

## The search is on for the perfect tree

Christmas tree cutting permits for sale at several locations or online, for just \$5

By **JAYSON JACOBY**  
Baker City Herald

**BAKER CITY** — The hunting season is on, but the hunters in this case needn't worry about their quarry detecting their scent or hearing the snap of a twig.

Nor will the objects of this hunt sprint away long before you have them in your sights.

At most they might shiver a bit if the wind is high.

And yet Christmas trees, despite lacking the keen instincts and awe-inspiring agility of a deer or elk, do not always make themselves readily available.

They sometimes hide, as the saying goes, in plain sight.

Trees, of course, tend to grow in groves. And this is a typical trait for the grand and white firs that are a favorite Christmas tree in Northeastern Oregon forests.

When you come across a cluster of firs — especially if they're slathered in snow — it can be difficult to distinguish between a specimen with gaping gaps in its limbs or a crooked trunk, and one that would be the crowning holiday adornment for your living room.

For many families, though, this seasonal search is as integral to the holidays as carols, Charlie Brown and cookies decorated with frosting.

And it's considerably less expensive than most hunts.

A permit to cut a tree on national forest land costs just \$5.

"If you are on the hunt for the perfect tree, you are welcome to harvest one from the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest," said Shaun McKinney, supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman, which is based in Baker City.

The same goes for the Umatilla and Malheur national forests.

"You'll have a memorable adventure and a story to share with family and friends," McKinney said.

Permits are available at many local stores (see list in the shaded box on this page) or online by setting up an account at Recreation.gov.

Lest anyone worry about contributing to deforestation by cutting a Christmas tree, quite the opposite is true, Forest Service officials say.

Removing a small-diameter tree — the limits are 15 feet tall and a trunk six inches in diameter — can improve forest health by reducing the competition for



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald, File

Dragging a grand fir through the snow near Sumpter during a previous year's Christmas tree excursion.

sunlight, water and nutrients, allowing remaining trees to grow faster.

"In most parts of the forest, removing small trees reduces the risk of wildfire, helps other trees to grow larger and more fire-resistant, and creates open areas that provide forage for wildlife," according to a press release from the Forest Service. "So don't feel bad when you cut that little tree. You are supporting a healthy forest."

Other guidelines for cutting a Christmas tree on national forest land:

- Cut your tree at least 50 feet away from the road.
- Clean up any trimmings or

limbs.

- Leave stumps no higher than 10 inches. It is not legal to "top" a tree taller than 15 feet.

- Remove any green limbs left that remain on the stump.

- Do not cut in active timber sales or areas that have been planted with new trees.

- Do not cut on private land, wilderness areas, designated campgrounds, or existing tree plantations.

- Do not cut trees in the following areas: Baker City Watershed, Anthony Lakes Campground or Ski Area, Starkey Experimental Forest, La Grande Watershed, Hurricane Creek, and Lostine drainages.

- Do not cut trees in posted Old Growth areas or within 1/4 mile of wild and scenic corridors.

- Christmas tree cutting within sight of a state highway is prohibited.

National forests in the Blue Mountains are amply endowed with multiple species of conifers that are suitable for Christmas trees.

You're not likely to find the symmetrical specimens of tree farms or sales lots in towns, to be sure.

But browsing the orderly rows can't fairly be called an adventure.

Acquiring a tree in the forest,

### WHERE TO GET A PERMIT

Christmas tree permits cost \$5 and are available at these businesses:

- Bi Mart, Baker City
- D&B Supply, Baker City
- York's, Baker City
- The Gold Post, Sumpter
- Burnt River Market, Unity
- Hitchin' Post Grocery, Richland
- Halfway Market, Halfway
- Wallowa Food City, Wallowa
- Dollar Stretcher, Enterprise
- Sports Corral, Joseph
- Miller's Home Center, La Grande
- Bi Mart, La Grande
- Hometown Hardware, Union
- Island City Market & Deli, Island City

by contrast, often involves trudging through snow, over the hills and through the woods, with the likelihood of getting sticky sap on your hands and clothes.

If you do venture into the forest, prepare for slippery roads and chilly temperatures. Bring food, warm drinks and extra clothing, and make sure somebody knows where you're going and when you expect to return.

Here's a list of some of the common tree species in our region:

### Grand fir/white fir

These true firs are abundant at the lower elevations that are more likely to be accessible in late fall.

They also have a classic Christmas tree form, with nicely spaced branches that offer plenty of places for ornaments, lights and tinsel.

Although grand fir and white fir are separate species, hybrids bearing traits of both are common in the Blue Mountains, the late Charles Grier Johnson Jr., longtime forest ecologist in the Blues for the Forest Service, wrote in his definitive "Alpine and Subalpine Vegetation of the Wallowa, Seven Devils and Blue Mountains."

"Hybridization between these two true firs ... make identification difficult," Johnson wrote.

But names, of course, are less important than shape.

### Subalpine fir

Full-grown subalpine firs are easy to recognize from their slender, dart-like shape. But in juvenile form they sometimes resemble grand firs.

A distinguishing characteristic of the subalpine fir is its needles. They grow at all angles from the limb, rather than in flat, orderly rows as a grand or white fir's do.

Although subalpine firs usually grow at higher elevations than grand firs, the two species occasionally mingle between about 5,500 and 6,000 feet.

See, [Tree/Page 2B](#)

## 'Born 30' and still enjoying looking back



**LUKE OVGARD**  
CAUGHT OVGARD

My mom always told me I was born 30.

If that's true, my hairline is doing remarkably well for a 61-year-old, but perhaps it explains why I get up to pee so often during the night. Hmm ... not important.

Actually important is one of my family's favorite home videos. The clearly dated scene shows Young Luke sitting in front of the bolster, arranging something on its surface out of view of the camera. Into frame walks my younger brother, Jake. Without delay, Jake begins scattering the assortment of papers I was apparently "playing" with. Jake was maybe two or three at the time, and as I realize what he's doing, I begin to voice my displeasure with a whiny timbre that I mostly aged out of. Seconds later, I can be heard complaining to my mom "He messed up my business papers!" Dad keeps the camera on Jake for what, in retrospect, is the

comedic climax. Jake turns and stares at the camera with a devious half smile.

Business papers. SMH.

I have no recollection of what I was playing, but I do know that not much changed as I grew older.

My first job that gave me an actual paycheck was refereeing soccer, which Jake and I did together. I brought in about \$500 over the course of the season, which might as well have been \$50,000. At 12 years old, there were any number of things I could've bought after that 2002 soccer season. My friends likely would've bought clothes, one of the newfangled iPods, video games, a new ball or bat or helmet or loads of snacks and treats. I don't know what Jake bought. I do remember what I bought, though. It's more what you'd expect from a suburban mom than a seventh grader; I spent my money on a FoodSaver vacuum packer. It cost me about half of my first paycheck. Yeah, that's what kind of kid I was.

Best of all, it still works to this day, hundreds of pounds of fish and nearly 20 years later.

Like that FoodSaver, I quickly learned that I had the rare ability to suck the air out of a room at 13-going-on-30. I always had a good sense of humor, but if I wasn't a killjoy full-time, I at least moonlighted.

Young Luke was responsible. Young Luke was mature. Young Luke could be counted on to handle the fundraising for class endeavors, to always have tissues or allergy medicine or Tylenol close at hand, to reassure parents of the lack of criminal activity or general delinquency at any party where he was present — that is, if Young Luke wasn't talking to the parents at said party. But honestly, as I've aged, I realize Young Luke missed out on his childhood in many ways because he was never really a kid.

### Risk

Today, I live a rich life punctuated by new experiences. Travel, fishing, dining out, cooking, reading and dating regularly but unsuccessfully all serve as testaments to my love of the untamed and untested. I'm not alone in this, either.

Millennials aren't the first generation to chase new experiences with almost religious fervor, but they certainly are the first to share those experiences so ubiquitously. Everywhere you look is another video series or podcast or social media influencer sharing his or her passion with the world. It's awesome for those who love to consume this content, but it's also a bit dangerous. My generation grew up at a time when the world changed faster and more radically in 20 years than at any other time in history, and it has shaped us into a unique subculture.

Among other things, this rapid immersion into the global and the digital left many desensitized to the value of the very experiences we record and curate for a virtual audience on the regular.

I don't think I ever would've wistfully doubted the paths I took in life or felt a sense of loss for this experience or that if I'd never known it existed. I'm not saying ignorance is bliss and something to aspire to, but we were given so much unfiltered information so quickly that I think it's left those like me, who were born 30, in this

weird introspective rut that the average person might not have until they are much, much older.

Honestly, the internet has been far more boon than bane, and we now have the collective of human knowledge and experience at our fingertips, but that's what makes it so overwhelming. The internet has the potential to be a panacea for all problems and difficulties it doesn't itself create, but it also has the ability to leave us listless and overwhelmed.

Something I wish I could've told Young Luke so many years ago is that you don't need to always make the most prudent, well-reasoned choice to be successful and happy. Sometimes, action beats calculation. It's OK to spend your money and time on something that isn't wholly practical. Who knows? Maybe someday you'll even have a platform to write about that frivolity.

Sign up for every CaughtOvgard column at [www.patreon.com/CaughtOvgard](http://www.patreon.com/CaughtOvgard). Read more for free at [caughtovgard.com](http://caughtovgard.com); Follow on Instagram and Fish-brain @lukeovgard