

# Return of Woodlands and Watersheds a success

By ANN BLOOM

For the Wallowa County Chieftain



Contributed Photo

The Woodlands and Watersheds Festival returned with in-person activities after the previous two had been canceled due to the COVID-19 virus.

ENTERPRISE — A crowd of more than 450 people, many of them families, turned out recently for Wallowa Resources 2022 Woodlands and Watersheds Festival at the Wallowa County Fairgrounds.

Wallowa Resources and the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center partnered together to celebrate the county's cultural and natural resources.

Smokey Bear could be seen greeting children as some proudly displayed their catch from the fishing pond, sponsored by the Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries. Many of the booths featured family-friendly activities. The Woodlands and Watersheds Festival had been canceled the last two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think the festival surpassed our expectations this year," festival coordinator Jeff Costello said. "The last in-person festival we held was in 2019, so we weren't quite sure what to expect, this being our first year back in full swing at the fairgrounds. But we had 30 exhibitors from across Wallowa County and Northeast Oregon. The general spirit of the day was one of celebration and old friends reconnecting. So,

yeah, I think it was a successful event."

With warm temperatures and sunny skies, the event kicked off with a drumming and song performance by the Lighting Creek drum group, of the Nez Perce Tribe, out of Lapwai, Idaho. They were accompanied by speakers Mikailah Thompson and Aaron Miles, both Nez Perce tribal members. There were free hot dogs and a lunch

available from the Maxville Heritage Center.

Kevin Silagi, the new director of the Nez Perce Wallowa Homeland, said it was great to see so many of the organizations and agencies that make a positive impact in our communities and ecosystems.

The Head Start table offered a planting opportunity with its hens and chicks succulents.

"Most of the children were interested in seeing how the hens and chicks grow," said Kris Fraser, head teacher for Head Start.

She explained to the children how they spread by growing "chicks" from the "hen."

"I told one little girl she could break off the chicks to share with her friends. She thought that was cool," she said. "One of my past Head

Start parents who had given me my original plant happened by and was excited to see so many from the original plant."

The Nez Perce Wallowa Homeland Project focused on native demonstrations. According to Silagi, the demonstrations included games with knuckle bone dice, a discussion of rounds and tamalwit and using stones to grind a staple first food, qaw (biscuitroot) to make flour.

The seasonal round refers to people moving through the course of the year to follow food as it becomes available. Silagi explained that in the spring the food include gathering roots in the valleys and collecting berries in the forests during summer months. Gathering, fishing and hunting practices all center around managing those resources for the benefit of future generations with the understanding that if you take care of the land, the land will provide everything you need, he said.

"This spiritual relationship to the land is called tamalwit, it the natural law that teaches people how to live, and the way of holding people accountable for the land," Silagi said.

At the Building Healthy Families booth, children were busy making bird feeders and discussing native bird species.

"Watershed was a wonderful way to bring back large family summer events. We just enjoyed an amazing day building community in the sunshine!" said Maria Weer, director of Building Healthy Families.

This was the 18th year for the watershed festival, the 14th year of the Maxville Gathering and the seventh year of the two organizations co-hosting the event as the Woodlands and Watersheds Festival. Costello said that with the partnership between the two organizations Woodlands and Watersheds Festival was a better name fit for the event.

"(It) better reflected, not only the entirety of the diverse landscapes that surround our local communities, and to which we are intimately tied, but also the rich history, heritage and mission of both organizations," Costello said.

"We are so grateful to Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center and Wallowa Resources for putting together this wonderful event," Silagi said.

Costello said the Woodlands and Watersheds Festival is an opportunity for residents and visitors to celebrate the natural, historic and cultural resources of the area all while providing a way for families to engage in learning, listening and having fun.

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## Drone regulation proving to be time-consuming process

Public has voiced concern as rules are being drawn up

By JACK PARRY  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — For the past 100 years, state parks in Oregon have been an attraction to view various plant life, bodies of

water and animal species.

However, a newer addition to state parks is something that Oregonians couldn't have foreseen even a few decades ago: drones piercing the skies.

There are no regulations on drone flight, takeoff or landing within state parks. The parks can only make airborne regulations during certain mating seasons.

"When raptors are nesting and doing their breeding, they don't allow drones into the park whatsoever," said Ashley O'Toole, a drone flier and the owner of Sky High Imaging, LLC, a company that provides drone imaging services located in La Grande.

Just because people are free to fly drones through parks, doesn't mean that they are free from controversy.

So when a work group convened by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department put together a proposal for drone regulations in state parks at the end of 2021 and asked for public input, it didn't take long to receive backlash.

The proposal stated that drones would be allowed to take off anywhere unless otherwise specified. The vagueness of the law prodded people to ask Chris Havel, associate director at the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, if their worst fears were possible.

"Either we're going to have a cloud of drones over every park, or a wildlife des-

ert in every park," he said.

While the backlash was coming from drone supporters and protesters, Havel noted that most of the worries came from natural resource supporters, who were underrepresented on the work group.

"Eighty percent of the concern was from people who thought they were going to hurt birds, hurt other wildlife and chase off deer," Havel said.

While the Havel sees drone usage as a contentious topic for the parks, O'Toole believes that the public has been easing its concern recently. Even though people were nervous when drones were new, he believes that technological innovations like GPS, collision warning systems and the prevalence of drones have taken the pressure off the issue.

"I think the general opinion of drones has gone from not liking them to maybe just apathetic, not having an opinion at all really," he said.

After the criticism, the Parks and Recreation Department decided to pause the rulemaking, look to form a new work group with more representation from environmentalists and create a map and criteria for places where drones can take off and land in state parks.

Havel said this rulemaking process has been difficult for a few main reasons, one being the difference in the

landscapes of parks throughout the state creating issues for statewide regulations.

"The environment isn't the same across the state, the way people use parks is not the same across the state, so why would the rules be the same across the state?" he said.

Also, the balancing act of managing the people's interests as well as the safety of the parks is a struggle with most park regulations.

"You don't want to just slam the door on something that is a legitimate form of outdoor recreation," Havel said, "but you don't want to harm the park or conflict with people."

Even though there is currently a lot of freedom for drone owners in state parks, O'Toole welcomes rules of this kind so drone pilots can be more educated on rules.

"If anything it sounds like this is just going to provide the clarity that everyone's been looking for," O'Toole said.

The work group is still formulating a map and criteria for the parks. Once it is done, the group will give its proposal to the agency director who will decide if the rulemaking process should restart. It is a process not likely to happen in 2022.

"If they produce something that is really practical, useful, protects parks, and accommodates recreation," Havel said, "I would expect rulemaking could restart in spring next year."

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