

EDITORIAL

Welcome work in the watershed

We can't permanently and completely protect Baker City's watershed from wildfire.

Fire is a natural force too powerful to totally tame, as the catastrophic blazes that have become all too common across the West over the past decade attest.

But we can reduce the risk — perhaps by a meaningful amount — that a fire will devastate the 10,000-acre watershed, creating a water supply crisis and likely forcing the city to spend more than \$10 million to build a water filtration plant.

U.S. Forest Service officials plan to start, as soon as the summer of 2023, the most ambitious such project in and around the watershed in decades.

Kendall Cikanek, ranger for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's Whitman District, announced in late July that the forest has scheduled a public open house to give residents information about the watershed project. The open house is set for Aug. 17 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Baker County Events Center, 2600 East St.

Forest Service and Baker City officials have talked for many years about the threat wildfire poses to the watershed, most of which is densely forested. The area, on the east slopes of the Elkhorn Mountains west of town, is public property but most of the watershed is closed to the public. The city allows limited access for hunters when the fire danger isn't extreme, and one open road, leading to Marble Creek Pass, runs through the watershed.

The forests in parts of the watershed are types where wildfires have historically been infrequent, but when they do burn they tend to be severe. Cikanek said there hasn't been a large fire in the watershed since the 1880s. And when researchers studied old fire-scarred trees in the watershed in the mid 1990s, they concluded that such a blaze, based on past intervals, is overdue.

Fortunately the watershed is not only close to Baker City, where the Wallowa-Whitman has firefighters stationed, but it's visible from most of the valley, so when a fire does start — typically sparked by lightning — the smoke is seen, and reported, quickly. Fire crews have rapidly doused every blaze in the watershed over the past several decades.

But the risk remains. And the danger continues to increase as climate change results in longer, more severe fire seasons.

Wallowa-Whitman officials intend to curb that risk through a variety of tactics, with two chief goals. The first is to reduce the chances that a fire will spread into the watershed from outside its boundaries. The second is to give firefighters a better chance to confine a fire inside the watershed to no more than a few drainages. The latter goal is vital because the city diverts water from a dozen streams and springs. The fewer of those sources affected by a fire, the more likely the city could still have a sufficient supply while the burned drainages are healing — particularly with the city's second backup well coming online later this year.

The Wallowa-Whitman proposes to achieve these goals through a combination of cutting trees — including commercial logging, primarily outside the watershed itself — and prescribed burning to reduce the amount of combustible stuff. A key component of the plan inside the watershed is to create fire breaks — swathes where the number of trees and amount of ground litter are both substantially reduced — along the tops of the ridges that divide major streams such as Elk, Salmon, Marble and Mill creeks. Fire crews could use these fire breaks as anchors, a sort of no man's land where flames could be stopped.

Like all cities, Baker City needs a reliable water supply. Wildfire is one of the biggest threats to that supply, which makes the Wallowa-Whitman's watershed project both crucial and most welcome.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.

• The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters.

• Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

• The writer must include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

• Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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AS THE WATER LEVEL CONTINUES TO RECEDE



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

B2H power line would ruin views, raise wildfire risk

After moving to Baker City in 2008 from La Grande I have walked, hiked, and run the trails at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, often several times a week. It's difficult to describe the peacefulness and beauty that comes with every season there. When friends or family members come to Baker City I am proud to take them to this amazing heritage site that sits outside Baker City with phenomenal views of the valley and our Elkhorn Mountains. This amazing vista would be destroyed due to the monstrously huge towers that would obstruct the view and destroy some of the historic wagon ruts. The B2H line would destroy the sweeping vistas of the carefully sited Oregon Trail Interpretive Center which was built at a cost of millions of taxpayer dollars.

I'm even more concerned about B2H because in order to construct new high voltage power lines across eastern Oregon, Idaho Power would be allowed to seize the property of private landowners — in some cases taking land that has been respected and cared for by the same families for generations. I also oppose B2H because of the impacts such a transmission line will have on the heightened possibility for wildfire in remote areas where rural communities and landowners are ill-equipped to fight a major fire, but bear the full risk of loss caused by any fires that do occur. We in Oregon will not benefit from the B2H line, but Idaho Power stockholders will. For more information on the work that's being done to stop the Boardman, OR to Hemingway, ID power lines go to: www.stopb2h.org.

Carol Glaser
Baker City

Pleased to see changes to the GOP central committee

It was invigorating, no actually exhilarating, to read in the Herald (07/30/22) that the newly elected/confirmed Republican Precinct Committee Persons are retrieving and reviving the Baker County Central Republican Committee. For far too long the previous so-called leadership of the Baker County Republican Committee has conducted the business of the County Committee in a deceptive, tightly controlled, self-promoting, disingenuous manner, with highly questionable fiscal accountability.

It is with appreciation that the newly installed PCPs have the ambition, courage, moral clarity, with the dedication to public service to rejuvenate, bring transparency, along with honest, robust discussion on the mission of promoting Baker County's, AND Oregon's grassroots

conservative movement. My personal appreciation and gratitude to these individuals who are putting forward their efforts, time and sacrifice to Make Baker County Great Again!

It is definitely time for the old, tired, non-representative "RINO establishment" to step down and get out of the way. Let the new, fresh conservative ideas, driven with positive, proactive solutions on the mission to ambitiously bring our rural community conservative values back into the mainstream of Baker County's political arena!

I also much appreciate the straightforward, factual and accurate article by Clayton Franke, reporter for the Baker City Herald.

Curtis Martin
North Powder

Some trying to muscle their way into power with GOP

I serve as the elected treasurer for the Baker County Republican Central Committee. I also serve on the Baker City Council.

I am very familiar with the facts of how Suzan Jones has admirably led Baker County GOP the past 12 years. I am also familiar with how inaccurate the allegations are about her leadership and this so-called need for a "investigation." Frankly, it's just a bunch of bovine material spread around so a few insurrectionists could feel important by muscling their way to power without having a quorum.

I could have attended the July 28 meeting and provided that missing Executive Committee member for the quorum required by the by-laws. I didn't — and I think that the district attorney would agree with my decision.

On October 10, 2022, Ken Hackett's criminal jury trial for numerous felonies will begin. I am witness for the state against Ken Hackett. Because Ken Hackett was one of the leaders of this "takeover" I don't feel comfortable being in the same room with him. "Fool me once, shame on you? Fool me twice shame on me?"

Unfortunately, in my opinion, many of the precinct committee people in that room were victimized by Hackett and the other ring leader's misinformation. I hope those good hearted PCPs are not fooled again.

I daresay that the January 6 Committee would be proud of the insurrection detailed in Saturday's article.

Joanna Dixon
Baker City

Shrine Game: thrilling football for a good cause

Having family in Baker City, I read the Baker City Herald article: "Shriners back on schedule" (July 30 issue). I happen to be a fifth-generation Mason and a second-generation Shri-

ner, so that made me doubly pleased to read the article noting that the famed Shriners East-West game is resuming after the COVID-19 postponements. Good thrilling football for a good cause.

Many people don't realize that all Shriners must join a Masonic Lodge first, in order to be eligible for Shriner membership. The Masonic Lodge is the grassroots friendship society which instills good character inside of a man. Masons enjoy friendships, fraternal bonds and ritual connections which have spanned the generations. Freemasonry takes those good men and makes them better men, who enjoy fun times when they can let their hair down.

The Shriners Hospitals for Children has been going strong for 100 years now. Speaking solely for myself (although I know a lot of men who can share the same sentiment) in that I am proud I followed in the footsteps of my dad and other ancestors by joining such a worthy group of men who help their communities and help those in need.

James A. Marples
Longview, Texas

Sarcasm doesn't help with progress on train quiet zone plan

A July 26th letter to the editor went too far for me. On the first reading, the words appeared to draw a partisan circle, and in that circle the author placed two policies that are important to him. Then, using a series of cartoonish country expressions, it seemed as if he was disparaging everyone outside of his circle.

Now, I don't think the author meant it that way.

It was only my first reading. The second time I picked up more nuance, including these suggestions: (1) Please don't disagree with a proposal until you understand the evidence. (2) Let's not make everything about "us" and "them." Many would agree with those points, if I interpreted them correctly.

However, for those who didn't read this particular polemic twice, and found themselves acid-washed by its sarcasm, I would offer two comments in response.

First, most people in our community are good, smart, hard-working, and welcoming. I come from a family of Montana homesteaders, so I cringe at the outlandish rural stereotypes in the July 26th letter.

They are just not OK. They don't apply to our community. They make people feel "less than" and "othered." They dig deeper partisan trenches in a time that we need to be making peace.

Second, the train horn quiet zone is non-partisan. It is not in anyone's partisan circle. But even if it was, I think it would be labeled conservative, not liberal. Train horns are imposed by

the federal government, yet they have been proven harmful and unnecessary. Therefore, the quiet zone process allows Baker City to take local control over an overreaching federal mandate. That is why hundreds of towns have established quiet zones across the country, including our neighbors in La Grande. (By the way, if you like the horns, that's OK. You will still hear them in the distance and even in town when the train engineer thinks they are necessary.)

Exercising our local rights, we will exceed the safety standards for the quiet zone; we will make our children safer at South Baker School by reducing the painful 110-decibel horns in the playground; and we will improve the quality of life for everyone who lives, works or plays in earshot of the train horns. The Baker City Council decided to pursue the quiet zone in 2019, and twice in 2022. Over 50 businesses and over 400 residents signed a letter of support. Citizens and schools have raised \$70,000 for the project, and we will keep at it until the project is fully funded. This summer, City staff are completing steps toward the final notice of intent and formal application. We are all making strong progress.

Baker City is a great community full of good and smart people, and the train horn quiet zone is a good and smart project. We can do this together, so let's finish what we started.

Peter Fargo
Baker City

Lamenting the problems caused by an overcrowded planet

I must ask — by what metric do you conclude the Earth is underpopulated?

When I was a young boy, 1940s to 50s, we had about 2 billion people (est.). Now we seem to be up to around 8 billion. Results:

1. Pollution beyond nature's ability to compensate.

2. Societal ills due to overcrowding (compare rural vs major metro perspectives on what's important to life).

3. Lack of consideration for social dynamics as a factor in community identity and the effects of overcrowding.

4. Lack/decline of essential natural resources such as water, fish stocks, grazing land for meat animals (do you really want to eat insects?).

These comprise a short but observable list of concepts that seem to be left out of the discussions relating to the population question. The frightening aspect is humanity's ability to procreate and the observable problems we are now experiencing. These issues lead to the globalization of society. It is an "all your eggs in one basket" structure that actually puts us as a species at greater peril.

Rick Rienks
Baker City