

NRD relearning how to burn designated areas safely

**BURN continued
from front page**

and cultural harm, some of the knowledge for wielding that tool has been lost, and the climate and landscape have changed.

The Tribe’s Natural Resources Department is relearning how to burn designated areas safely, without letting a controlled burn turn into the nightmare of the Pacific Northwest: An out-of-control wildland fire.

“It’s complicated,” Natural Resources Specialist Annaliese Ramthun said. “There are traditional knowledge holders nearby and some of that information is available but there are a lot of modern social constraints on burning that can make it difficult to apply and build on that knowledge. I would say, currently, we are working on learning how to best take care of culturally significant species within these constraints.”

The wind has shifted, and the smoke is now rising in thick clouds, sometimes straight up to block the sun, sometimes back toward the east. Those in attendance retreat to the northwest side to avoid being caught in the shrinking square of grass. Suddenly, a towering dust devil of ashes appears. The field beyond it, covered in waving grasses just moments ago, now lies blackened and smoking.

“The Willamette Valley has a big population in an area that tends to hold onto smoke in the wrong conditions, and with wildfires increasingly visible in the news, fire understandably makes a lot of folks nervous,” Ranthum said. “There are also regulations on when and where we’re allowed to burn based on weather conditions. As a result,



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

The Bateman camas field smolders after a prescribed cultural burn on Tuesday, Sept. 3.

we generally only get a handful of days per year in which using fire is an option for us and a lot of times we don’t know when those will be exactly until a day or two in advance or sometimes until we get onsite.”

On the day of the burn, water trucks and firefighters stand by and the weather forecast is watched closely. The day must not be too hot or too dry; the humidity must not be too low. On this early September day, with temperatures in the mid-70s, the flames are almost leisurely in their progress across the field.

The objective of the Bateman burn is to use different mowing and/or burning treatments to see how each affects camas bulb development. A control plot that receives no treatment will be compared to plots that were mowed and then burned, mowed without burning or burned without mowing, Fire Management and Protection Program Manager Andrew Puerini said.

Several staff across three Tribal programs collaborated on the

Bateman Cultural Burn project, which included planning objectives and four different treatments, burn unit preparations, and monitoring, documenting and implementation of the burn.

There were numerous factors to consider, Puerini said.

“Since the Bateman is a first foods gathering area, we elected to use propane torches to not contaminate the food resource, which... was a bit cumbersome. We will be working on more reliable ignition devices in the future. On previous food plot burns, we have made pitch sticks and also used small bundles of straw to ignite fires.”

Ramthun added that there’s a lot to conducting a controlled burn.

“Historically, there would have been a large section of community burning across the landscape as part of their culture and livelihoods,” she said. “This system was able to cover most of the valley but was also able to focus on individual species on smaller patch and even individual levels.”

She continued, “Currently, there

is a lot of habitat in the Willamette Valley that would greatly benefit from the return of fire, but we are often limited in who is allowed to use fire. In the grand scheme of things there aren’t many people with the qualifications to legally use fire in the area and as a result, individual species often don’t receive the same attention they would in the traditional context. In the modern day a lot of who gets to apply fire to the ground is dictated by liability law and the national training guidelines for wildland firefighters.”

The return to using fire to achieve ecological goals is an idea that has slowly been gaining popularity in the state. In 2021, the Oregon Legislature approved Senate Bill 762, which required the state Forestry Department to create a certified burn manager program. Tribal Natural Resources Department Manager Colby Drake provided information to help create that program.

The program allows input from all interested parties and provides “significant” state liability coverage for the burn boss and coverage for potential losses incurred from burning under the program, Puerini said.

The Tribe is currently trying to figure out how to create safe opportunities for the cultural practice of fire that are less restrictive than federal training standards, which tend to be less culturally informed and are time intensive to pursue, Rathum said.

“The new Oregon Certified Burn Manager program seems like it may be pathway forward on that, but the state is still working out some of the details on that one,” she said. ■

VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED!

ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING

We are looking for individuals who are interested in participating in our active shooter drill as actors.

This training will be at the new Grand Ronde Firestation

911



REGISTER NOW

OCTOBER 28TH
2024
AT 8AM - 12PM



CONTACT:
Kaylene.barry@grandronde.org
Brandy.bishop@grandronde.org

 (503)-879-1701



2024 VETERANS DAY LUNCHEON

Friday, November 8, 2024
11:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M.

At the CTGR Community Center

ALL VETERANS INVITED (please bring a guest)

To RSVP: Contact (503) 879-1484 or email
CTGRtribalVSO@GrandRonde.Org

PLAN FOR THE DAY

9 am to 1:30 p.m. Free Haircuts for Veterans
11:30 a.m. Event Opens
12 Noon Catered BBQ Lunch
1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Bingo
2 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Event Closing

 TRIBAL VETERANS
SERVICE OFFICE