

## EDITORIAL

## Paring the wolf pack

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) was wise to authorize the killing of up to four wolves from the Lookout Mountain pack in eastern Baker County. According to ODFW investigations, wolves from that pack have attacked cattle northeast of Durkee four times since July 13, killing two animals and injuring two others.

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett, who is also chairman of the county's wolf committee, requested the kill permit on Tuesday, July 27 on behalf of ranchers Deward and Kathy Thompson. The Thompsons, in a letter included with Bennett's request, wrote that in the past two weeks they have been "brutally and economically impacted by a pack of wolves that won't seem to stop no matter what we do."

The Thompsons included with their letter a handwritten, six-page diary of the efforts they've made since January 2021 to protect their cattle.

That includes having someone check their herd every two to four hours, around the clock, during calving and for several weeks after in February and March, firing gunshots in the air, and installing wire fencing around their calving grounds. The Thompsons wrote that the "rampant" depredation coincides with the Lookout Mountain pack adding five to seven pups this spring. According to ODFW, prior to this year the pack consisted of the adult breeding male and female, and two yearlings born in the spring of 2020.

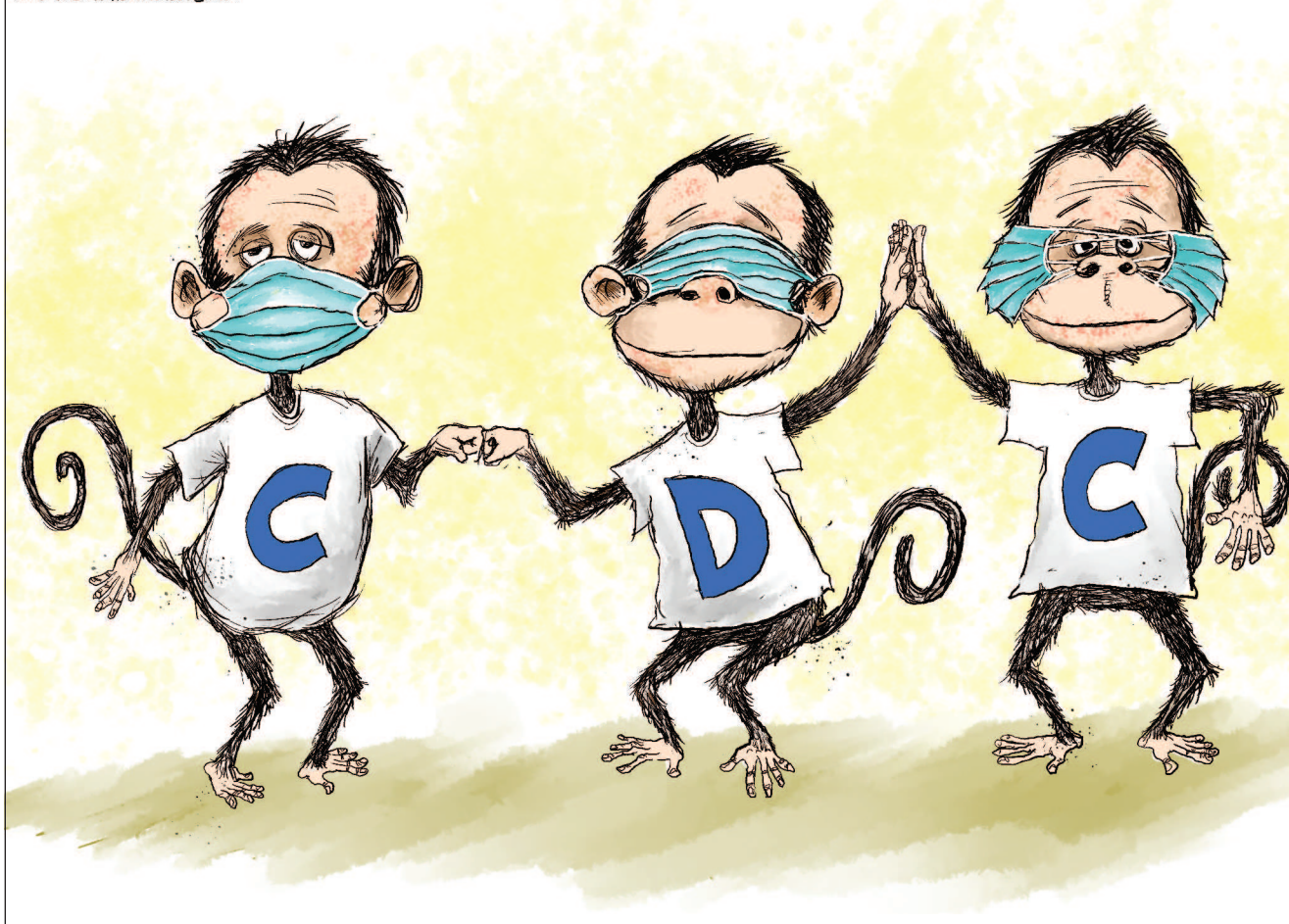
"We are asking for your urgent assistance in reducing the packs need for so much meat to exist," the Thompsons wrote to Melcher.

The permit does not allow the killing of the pack's breeding male and female. But based on the record of depredations by the pack, it looks as though paring the pack, rather than trying to effectively eradicate it by killing the breeding pair, could largely, if not entirely, solve the problem.

That's a reasonable compromise that could allow the cattle industry, a vital part of Baker County's economy, to continue to coexist with wolves. This is not necessarily a peaceful coexistence, to be sure. But the presence of wolves is obviously more tolerable when the wolves aren't pilfering dollars from ranchers' pockets.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

©2021 Mike Stollen cartoons.com



## Your views

## Residents continue to promote train quiet zone

Neighbors for a Safer, Healthier, and Happier (Shh) Baker City formed to improve the lives of all of the people, schools, and businesses in Baker affected by the train horns. In 2019 we asked the City Council to begin the process of establishing a Railroad Quiet Zone and they voted unanimously to submit a Notice of Intent to the Federal Railroad Administration. A Quiet Zone would maintain railroad safety, protect our kids and schools, help our businesses thrive and help our neighbors get a better night's sleep.

Since 2019, the City Public Works Department has worked with us to complete safety improvement designs for each crossing, host a well-attended open house, and submit the Notice of Intent.

To date, we have received overall positive support for a Quiet Zone. We heard from residents about how the interruption to their sleep has worsened health problems. We heard from teachers and students at South Baker Intermediate about how the train horns disrupt learning. We also heard from business owners who believe their businesses and tourism would benefit from a Quiet Zone.

What is a Quiet Zone? Train engineers are required by Federal regulations to blast their horns four times before each railroad crossing. When Quiet Zone safety measures are added to crossings, the horn mandate goes away. Engineers can still use a horn when needed. Cities nationwide have set up Quiet Zones to reduce train noise, including La Grande.

At a recent City Council meeting,

we heard questions about safety and cost. The Federal Railroad Administration is currently reviewing the City's plans, and will only approve the Quiet Zone if crossings are deemed to be as safe as or safer than with horns.

Regarding cost, the City's current estimate for the project is \$150,000. We will not rely on any new or additional taxes, and we would like to raise a significant portion of the funding for the project.

A railroad Quiet Zone will improve the health and safety of the community we love, schools, and local business. We invite you to join us and consider signing our petition at <https://bit.ly/qzbaker>

**Jessica Griffen**

*Neighbors for a Safer, Healthier, and Happier (Shh) Baker City*

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

**President Joe Biden:** The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley:** D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; [merkley.senate.gov](mailto:merkley.senate.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden:** D.C. office:

221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; [wpyden.senate.gov](mailto:wpyden.senate.gov).

**U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz** (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; [walden.house.gov](mailto:walden.house.gov).

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State

Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

**Baker City Hall:** 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Lynette Perry, Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr.

**Baker City administration:** 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

## An impressive tour of the Pythian Castle

I walked through Baker City's Pythian Castle with what I suspect was the bemused expression of a person who is seeing something that doesn't merely exceed his expectations, but lies well beyond them.

(I didn't have a mirror so I can't be sure about my expression. But bemused is what it felt like.)

I stroll past this imposing structure, at the corner of First Street and Washington Avenue, at least a few times each week.

I drive by occasionally as well.

It is a noteworthy building, even by the standards of Baker City's renowned, and deservedly so, historic downtown district.

The Pythian Castle was built in 1907, when Baker City still had its original two-word name.

(Three years later voters decided they were satisfied with plain old "Baker." And 79 years after that, voters — no doubt including some descendants of those who dropped "city" — terminated the long experiment in brevity and put "city" back where it was originally. This proves something about the electoral process, but I have no idea what that might be.)

The Pythian Castle's exterior walls are faced, like several other downtown structures including Baker City Hall and the Baker County Courthouse, with Pleasant Valley tuffstone, a type of volcanic



**JAYSON JACOBY**

ash welded into a solid (very solid) formation by the heat of an eruption between 15 million and 16 million years ago.

The building was the local headquarters for the Knights of Pythias, a nonsectarian fraternal order founded in 1864.

And though it was never a castle in the sense of a place where a king lives — or at least a medieval lord of some prominence — the name is not inappropiate.

The building's battlement-style parapet — the series of stone "teeth" — certainly give the impression of a castle. These features, as part of an actual castle, gave archers both a place to shelter, as well as open spaces between from which they could fire their arrows or, perhaps, pour boiling oil on the enemy below during a siege.

I knew Heidi Dalton had bought the Pythian Castle in early 2020, and that she was restoring its interior.

The Herald published a story about her progress in late June 2020.

But I hadn't been inside, to see the handiwork of Heidi and her

contractors, until the afternoon of June 30.

I was there to have a look at the Herald's new office space in the building. I'm excited about the move, which should be complete in early August. The newspaper, to an extent, has come home.

The Herald's office was at the other end of the block, at First and Court, for more than half a century before our previous owner, Western Communications Inc., sold that building in the spring of 2018.

I feel honored, too, to work in the same building where Leo Adler oversaw his magazine distribution empire, the fruits of which continue to enrich the community he loved.

Once we had walked through the office, admired the original polished wood trim and the view through the tall, narrow windows on the Castle's west side, Heidi offered to give us a comprehensive tour.

We climbed the stairs — more dark, lustrous wood of the sort you rarely see except in buildings at least a century old — and Heidi guided us to the ballroom.

There were audible gasps from the group as she opened the doors.

The renovation is ongoing, but this space is impressive even when it's strewn with tools and lengths of lumber and small, aromatic drifts of sawdust.

Its grandeur is impossible to discern from outside. Inside, though,

the sheer scale is so beyond what we experience in most structures — exposed wooden joists more than 20 feet overhead, windows nearly as tall as a basketball hoop, space enough to have a junior high rollerskating party — that I needed a minute or so to comprehend what I was seeing.

I could imagine the parties that happened here so long ago, couples in formal dress dancing across the maple floor in an era when people talked about the Great War but wouldn't know what you meant if you referred to the Great Depression.

Heidi also showed us the second-story residential quarters where she and her two teenage daughters live.

The view of the Elkhorns is as you might expect from an elevated vantage point.

It's a common thing to credit someone with "saving" a building. Sometimes this is literally true, of course. Barbara and Dwight Sidway rescued the Geiser Grand Hotel. Had the couple not taken a fancy to the decrepit building in 1993, it almost certainly would not stand today.

The Pythian Castle, by contrast, was in no danger of falling to the wrecking ball.

Previous owners Rosemary and Larry Abell did a considerable amount of renovation work on the

building after they bought it in 2002.

Heidi is turning the Castle into a true showplace — the sort of structure that people drive hundreds of miles to see.

While we were following her around, I thought about a topic that I've heard discussed periodically over the past 30 years — the potential that exists in the second floors (and sometimes third or higher floors) of Baker City's historic downtown buildings.

The changes Heidi has wrought in the Castle remind me of just how vast and untapped that potential is.

I pondered how many tens of thousands of square feet exist, the dust slowly accumulating, how many expanses of irreplaceable hardwood floors, awaiting only the ministrations of the sander and the buffer soaked in lacquer, the fine grain ready to gleam for the first time since Truman was president, or maybe Taft, or McKinley.

Time stretches. People die. Memories are lost, and photographs are buried in landfills.

But so long as the buildings stand, their bones still stout and their walls true, the next chapters in their long tales are waiting to be written.

*Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.*