

OUTDOOR

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The residential camp established in 1956 includes 186 acres of forestland just off state Highway 244 southwest of La Grande. Camp Elkanah is operated by the Blue Mountain Association of Conservative Baptists.

Last year was the first in which money was provided through Ballot Measure 99 to help pay for Outdoor School programs. A total of \$24 million was approved for the program's first two years.

The measure, which was approved by voters statewide in the November 2016 election, created the Outdoor School Education Fund financed by Oregon State Lottery money distributed for economic development. Baker County voters supported the measure by a margin of 4,744 to 3,776. The money is administered through the Oregon State University Extension Service. The Baker County Extension staff has been a traditional partner in the program over the years.

The 5J District received about \$5,800 for its 2017-18 Outdoor School program, a rate of about \$35 per student as reimbursement for expenses incurred during its daytime schedule of classes at the

Elkhorn Wildlife Area along the North Powder River 25 miles northwest of Baker City.

The Baker School District's Outdoor School, which started in 1992 and traditionally was scheduled in May, has taken place in September since the fall of 2011. The schedule was flipped from spring to fall because of the usually milder fall weather compared to Northeast Oregon's unpredictably rainy, windy springs. On average, May is the wettest month here.

The Baker program was maintained over the years when other school districts were cutting their outdoor school programs thanks to contributions from Parent-Teacher organizations, grant funding and community partners and volunteers who contributed their support.

This year's residential camp is expected to cost about \$225 per student, which includes on-site meals provided by Camp Elkanah, lodging and other services, said Betty Palmer, assistant superintendent.

Geno Bates, South Baker Intermediate principal, said about a dozen overnight chaperones have been recruited from among Eastern Oregon University students enrolled in the education program who are doing their fall student-teaching experience in various schools in

the area, including the Baker 5J District.

Bates credits his experience as a college student for helping him get his first teaching job.

"I think it's a great opportunity," he said of the experience the college students will gain during the week. They also will receive a small stipend and money to cover the cost of transportation to the site, he said.

Sixth-grade teachers also will help with the program as they have in the past and at least one paraprofessional will travel to the site along with parent volunteers.

The residential camp model promoted by the state has actually found the Baker School District harkening back to its early beginnings when the District bused students to Camp Elkanah for an overnight stay, Palmer said.

Many improvements have been made at the camp since then to keep young people interested in the rustic experience. Those improvements include a Frisbee golf course, a challenge course, a rope swing and zip line, and a Slip N Slide.

Outdoor activities also will include group activities such as games of tug of war and capture the flag, said Dorothy Mason, who has coordinated the Outdoor School program for the past seven years. Before

bedtime curfew is announced, students also will get together in the evenings to enjoy campfires, songs and s'mores.

Although this year's sixth-graders will find themselves in a new setting and awaiting different adventures from those of past classes, some things will remain unchanged, Mason says.

Twenty class sessions will be offered this year, up from 16 last year, with many of the same past instructors attending at the new location.

In addition to the traditional lessons on building bird boxes, archaeology, fire, and fish and wildlife, students will learn lessons provided by representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla and the Blue Mountain Wildlife Center near Pendleton.

The center describes itself on its Facebook page as "a nonprofit, primarily volunteer organization, state and federally licensed to provide rehabilitation services to native wildlife in need of care (primarily raptors).

Lynn Tompkins, the center's executive director, and her husband, Bob Tompkins, assistant director, are expected to speak to the students about the work they do to with injured wildlife. They will bring raptors that have been rehabilitated at their center with them as part of their lesson, Mason said.

LA GRANDE, ISLAND CITY

Boise Cascade to sell local mills

By Cherise Kaechele
The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Boise Cascade entered into a purchase agreement Tuesday with Woodgrain Millwork to sell three of its facilities in Northeast Oregon.

According to a press release posted to the Nasdaq website, Woodgrain has agreed to take over the Boise Cascade lumber mills in La Grande and Pilot Rock and the particleboard plant in Island City. This transaction does not include the plywood mill or the powerhouse and log utilization center in Elgin.

"The sale to Woodgrain allows us to further focus on our veneer-based engineered wood products and plywood businesses," said Mike Brown, senior vice president of operations, Boise Cascade Wood Products division, in the release. "Woodgrain is a family-owned company with a solid reputation in the industry. The products manufactured at these Northeast Oregon facilities are a good fit with their business strategy."

Lisa Chapman, Boise Cascade media contact, told The Observer on Tuesday the sale will impact 109 employees in Union County. A total of 256 employees, including those in management, work in the three facilities.

The due diligence process, which looks at Boise Cascade's assets and liabilities, will take approximately 50 to 60 days, Chapman said. After that, the transaction will be completed.

A spokesperson from Woodgrain was not available by press time.

COUGARS

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Although the number of people with cougar tags has skyrocketed, their success rate is usually between 1 percent and 2 percent.

Bruce Johnson, a research biologist with ODFW in La Grande, said in 2014 that after 1994 cougar populations in the Blue Mountains south and west of Interstate 84 increased as cats migrated into those areas, which had

had comparatively low cougar populations, from the more densely populated areas to the north and east of the freeway.

Here are some cougar-related episodes in Baker County:

- February 2015 — Baker City Police received several reports from residents who said they saw a cougar in the southwest corner of the city. Subsequent searches, including ones with tracking hounds, failed to find the cat.

- April 2009 — Micah Blank, who lives near the base of the Elkhorn Mountains northwest of Baker City, shot and killed a 75-pound female cougar that was perched in a tree 100 feet from where his two sons met the school bus.

- December 2007 — A cougar attacked Blaine and Faith Kenneys' 35-pound Shetland sheep dog, Shep, on the porch of the couple's home near Pine Creek Road, about one mile west of the Blanks'

property. The dog survived the attack but suffered puncture wounds to his neck.

An Oregon State Police trooper later shot and killed a 115-pound male cougar near the Kenneys' home.

- January 2005 — hunters killed five cougars over a span of two weeks near New Bridge, a few miles north of Richland, after several

residents saw cougars prowling their properties. A cougar ate at least one domestic cat during that period.

- August-October 2003 — Several residents reported seeing a cougar on or near Spring Garden Hill, in southeast Baker City.

- November 2002 — a young, emaciated female cougar jumped onto the porch

of a home about two miles north of Halfway. The cat came within a couple feet of a five-year-old boy.

- July 2001 — ODFW biologist Todd Callaway shoots and kills an 80-pound male cougar that was hunkered beneath a blue spruce tree just west of the Bridge Street Inn motel near downtown Baker City.

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