

Tribe signs MOU to help manage Table Rocks area

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

MEDFORD — With Lower Table Rock behind the speakers and Upper Table Rock behind the audience of almost 100, Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl A. Kennedy formalized plans to involve the Grand Ronde Tribe in the future management of this sacred area on Saturday, Sept. 10.

"It is the Creator's intention that we again be visible in this area," Kennedy said.

"We are survivors," she added. Speaking of the memorandum, she said, "It is not only to heal the land, but to heal ourselves."

The Tribe signed a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and The Nature Conservancy with pens beaded by Donna Lewis, wife of Tribal member and Cultural Resources Department Manager David Lewis.

The memorandum will ensure that the area retains the culture that the Tribe's ancestors established there thousands of years ago until treaties with the U.S. government in the 1850s ended their relationship to the land.

The first of those treaties in 1853, which ceded vast expanses of land to the U.S. government, was signed near where the current memorandum of understanding was signed.

"What a difference a few feet and 158 years can make," said BLM State Director Edward Shepard. He pointed out that "the amazing variety of plant communities" at the Table Rocks "are found no place else on earth."

The 1853 treaty promised the Table Rock peoples, known as the Takelma Tribe (ultimately included among the Rogue River Tribes), a permanent homeland among the Table Rocks. But in 1856, the

Table Rock people were among those forced on the Trail of Tears march up to Grand Ronde so that gold miners could freely work the Rogue River area.

Lewis said that there were Native villages at almost every bend in the river, which also happened to be where gold would settle to the river bottom as the river current slowed.

Personal family connections still ring with memory and hope. The Tribes and bands lost eight people during the march with eight others born during the 31-day (Feb. 23-March 25, 1856) ordeal. Kennedy's great-great-grandfather, Chief Bogus, who was among the signers of the 1853 treaty, also was one of those who died on the Trail of Tears.

His son, John Bogus Warren, sur-named for the McMinnville family that took him in after the march, was 9 years old at the time.

Kennedy's own grandson, Tribal member Kaleb Allen, is 9 years old today. He was chasing a grasshopper after the ceremony and called to Kennedy, "Look, a flying grasshopper!"

"What a strange thing for a young boy to be marched from his home," Kennedy said. "This is very personal to us."

Tribal Elder Jolanda Catabay, who counts Umpqua Jo (another signer of the 1853 Treaty) and his daughter, Indian Mary, among her ancestors, sang the national anthem to the group.

She remembered the efforts of her grandmother, former Tribal Elder Flora Llana, to get back the land lost in the wake of the treaties.

"When we did a moment of silence because of 9/11 (at the memorandum signing)," she said, "I was thinking, 'Grandmother, I'm home.' It dawned on me. The whole event, this is an honor. Think where you



Jon Raby, right, Bureau of Land Management Butte Falls Resource Area field manager, introduces, from left, then-Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg, Tribal Vice Chair Reyn Leno and Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. after they presented the colors during a memorandum of understanding signing ceremony at Lower Table Rock in Medford on Saturday, Sept. 10.

have been working at preserving the Table Rocks area for some 30 years, beginning in 1978 when land-owners in the area were thinking they might develop the area that already had a landing strip atop Lower Table Rock.

The Nature Conservancy bought much of the available land at that time, and in some cases only bought conservation easements that guarantee the land will not be developed.

Stewart sang and drummed with help from Tribal member Kathy Cole, interim Culture Language manager for the Tribe.

The Nature Conservancy and the Bureau of Land Management

Today, BLM owns or has responsibility for 1,280 acres of the Upper and Lower Table Rocks land while The Nature Conservancy has acquired 2,789 acres with conservation easements on another 795

acres.

One land owner in the area is Jackson County Commissioner John Rachor, who attended with fellow commissioner C.W. Smith. They are both supportive of the effort.

"I've heard magpies and geese today," said Russell Hoefflich, vice president and Oregon director of The Nature Conservancy, "but no golden eagle yet."

He called the area, "unique from a biological perspective" and that the goal of "always feeling a deeper connection" with the area was advanced with the signing of the memorandum.

"This area," he said, "is a critical environmental concern," and "with this assembled expertise, it will be a showcase around the nation that will interpret and share Table Rocks cultural history."

The Tribe's expertise with managing lands with fire will be among

the talents and experience that the group will seek. The memorandum also asks that the three participants continue to buy land in the area as it becomes available.

Already, management of the area has translated into 4,000 student visits and 40,000 visits altogether annually.

Tribal Attorney Rob Greene praised the day's event as "the continuation of an important developing relationship" with the Tribe's partners.

The Cultural Resources Department drafted the history, made gifts for the participants and organized the proceedings, said Lewis. He gave credit to Khani Schultz, Julie Brown, Veronica Montano and himself, all members of the Tribe, for making necklaces, and to Schultz for printing and cutting the treaties.

Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor organized the event with the help of Tribal member Kristen Ravia, her assistant, and Tribal member and Portland Office staff member Lisa Archuleta.

Staff members from many Tribal departments were on hand for the signing and 14 Tribal Elders came down on a Tribal bus for the occasion.

"This is a good day," Kennedy said. ■

Photos by Michelle Alaimo



Tribal Elder Jolanda Catabay sings the national anthem during a memorandum of understanding signing ceremony at Lower Table Rock in Medford on Saturday, Sept. 10.



A Grand Ronde Tribal contingent attended the memorandum of understanding signing ceremony at Lower Table Rock in Medford on Saturday, Sept. 10.