

## RECREATION REPORT

### FREE FISHING WEEKEND SET FOR SEPT 1 AND 2

Sept. 1-2 is a Free Fishing Weekend in Oregon — you can fish, crab or clam anywhere in Oregon without a license or tag.

### FOREST GROUSE HUNTING STARTS SATURDAY

The statewide hunting season for blue and ruffed grouse starts Saturday, Sept. 1. The daily bag limit is 3 birds of each species.

The mourning dove season also opens Saturday. The daily bag limit is 15 birds, and the possession limit is 45 birds.

### LIFT TO RUN SEPT 8-9 FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING AT ANTHONY LAKES RESORT

Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort will run the chairlift on Saturday, Sept. 8, and Sunday, Sept. 9 for mountain bikers who want to try the resort's new downhill Broadway Flow trail.

The lift will run from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. (tickets are \$10) on Sept. 8, and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sept. 9 (\$20 tickets).

Food and beverages will be available, with live music on Sunday afternoon. The Trailhead in Baker City will have bike demos on Sunday.

### WOLF PAIR PRODUCES PUPS NEAR MOUNT HOOD

A new pair of wolves in the White River Unit of southern Wasco County south of Mount Hood has produced at least two pups this year, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

A remote camera on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation first captured images of two pups on Aug. 10. This marks the first known reproduction by wolves in the northern portion of Oregon's Cascade Mountains since wolves began returning to the state in the 2000s.

Wolves in Wasco County and anywhere west of Highways 395-78-95 are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead management agency.

### PHILLIPS RESERVOIR

The reservoir has been stocked with over 10,000 legal size and 4,000 trophy-size rainbow trout

Fishing has been good for both yellow perch and rainbow trout, even with the recent hot weather. The perch are larger this year, averaging about 9 inches. Rainbows range from 10 to 20 inches. The only functional boat launch is near Mason Dam.

\$10,000 DONATION WILL HELP TO UPGRADE SKI LIFT SAFETY AT FERGUSON RIDGE SKI AREA NEAR JOSEPH

# FOR THE LOVE OF FERGI

By Katy Nesbitt

For WesCom News Service

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa County's beloved Ferguson Ridge Ski Area received a promise of \$10,000 this month to upgrade its ski lift safety system.

At the county's Aug. 20 meeting the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the money from the county's video lottery fund.

The money will complete the second phase of the Eagle Cap Ski Club's improvements to the T-bar, the main ski lift to the top of the hill owned by the Joseph-Enterprise Lions Club.

According to a letter written by Willy Locke, president of the ski club, four years ago the T-bar safety system was replaced with a new control system designed to stop the lift during an electrical or mechanical malfunction and alert the hill managers. The current system requires personnel to manually check each tower to detect the problem.

The county's video lottery grant will pay for the second phase of the project — an electronic system that would quickly and accurately detect where the problem is, improving the speed of detection. Locke wrote that the diagnostic assessment would result in quicker repairs and less down time for the lift.

Charlie Kissinger is a member of both the Eagle Cap Ski Club and the Lions Club. He said the old safety system was clunky — it was safe, but it would periodically shut the system down, sometimes unnecessarily. The new system will work much more efficiently, he said.

"We are replacing all the wire at the towers with electronic sensors," Kissinger said. "Now we will be able to tell from the bottom of the hill what the problem is."

The total cost of the project is \$15,000; Kissinger said the \$5,000 not covered by the grant is provided



Submitted photo

A \$10,000 grant will help the operators of Ferguson Ridge Ski Area near Joseph upgrade the safety system for the ski lift.

*"All labor for the installation is by volunteers."*

— Charlie Kissinger, Eagle Cap Ski Club member

through last year's ticket sale proceeds.

Kissinger said, "All labor for the installation is by volunteers — even the time donated by Enterprise Electric's crew."

County Commissioner Susan Roberts said Locke had approached the commission about economic development funding from the county's portion of state video lottery money for the safety equipment. She said while the commission approved the grant it would not allocate the money until October when the next

payout is due.

Commission Chairman Todd Nash told Locke and Kissinger, who were in attendance at the Aug. 20 meeting, "You are really appreciated by the community — thank you for all you do."

In 1983 the equipment used at the ski hill off Ski Run Road just outside of Joseph was moved to Ferguson Ridge, about nine miles southeast of town. Ten individuals and families came together to buy 280 acres for the new ski area.

For 35 years Ferguson Ridge, or Fergi as the locals call it, has been the hub for winter family fun with terrain for downhill skiing and snowboarding as well as a cross-country trail system that ties in with Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

roads and trails.

Kissinger said in 1983 a rope tow was the only conveyance to get to the top of the 600-vertical-foot ski hill. Two years later, in 1985, a T-bar replaced the rope tow and the same system was in operation for almost 30 years.

Ferguson Ridge is open December through April, snow conditions permitting, and still costs under \$20 per person for a day's skiing. Season passes are available and holders take turns fulfilling volunteer hours from clearing brush in the fall to repairing the lifts, grooming the runs, selling lift tickets and managing the T-bar during the ski season.

For more information visit [www.skifergi.com](http://www.skifergi.com) or look for Ferguson Ridge Ski Area on Facebook.

# From the top of the continent to the Wallawas, Victor McNeil has a second sense about snow

Here in Eastern Oregon we are no strangers to the extremes of the four seasons, and as hot as the summers can get, the winters are equally as impressive. From building a snowman in the front yard to bombing down a run at Anthony Lakes, we get the snow to make it happen. One thing that comes with that is the deadly possibility of avalanches.

Enter Victor McNeil.

Born and raised in Forest Grove, Victor moved to Eastern Oregon in 2009 to work as a backcountry ski guide for Wallowa Alpine Huts, first living in Enterprise before moving to La Grande in 2011. Helping the Wallowa Avalanche Center as a professional observer since 2014, Victor became the nonprofit organization's executive director in 2016 after the passing of the previous director, and Victor's good friend, Kip Rand. Victor and the Wallowa Avalanche Center serve our area by offering bi-weekly avalanche advisories, aiming to improve avalanche knowledge and increase winter recreation safety. Considered a Type 2 Avalanche Center, the WAC offers avalanche, snow and weather forecasts during avalanche season.

During the spring, summer, and fall, Victor works as a guide with Alpine Ascents

## OUTSTANDING IN THE OUTDOORS



ERIC LINCOLN

International, guiding groups on trips in Washington and Alaska. Victor teaches mountaineering schools and guides expeditions throughout Washington on peaks such as Mt. Rainier and Mt. Baker, and also Denali in Alaska. The list is vast, and it would be difficult to fit it all in this article, but you get the (impressive) idea.

Victor is also involved with the local Go-Asap program, an afterschool program aimed at giving youth in our area a chance to experience the outdoors, by volunteering for various outings, as well as teaching technical skills such as rock climbing and avalanche safety.

As a guide, people place their safety in Victor's hands, and for good reason. To say nothing of his notable practical experience, in 2011 Victor became Avalanche Level 3 certified. Through the American Mountain Guides Association he holds ski, rock, and alpine guide certifications, as well as the split board certification. He was the third person to receive that certification in the U.S., and



Submitted photo

Victor McNeil is an accomplished mountaineer and avalanche expert.

remains one of fewer than 10 to do so nationwide.

To put this all in perspective, we'll look at what it takes to climb Denali, the Alaskan peak, also known as Mt. McKinley, that, at 20,310 feet, is the highest peak in North America.

Over the course of three weeks, climbers will cover the 15 or so miles from the base camp to the summit, which can easily become more than 50 miles when accounting for backtracking to gear caches and the acclimatization process, which requires climbers to ascend and descend along

the way to help their bodies adjust to the elevation.

Each person will carry their own gear weighing in at roughly 130 pounds between their gear sled and pack. The route up Denali's West Buttress typically involves four camps, the first base camp starting at an elevation of 7,800 feet, up to the high camp of 17,200 feet, from which the summit is attempted. During the attempt, climbers spend many days at each camp resting, acclimatizing, moving and retrieving gear from caches set between the camps, and dealing with

the ever-changing weather. Prior to the expedition each climber must undertake to make sure they're in physical and mental shape for the challenge.

We're lucky here in Eastern Oregon, it's not often you can be such a short drive away from such breathtaking landscapes. One of our greatest assets, Victor is working hard to make sure we can enjoy it to the fullest, while staying safe so we can continue to do so, and we're happy to have such a cool guy in our neck of the woods.

