

'This is pretty groundbreaking'

LAND continued from front page

Bonneville Power's obligations under the 2010 Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Settlement. The negotiated settlement specified that Bonneville Power either give or place conservation requirements on 17,000 acres to make up for habitat lost when dams along the Willamette River flooded other wildlife habitats, said Mike Karnosh, the Tribe's Ceded Lands coordinator.

At the end of 2012, Karnosh said, the Grand Ronde Tribe will either own or maintain about 450 of those acres. Grand Ronde staff members are currently investigating 1,500 to 2,000 acres that may also be included in the Tribe's wildlife management portfolio.

As important as the actual land, said Grand Ronde officials, are the growing relationships between the Tribe and the Nature Conservancy and federal and state agencies that have developed in recent years.

"You bring a rich cultural history and innate knowledge of land management to this property," said Dan Bell, Willamette Basin Conservation director of the Nature Conservancy.

"This is pretty groundbreaking," said Karnosh, "because it makes the Tribe an equal participant."

The Tribe values this responsibility because it demonstrates Tribal land management expertise on the state and national stage.

"The real benefit," said Karnosh, "is that the Tribe can show that they can take care of the land as well as, and in some cases, better than the government. This is our proving ground."

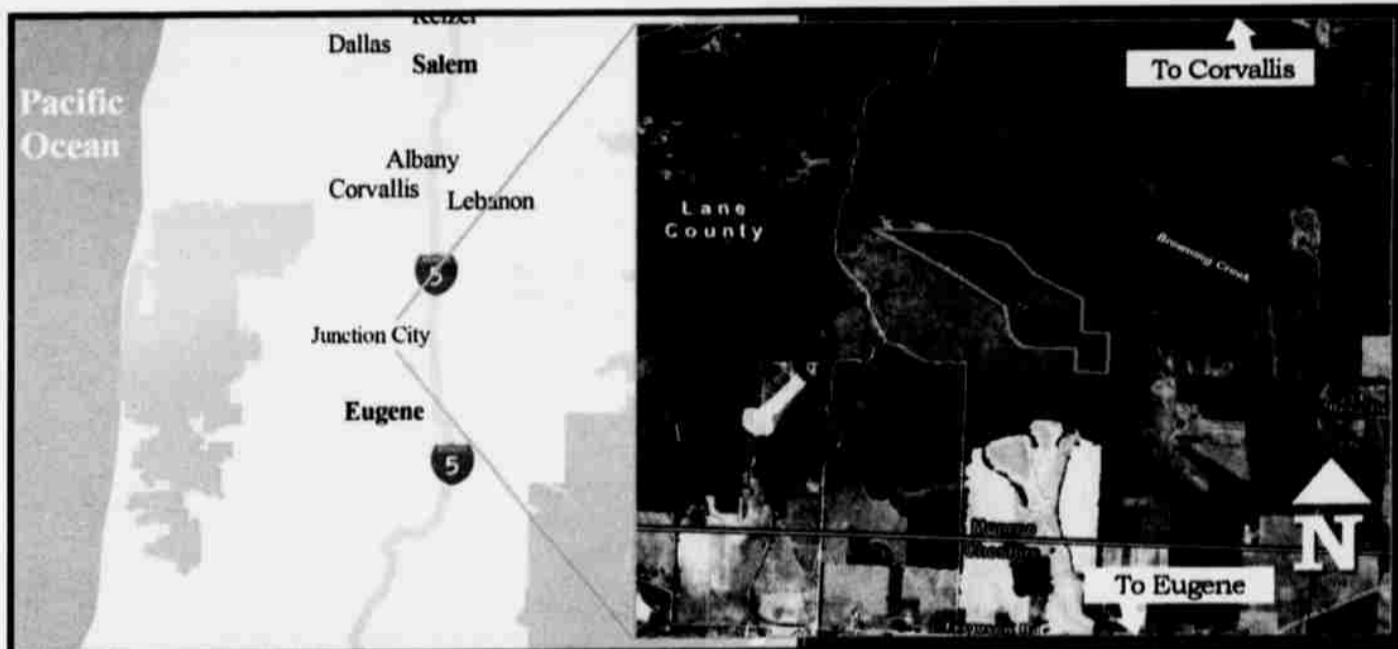
In addition, said Tribal Council member Chris Mercier, "We're asserting ourselves in our ceded lands again, showing that we're serious about environmental issues."

A 2011 Memorandum of Understanding gave the Tribe a hand in managing — with the Bureau of Land Management and the Nature Conservancy — almost 5,000 acres at Table Rocks in a similar ceremony. Many from the Tribe headed south after the Rattlesnake Butte event to a weekend encampment celebrating the Table Rocks agreement.

The land is among the Tribe's ceded lands.

"This is really why we do our jobs," said Karnosh.

"Monumental!" is how then-Tribal Council Secretary Jack Giffen Jr. described the land donation.



Map created by George Valdez



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Miguel Adams, 11, gifts a necklace to Laura Tesler, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program staff biologist, during an event to mark the donation of almost 100 acres of prairie habitat and oak savannah at Rattlesnake Butte to the Tribe in Junction City on Friday, Sept. 7. Also gifted necklaces for their involvement in making the donation happen was Dan Bell, middle, Nature Conservancy Willamette Basin Conservation director, and Lorri Bodi, second from right, vice president for Environment, Fish and Wildlife at Bonneville Power Administration. On the left is Mike Karnosh, Tribal Ceded Lands coordinator.

Then-Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy described the moment as "joyful. This is healing for us. If our ancestors could talk, there would be a lot of laughter," she said.

She described how treaties of the 1850s had promised the Tribe farm implements "not knowing that we were the original stewards of the land. ... The only promise they kept was to take all of our land. Today represents the return of a small piece of that land. ... It's healing to know there is some justice in America. We can all feel good today."

"This is a great success for conservation," said Lorri Bodi, vice president for Environment, Fish

and Wildlife at Bonneville Power. "This is an important site for protection and a big accomplishment for BPA ratepayers. ... The power of partnership is so great, for us, for our children and for our grandchildren."

The Nature Conservancy's Bell noted that one of the parcels that made up this donation came in 1985 from John Pickett, owner of the Pickett Slide Rule Co.

"I'm not old enough that I'm even sure what a slide rule is," Bell said. "I'm still not sure I know what it does, but the place struck me as very special, a gem of a place and worth protecting."

In addition to "one of the very few remnant populations of the western rattlesnake (Oregon's only indigenous rattlesnake) known in the Willamette Valley, and the only one west of the Willamette River, the south facing rocky slopes harbor populations of virtually every reptile native to the Willamette Valley," said Laura Tesler, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife manager of the Wildlife Mitigation Project. Tesler is responsible for recommending sites that will meet the requirements of the project to Bonneville Power.

"There are many plants here as well," she said, "including small examples of two other high ranking plant communities once widespread in the Willamette Valley and now restricted to a very few small areas: the Roemer's fescue dry grassland and the Oregon white oak savannah. Among plant species uncommon in the Willamette Valley are Hall's violet, prairie lupine and turkey mullein, along with a host of other typical Willamette Valley prairie and savannah wildflowers. Many of the native plants here are used in traditional basket-making practices of the Tribe, and there are also cat's paw lilies and shooting stars that are also used in traditional medicine."

Greg and Lisa Archuleta and Jordan Mercier opened the ceremony with drum and song. Karnosh and Miguel Adams, 11, Lisa Archuleta's son, honored the speakers after the ceremony with necklaces made by Tribal Elder Francis Simmons.

"Thank you for bringing your spirit, vision and generosity to this plan," said Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, who organized the event.

In addition to Public Affairs, credit for the success of the more than two-year project goes to Wilson, Karnosh and Schwabe at Natural Resources, Tribal Lands Manager Jan Reibach, and Jennifer Biesack and Ryan Sudbury in the Tribal Attorney's Office.

News crews from Oregon Public Radio and Eugene television stations KVAL and KEZI reported on the event.

About 35 attended the ceremony that preceded a three-hour hike through the area, attended by half that many.

"This was an especially great hike over an area that's significant to the Tribe, the state and the environment," said Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, who went on the hike. "Staff from the Tribe, the Nature Conservancy, federal and state agencies were on the hike. The camaraderie among the hikers reflects the great relationship the Tribe has forged with Nature Conservancy and BPA staff, among others. Rattlesnake Butte is another milestone in the Tribe's impressive record of stewardship within its ceded lands." ■

Family Movie Night showing 'Avengers'

The Tribe's Youth Prevention Program and Community Awareness Team will present "Avengers" during Family Movie Night on Saturday, Sept. 29, in the Tribal gym. Dinner will start at 5:15 p.m. and be followed by the movie at 5:35 p.m. The dinner will include chicken strips, tater tots, salad, water and juices and snacks. There will be door prizes, too. ■