said, ‘It’s just too dangerous and I’m not coming in.’ But you kept that operation going and we really appreciate your service and we want to recognize that. There’s a lot of extra people who came here today just to make sure you are recognized for your duties here, so thank you very much.”

Langerman said after the presentation that four of the six 911 dispatchers were out sick with coronavirus and it was just her and Shaver keeping the operation going.

“We were working 12-hour shifts,” Langerman said.

The mother of three, ages 3, 5 and 6, said that the long shifts and shorthanded situation lasted about two weeks.

Local COVID-19 cases continue decline

Chieftain staff

ENTERPRISE — COVID-19 cases dropped again in Wallowa County.

From Oct. 19-25, the Oregon Health Authority reported 19 cases — three on Oct. 19 and Oct. 21, six on Oct. 20, and seven on Oct. 25. There were no new cases reported Oct. 22, but the number of cases in the

county increased by 20, from 673 to 693.

Still, the number is trending in the right direction. The county had 49 cases from Oct. 5-11, and 21 from Oct. 12-18. For the month of October, there have been 111 cases, going from 582 at the end of September to the current 693. The daily case total for the month is down to 4.63 after being near seven per

day in early September.

The county is also likely to finish the month with a decrease in month-over-month cases. There were 180 cases in August and 163 in September. October is on pace to see about 143 cases.

There have been no new deaths reported in Wallowa County, with the number of COVID-19 related deaths staying at 12.

Resources:

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He started with a history of Wallowa Resources, documenting various achievements the group has made over the past quarter-century.

In addition to those contributions to the county, contributions the group has made or been a part of include the Woodlands and Watersheds Festival, the Warm Hearts Warm Homes project, a COVID-19 Business Relief Fund, a Thanksgiving dinner and Pub Talks, which had been suspended because of the pandemic, but Christoffersen said he hopes to see that start up again.

He emphasized the group’s threefold mission. As Wallowa Resources’ website states, “Our mission is to empower rural communities to create strong economies and healthy landscapes through land stewardship, education, and job creation.”

“The concept of a stewardship economy is central to who we are and what we do and it’s centered on our primary assets: the people who live here and our natural resources, particularly our working landscapes and we invest in these connections,” Christoffersen said. “This differs from the standard responses to the loss of large job providers like the mills. In most places when you lose a large job provider, people work hard to recruit some other large industry or employer. Back when I got here (in 1999), I remember conversations about whether we should try to attract call centers, service centers, it was even aired — I don’t know how seriously — but there were discussions about whether we should try to get a federal prison here. Everybody was desperate to figure out how to put people back to work.”

“It also differs from the recreation or amenity economy because we believe strongly that rural communities should and must be part of land stewardship, producing high-quality food, fiber, building materials, energy and maintaining while we also maintain and improve the quality of our soils, water, forests and, of course, our community.”

Forest management

The issue of job losses from past sawmill closures prompted another discussion with the commissioners: that of timber harvest



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Nils Christoffersen, executive director of Wallowa Resources, gives an update on his organization to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners at its meeting Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021.

and differences between the county and the USDA Forest Service on the amount of harvest.

“We have this divergence of opinion with the Forest Service and the county as far as goals and the volume of timber coming off the forest here is dismal,” Commissioner Todd Nash told Christoffersen. “When I hear their silviculturist talk about his goal is to get 5 million board feet a year off and that isn’t our goal. When I pipe in, I get eye rolls from the Forest Service and they say, ‘Oh, there goes Todd again.’ We need support in getting a viable amount of timber coming off this national forest on a yearly basis that is long-term sustainable for operations and new investment and infrastructure and for the health and well-being of our community and our forests. We’re so far

from that.”

Nash said after the meeting that with general forests in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest growing at a rate of about 80 million board feet a year, a realistic harvest would be 40-50 million board feet a year.

“That would be half of what’s growing out there,” he said.

He and Commissioner John Hillock also talked about vacant, closed allotments that are not being used for grazing land.

“I’ve knocked on that door for a long time in the same way and I just get eye rolls, you know, ‘We’ve got it on our schedule.’ they say,” Nash said.

While speaking highly of the “heroic” efforts of the Forest Service and other agencies in fighting fires, he and Hillock said some of those same efforts

should be employed ahead of time to prevent fires.

“I’ve seen what happens when we have a fire here in our community, especially early in the season, it’s a heroic effort,” Nash said. “They bring in resources from every entity from every place in the world to make sure they get that (fire) knocked down. But we never get that kind of response to those things that are here, slated, and I’ve asked the Forest Service, ‘Do something heroic. Show me that you’re making an effort.’ We’ve seen them take NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) writers from this forest and assign them to other places,

but we don’t see that effort here. For me, we need help from that because apparently, I’ve lost all credibility. They don’t want to make any more effort than what they’re doing right now. That’s completely unacceptable what they’re doing right now. I’m fit to be tied on that level.”

Christoffersen said he and Wallowa Resources agree with the commissioners’ position on use of timberlands.

“The forest plan needs to speak to the needs on the ground and set the goals based on the needs on the ground, not based on the limits of the existing capacity to manage public lands,” he said. “We need to be honest about what the land needs in a management plan and figure out how to get the resources to do the work that needs to be done rather than set the bar very low because we’ve got too few staff ... to do anything. Clearly, the restoration need far exceeds the current level of activity.”

He noted that some of Wallowa Resources’ work already is addressing those issues.

“Throughout our work, whether it’s through the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative or the messaging that is in the film, ‘The West is Burning’ that speaks specifically to this issue or the work we do with Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, which is pushing hard that all of that heroic investment that’s made in the face of a fire we shift back to do

up front to do the work to avoid a future fire risk. We’re in complete agreement on that,” he said.

The future

In addition to the recap of what Wallowa Resources has done, the commissioners also were eager to know what the group’s future plans are.

“My question would be what’s your plan for the next 25 years?” Hillock asked.

“I’m motivated because we’re doing good work, we’ve got a good team and we’re creating opportunities, but I would also say that I’m not anywhere near satisfied,” Christoffersen said. “I’m not going to pat myself on the back and think that what we’ve accomplished what this organization hoped it would accomplish 25 years ago.”

He went on to elaborate some of the group’s plans.

Hillock was pleased with what he heard.

“I like that attitude. I just want to add that I think you guys have done a great job and been a real benefit to the community,” he said. “Your attitude about, ‘It’s not enough’ that’s how we as businessmen are. Even though you’re at a certain point, you always want to do better. That’s a great attitude to take rather than just say, ‘Status quo; we’re doing OK.’ You guys have done a great job ... whether people see it or not.”

Nash agreed, saying, “Nils has a pretty special skillset.”

Wallowa County

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