

# Rattlesnake existence rare in western Oregon

**SNAKE continued  
from front page**

a sighting of the northern Pacific subspecies, as this one is believed to be, that many thought it had gone extinct in western Oregon, said Breece.

There are only a few pockets in western Oregon where this rattlesnake has historically existed, said Biologist Lindsay Belonga.

So, what's become of this first rattlesnake to make it back home? "Hopefully," said Dirksen, "it is back to making a living at Rattlesnake Butte."

In 2012, the Bonneville Power Administration and The Nature Conservancy signed a memorandum of understanding with the Grand Ronde Tribe, giving the Tribe responsibility to maintain and manage 97-acres in this wildlife refuge.

Since then, members of the Tribal Fish and Wildlife and Ceded Lands programs have been cataloguing plant and animal populations on a monthly basis.

The MOU requires the Tribe to forever protect the area for indigenous wildlife conservation. Maintenance costs come out of a \$157,954 trust fund provided by Bonneville

Power and the Tribe continues to look for other grant opportunities to help with habitat improvement, said Dirksen.

Tribal employees look through the different habitats for the kind of indigenous vegetation and reptiles that traditionally lived there, said Belonga.

The 97 acres of refuge land was purchased by The Nature Conservancy – 50 acres in the mid-1980s and 47 more in August 2012. Bonneville Power Administration purchased the land from The Nature Conservancy to fulfill a small part of its obligation to manage or get another entity to manage 17,000 acres as a conservation refuge.

BPA's obligation is to return habitat lost to the people of Oregon. Flooding wiped out habitat when the power agency built dams to generate affordable electricity for rural areas in the Northwest.

The Tribe bid for the opportunity to manage the property virtually forever. The Tribe sought to take on this job because indigenous peoples already had successfully managed the land for thousands of years and the Tribe has the expertise to bring the area back. The property also falls within the Tribe's ceded lands.

In cooperation with the Tribe's

Land and Culture Department, the Natural Resources Department's Fish and Wildlife program is now collecting biodiversity information about the area.

Dirksen, Breece, Aquatic Biologist Bryan Fendall and Belonga, all of the Fish and Wildlife program, are participating along with Hydrosystems Compliance Specialist Lawrence Schwabe from the Ceded Lands program.

What is left of the indigenous species in the refuge has survived a battering through the years at the hands of agriculture, rock quarry operations and urban development.

Other indigenous reptiles in the wildlife refuge include gopher snake, northwestern garter snake, northern alligator lizard, western fence lizard and western skink.

Within the 97-acre refuge are south-facing rocks at the southwestern edge of the Willamette Valley. These rocks harbor hibernating reptiles native to the valley.

Flora documented in the area include rare Lemmon's needlegrass from the silver moss plant community. Two other rare plant communities documented on the property are the savanna-type Roemer's fescue and Oregon white oak savanna. Once widespread in

the valley, they now are limited to a few small areas.

Typical flora in the valley includes prairie and savanna wildflowers.

Documented but uncommon plant species include Hall's violet, prairie lupine and turkey mullein.

The Tribe secured a stewardship account from the Bonneville Power Administration in 2013 to maintain the conservation value of the property.

The Tribe's final management plan for the area, a requirement of the BPA, is expected to be completed later this fall, said Belonga.

In a backgrounder about the new sighting, Dirksen reported that the Tribe's interest in the few remaining populations of western rattlesnake have been sparked by references in "oral histories and myth texts" of the Kalapuya people.

"Now, the Grand Ronde Tribe has a role in maintaining the habitat of this very rare snake endlessly into the future," he said.

Management of the environment for these snakes "is not easy," Dirksen reported, "and the fact that no one else in the valley is doing it reflects the Tribe's capacity to take on unique and challenging opportunities." ■

## Flu clinics scheduled

The Tribe's Health and Wellness Department has scheduled Influenza (Flu) Vaccine Clinics in the coming weeks.

A Flu Shot Clinic will be held at the Portland Area Office, 4445 S.W. Barbur Blvd., from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 14.

A Tribal Employee Flu Vaccine Clinic will be held during the All-Staff Meeting set for Thursday, Oct. 2, and from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 23, at the clinic in Grand Ronde.

People also can visit the clinic any time during normal business hours, which are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Wednesday and Friday, and 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday. The clinic is closed for lunch from noon to 1 p.m. daily.

The vaccine is covered by insurance and there is not a co-pay.

All children will receive free immunizations through Oregon's Vaccines for Children program. ■

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THESE PROGRAMS ARE 477/EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING AND THE GRAND RONDE TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM.

THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM WORKS WITH TRIBAL MEMBERS WITH A DISABILITY THAT HAS BEEN A BARRIER TO GAINING OR RETAINING EMPLOYMENT

THE 477 EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM SUPPORTS TRIBAL MEMBERS WITH JOB RELATED SERVICES 477 CAN SERVE GRAND RONDE TRIBAL MEMBERS WHO LIVE IN MARION, MULTNOMAH, POLK, TILLAMOOK, WASHINGTON AND YAMHILL COUNTY.

TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CAN SERVE GRAND RONDE TRIBAL MEMBERS WHO LIVE IN MARION, MULTNOMAH, POLK, TILLAMOOK, WASHINGTON, YAMHILL AND CLACKAMAS COUNTY

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THE SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT AT  
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TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAMS AND TO DETERMINE WHICH ONE CAN BEST ASSIST YOU



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