

Interpretive Center plans events for Get Outdoors Day on June 8

The BLM will celebrate National Get Outdoors Day on Saturday, June 8 with a variety of activities at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center near Baker City.

Admission to the Center will be free that day. The Center is about five miles east of Baker City and just north of Highway 86.

Events include:

The Sagebrush Scramble 5K Fun Run/Walk

Registration starts at 8 a.m., with the event at 9 a.m. This free, non-sanctioned, 5K event traverses the Interpretive Center trail system across a sagebrush landscape with views of the Eagle Cap

and Elkhorn Mountains, down to the Oregon Trail ruts and then back up to the top of the hill, past covered wagons to the start location.

Awards to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place male and female finishers.

Pioneer Pet Parade

The event will begin at 10 a.m., with registration starting at 9:30 a.m. and is open to all well-behaved pets on an 8-foot or shorter leash. The parade route is an easy, fairly level 1-mile loop on pavement.

There will be special prizes for pets in pioneer costumes and parade co-sponsor Best Friends of Baker will have

information about how to care for pets during hikes and outdoor activities, plus what to do if you find an injured or abandoned pet in the outdoors.

Other scheduled activities for the day include Trail Bingo for all ages at noon; guided nature hikes at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.; and gold panning at 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. and 2 p.m.

There will also be open activities from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., including meditation on the mountain, birding with local Audubon Society members, honeybee and pollinator education, a self-guided geology walk, fire prevention information and a plant identification

display.

You can download the Agents of Discovery app and try out the pioneer missions — games, activities and fun lessons based on the trail system.

A complete schedule of National Get Outdoors Day activities, plus more information about the Interpretive Center, can be found at <https://www.blm.gov/visit/nhotic> or by calling 541-523-1843

The Center is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Regular admission (no charge on June 8) for adults is \$8; seniors \$4.50; and children 15 and under are free. America the Beautiful Interagency Park Passes are accepted.

RAVENS

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The agency has not received permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said Michelle Dennehy, an ODFW spokesperson.

The poisoning of ravens will not happen until 2020 at the earliest, she said.

Environmental groups including Oregon Wild, The Humane Society and the Center for Biological Diversity oppose the plan, according to a story in The Oregonian.

ODFW's proposed strategy is part of "an unfortunate pattern of wildlife agencies scapegoating one wildlife species for the decline of another" without addressing primary causes of decline, said Bob Sallinger, conservation director at the Portland Audubon Society.

Researchers have identified other potential causes of sage grouse population decline, including conversion of sagebrush land to agriculture, livestock grazing, drought and West Nile virus.

Studies showing ravens' effect on sage grouse nesting were conducted in Nevada, and Oregon "has not produced adequate science to support killing ravens," Sallinger wrote on the Portland Audubon website.

Those studies showed that ravens were responsible for 53 percent of sage grouse nest failures in parts of Nevada.

(Badgers were the second most common cause, at 25 percent, followed by coyotes at 14 percent.)

ODFW is focusing on Baker County because its sage grouse population has declined by an estimated 75 percent since 2005, according to ODFW.

The sage grouse population in the Baker Priority Area for Conservation

(PAC) — an area east of Interstate 84 extending to near Richland — is estimated at 248 birds as of 2018, according to ODFW.

Researchers have found that when raven densities exceed 0.46 birds per square kilometer, the nesting success for sage grouse is reduced.

Recent surveys in the Baker PAC estimated raven densities exceeding that level, at 0.52 birds per square kilometer.

According to the Fish and Wildlife Service's draft environmental assessment that examines the potential effects of ODFW's proposed project, the estimated raven population in the Baker PAC is 708. If ODFW killed 500 ravens in the first year, the raven density would drop to 0.15 per square kilometer.

ODFW's goal would be to maintain that raven density during the second and third years of the three-year project.

The number of ravens killed in the second and third years would depend on the estimated raven density, which the agency would estimate by surveying the birds across the Baker PAC.

According to ODFW the purpose of the project, which would be done in collaboration with Oregon State University, is not to eliminate ravens from the area but to reduce their numbers to a level that, based on research, reduces the potential threat to sage grouse.

The agency is proposing to attract ravens with chicken eggs injected with a poison that targets ravens and other corvids (which include crows and magpies).

The poison was chosen because it is lethal to those birds but only moderately toxic to raptors and some other birds, and having little to no effect on mammals, Dennehy said.

Baker County has in the past several

years paid Wildlife Services, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to kill ravens, as well as coyotes, that prey on newborn calves on county ranches.

Last year, for instance, county commissioners approved \$13,000 to pay Wildlife Services to kill ravens and coyotes. Ranchers say ravens sometimes peck the eyes out of calves soon after they're born.

Although the federal Migratory Birds Treaty Act requires ODFW to obtain federal permits to kill ravens to protect sage grouse, the law does allow counties to kill ravens to reduce predation on livestock, Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Baker City office, said in an interview last year.

Wildlife Services has used poisoned chicken eggs to kill ravens in Baker County, and elsewhere in Eastern Oregon, to protect livestock, said Patrick Smith, the agency's district supervisor in La Grande.

Smith didn't have any statistics as to how many ravens the agency has killed in Baker County.

He said Wildlife Services does not have a regular program for killing ravens, but instead responds to specific complaints from ranchers.

Smith said the poison injected into the chicken eggs breaks down rapidly and does not pose a threat to animals that might eat dead ravens.

The Fish and Wildlife Service environmental assessment cites a 2007 study which concluded that the poison ODFW wants to use is "considered non-hazardous to predators or scavengers because the chemical is metabolized and its non-toxic metabolites are excreted by the target animal within a few hours after ingesting the treated bait."

BUDGET

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Committee members have worked through a presentation of 77 pages of key points that led to developing next year's budget plan in earlier meetings on May 21 and May 28. The committee's third and final meeting will begin at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the District Office, 2090 Fourth St.

Once the committee approves the spending plan, there will be a public budget hearing on June 18 as part of the 5J Board's regular meeting.

In his budget message to the committee, Witty stated that the 2019-20 budget is based on a projection of stable funding at District school buildings and in the Baker Charter Schools.

The numbers at the district's eight schools were at 1,734 students in October 2018. They are expected to rise just slightly to 1,747 next year.

Enrollment at the Baker Web Academy and Baker Early College in October 2018 was 3,858. Those numbers are expected to grow to 4,262 next year.

The State School Fund was set at \$8.2 billion to fund all schools in the state in the 2017-2019 biennium. The Legislature this spring approved \$9 billion in funding for schools in the next biennium. That funding will bring an additional \$300 per student to the Baker School District in the coming year.

Witty said he expects another \$2 billion, authorized by the Legislature

for schools in the next biennium to be funded by a corporate activity tax, will go to the voters for approval on a Jan. 21, 2020, ballot.

If approved, the Baker School District would receive about \$1.9 million for each of the two years.

"The framework has passed but they don't actually have the money in their coffers," Witty said. "They're betting on being able to get that referred to the voters and win."

If approved, the additional funding would be used statewide for use in specific areas beginning in the fall of 2020:

- Adding instructional time, school days, summer school and before and after school programs.
- Student health and safety, including social and emotional health.
- Reducing class size or student-staff ratios.
- Offering well-rounded educational programs that include offerings such as art, music, physical education and other programs.

Regarding last week's legislative approval of a measure to reform the Public Employees Retirement System known as PERS, Witty said he expects all or part of the plan to go before the Oregon Supreme Court for a final ruling.

In his presentation to the Budget Committee, Witty pointed to current trends that show the Baker School District's PERS bill is expected to reach \$2,983,144 in 2019-20 and \$3,874,450 in 2020-21.

CROSSROADS

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Ages and cost are as follows:

- Ages 3-5: 9-9:45 a.m.; \$40 members/\$60 non-members
- Ages 6-9: 10:30 a.m. to noon; \$48 members/\$72 non-members
- Ages 10-13: 2-4 p.m.; \$64 members/\$96 non-members
- Ages 14 to adult: 5:15-6:45 p.m.; \$48 members/\$72 non-members

Dianne Guzzle's "Pre-Ballet Swan Lake Dance Camp" for ages 3 to 5 is scheduled for July 29 to Aug. 2, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. each day. Cost is \$50 members, \$75 nonmembers.

Dancers will practice basic ballet technique with emphasis on basic movement concepts while learning about the ballet Swan Lake.

PEDAL

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Students in grades 2 and 3 practiced their skills on the playground.

"All my kids at Haines can ride a bike now. It's pretty cool," Anderson said.

The bicycles moved to South Baker for the last few weeks of school.

Anderson taught basic skills and hand signals on the playground.

Each bike is marked with a name — "Esperanza," "Ziggy," "Tiny Elvis," and "Stevie Nicks," to name a few.

When a class arrives for

"All my kids at Haines can ride a bike now. It's pretty cool."

— **Jessie Anderson, PE teacher at Haines and South Baker schools**

PE, they get instructions, then choose a proper-fitting helmet and bicycle. Before riding, they check tire pressure and brakes, then adjust the seat height.

Anderson placed stop signs around the playground so students could practice proper stopping and turning techniques.

When coming to a stop, a

student signals with their left hand at a right angle, their fist toward the ground.

To turn right, the left hand is again at a right angle, but with the fist up toward the sky.

A left turn is signaled by holding the left arm straight out the side, and also moving to the left side of the lane.

Anderson emphasized awareness — to always look over a shoulder before turning and be aware of traffic.

(She demonstrated this by having a student pretend to be a car — a Ferrari, in the case of Otis Young — that

crashes into her when she's not looking.)

"You need to be aware of your surroundings," she told the students. "You can't control them, but you can control your bike."

During the lessons at South Baker, Anderson said she had help with maintenance from janitor Bruce Bowers and Luke Burton, a behavioral specialist at the school.

The on-street portion for South Baker students will take place during field day, Thursday, June 6, with Adam Robb from the Baker County Sheriff's Office and Billie-Jo Deal, ODOT transportation safety coordinator.

During that day, Anderson will teach pedestrian safety to the students.



Lisa Britton / For the Baker City Herald

PE teacher Jessie Anderson demonstrates what can happen when a bicyclist doesn't check for vehicles — fifth-grader Jack Joseph played the role of a Mercedes-Benz to simulate a crash.

HEART TO HEART

Contributions help United Way locally

Winter and fall are hard times for folks in Northeast Oregon, especially our neighbors who struggle with food security or endure abuse. Fortunately, Baker County workers and businesses came together to fight back against high poverty and employment rates by donating to United Way of Eastern Oregon. Through a combination of payroll contributions from Bi-Mart and the state of Oregon, as well as donations from Avista and Bi-Mart, United Way of Eastern Oregon's

fall-winter campaign was able to raise over \$2,000 for Baker City Friday Backpack, MayDay, Baker Little League, New Hope for Northeast Oregon Animals, St. Francis Food Bank, and the North Powder Food Bank's operations in Haines. In 2019, UWEO hopes to build on relationships with businesses and workers in Baker County and expand our employee giving and donation efforts. If we received just \$1 per month from every local employee and \$100 per year from every local business, United Way would raise over \$100,000 that

would stay in Baker County. We recognize that community members want to give their time as well as money, so we are developing an online volunteer opportunity database that will allow you to better connect with your cause of choice. United Way fights for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in every community, and you can learn more about how to live united with us in Baker County this year at www.uweo.org.

Alex McHaddad
Executive Director, United Way of Eastern Oregon

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