

# Wallowa County commissioners get forest health update

## USFS officials discuss forest management

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Just over a year after the outbreak of the Elbow Creek Fire, officials from the Umatilla National Forest gave an update on ongoing forest management, including restoration of the nearly 21,000 acres that burned to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday, July 20.

Forest Supervisor Eric Watrud, Public Affairs Officer Darcy Weseman and District Ranger Susan Piper of the Pomeroy Ranger District gave the presentation, which included workbooks that showed maps and projections on possible timber harvests in the next few years.

Commission Chairwoman Susan Roberts said the board was eager to hear the officials' update.

"We're eager to hear



From left, Eric Watrud, supervisor of the Umatilla National Forest; Susan Piper, district ranger of the Pomeroy Ranger District; and Darcy Weseman, public affairs officer for the Umatilla forest, discuss ongoing forest management efforts Wednesday, July 20, 2022, with the Wallowa County commissioners.

about the Elbow (Creek Fire) area," she said.

Piper told how the affected area is already

being revitalized. Salvage and other timber sales are being planned. She said Heartwood Biomass in Wallowa was one of the purchasers of a timber sale amounting to about two million board feet of both saw logs and non-saw logs. She said a couple more sales will be coming out of the area. The second one will be in 2023 estimated at 3.5 million board feet and a third one is about 2.5 million board feet.

"Several of the sales she mentioned are from our regular green timber program," Watrud said. "The first one she mentioned is related to the fire so that would be considered more salvage. With last year being a big fire year, there were more acres that burned on the Umatilla National Forest since it became a national forest in 1908. That's not a giant surprise since we all

remember the heat dome in June of last year. You can still see the damage on trees and plants in people's yards around here."

A heat dome occurs when a persistent region of high pressure traps heat over an area.

"One of the success stories even though it was such a big fire season in terms of

kinds of fires in the future."

Forest management has been considered key to mitigating losses to fires, they said.

"In the intervening 15-plus years, they were able to harvest about 78 million board feet, and they were able to do active grazing management, they were able to do fuels breaks,

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— Eric Watrud, supervisor of the Umatilla National Forest

acres, was the impacts of those fires," Watrud said. "A large portion of the fire was in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness and we were able to help keep it confined in that area.

"Then the portion of the Lick Creek Fire that was outside the wilderness was an area that had been actively managed over the past 15 years in particular ... the Forest Service made a very deliberate decision to do a lot of active management to help prepare and mitigate the effects of those

proscribed fire, thinning, commercial timber sales," Watrud said. "What that yielded — in addition to helping to support the local community and support infrastructure in the area — is that when those fires occurred, they were much more manageable and safer to manage. The fire teams had options about where they could put in their firebreaks and to do that in a way that has a much higher probability of success and that was safer for the firefighters themselves."

## Grazing

Commissioner Todd Nash, a rancher who often addresses natural resource issues for the commissioners, said he hopes to see more grazing allowed in the region.

"I don't want to see that become a vacant allotment," he said.

Watrud sought to reassure the commissioners.

"Grazing is something that's highly important," he said. "To further highlight the importance of grazing management, the Umatilla National Forest is going to be bringing on a grazing manager to provide more structure and clear management of that for our grazing program."

## Firebreaks

Another management tool is the creation of roads in the forests that can serve as ready-made firebreaks. Nash asked how such roads had helped.

"It was something that, when the fire teams came in ... these were preplanned as being strategic firebreaks," Watrud said. "They showed up on the ground and (could see) that this will work. Especially with Lick Creek, in particular, it was such a fast-moving fire after that heat dome effect that they wouldn't have had time otherwise. So it really was a success story."

## The future

Weseman handed out workbooks complete with data, maps and other information on the Umatilla's forest management plans.

"You can see that what the fire effects were is totally different in that landscape," she said, adding that the Forest Service has just finished a video on the fire that includes drone footage.

"It's pretty neat to see how the landscape's come back," she said. "We'll be sharing that, too."

The USFS officials emphasized that further analysis and planning is and will continue to be underway to best avoid catastrophic damage from wildfires.

"Fires are part of the landscape, but if we can try to focus and direct the areas of impacts that fires have, we'll be a lot more successful," Watrud said. "So, we are going to continue to use that authority, as well."

## ODFW reports more wolf depredations

Chieftain staff

WALLOWA COUNTY — Three cases of wolves killing livestock in Eastern Oregon were reported by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in the ODFW's Livestock Depredation Investigation Report on Tuesday, July 19.

One of the three was in the Grouse Flats area of Wallowa County, according to the report. On July 6, agents of a rancher discov-

ered the carcasses of three yearling cows on a 160-acre, private pasture. Two of the carcasses consisted of scattered bones and were estimated to have died approximately a week prior to the investigation. The third carcass was mostly intact and estimated to have died about 36 hours prior to the ODFW investigation.

It was confirmed as a wolf kill, while the other two were considered possible wolf kills or unknown.

Union County ranchers also reported depredations on July 15 in the Palmer Junction area and July 17 in the Five Points Creek area. Both were confirmed as wolf kills.

The July 15 incident was attributed to the Balloon Tree pack, while the July 17 incident was attributed to the Five Points pack.

Three other confirmed wolf kills were reported July 12, 15 and 17 in Klamath County.

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## Wallowa County Weed Board & Wallowa Resources

### Do You Struggle with IAG Infestations?

## Invasive Weeds & Annual Grass Workshop

Explore a "Range" of Options for Controlling Annual Invaders

August 2

9:00am - Noon

Meet at the "Pink Barn", Crow Creek Rd.  
Free BBQ Lunch Following Workshop

### Agenda:

1. Welcome & Overview of Invasive Annual Grasses and other Prominent Noxious Weeds
2. Tour Invasive Annual Grass Test Plots
3. Bayer Herbicide Representative – Rejuvra Discussion
4. Upcoming Management Strategies to Address Invasive Annual Grasses in Wallowa County

For more information contact Andy Marcum at 541-426-4543 ext. 1206 or Teresa Smertut at 541-263-2283. Please RSVP to Andy Marcum by August 1st to Andy Marcum - Email: [AMarcum@co.wallowa.or.us](mailto:AMarcum@co.wallowa.or.us)

## GET TO KNOW OUR PROVIDERS!

### Dr. Emily Knudsen

Dr. Knudsen has been with Winding Waters since the fall of 2018 after completing her Residency at the Family Medicine Residency of Idaho. She loves being able to care for people at all ages and has a passion for women's health.

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