

Land and water recreation growing

Rager Ranger Station closure discussed

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Land management, wildfires and new recreational uses were major topics in the annual Ochoco National Forest and Bureau of Land Management updates presented at the Oct. 25 Grant County Court meeting.

BLM Prineville District Manager Dennis Teitzel, who became the district manager this past June, reported that nearly 6,500 boaters entered the John Day River this year, with the BLM selling 1,137 permits. That included 447 launched from Clarno or Thirtymile and 295 from Muleshoe or Service Creek.

"The BLM collected just over \$21,000 in fees that will continue to be put back onto the John Day River for maintenance and patrols," he said.

County Judge Scott Myers noted that ODFW lifted the limits on smallmouth bass fishing in the John Day River this year, which should generate even more boating interest.

The BLM is considering acquiring up to 11,500 acres of private land adjacent to the John Day River and Thirtymile Creek, Teitzel said.

The acquisition would provide public access to the John Day Wild and Scenic River, the Armstrong Canyon Area of Environmental Critical Concern, the Lower John Day Special Recreation Management Area and the Thirtymile and North Pole Ridge Wilderness Study Areas.



File photo/Kevin Sperl

Stacy Forson is the supervisor of the Ochocho National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland.

Commissioner Boyd Britton emphasized that he had "strong concerns" about the Western Rivers Conservancy acquiring this private land. He said he had a "personal vendetta" against the group and was happy to see the federal government take it from them.

Teitzel also reported on several improvement projects, including the waterline extension to the BLM's Dayville fire guard station, rehabilitation of Malloy Creek Road to improve water quality and protect spawning steelhead in the North Fork of the John Day River, reconstruction of 30 miles of fencing burned in the 2014 South Fork Complex Fire and reseeding of up to 3,000 acres in the Murderers Creek drainage to improve ecological conditions and wildlife habitat.

The Eastern Oregon Trails Alliance has also approached the BLM about developing a trail system on Little Canyon Mountain, Teitzel said. This follows a trend of increasing recreational use on the district.

Several groups have expressed interest in the Rager Ranger Station near Paulina, Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National

Grassland Supervisor Stacy Forson said. The Forest Service closed the station in 2012, citing a \$4 million maintenance backlog, and announced plans to decommission 33 structures at the site, leaving three historic buildings built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The groups hope to maintain the facilities for public use.

"Can't they be put up for sale?" Britton asked. "It'd be a shame to spend money to keep them up and then tear them down."

Forson noted that selling the facilities to a private party would create an inholding in the national forest.

She said the Forest Service planned to enlist a volunteer site steward to watch over the facility as it did this past summer.

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administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency — to cover firefighting costs.

"That way, work can continue on the ground that's so necessary," Walden said.

The federal government spent a record \$2.5 billion fighting wildfires in 2017, including 678,000 acres burned in Oregon. By eliminating fire borrowing, Walden said more work can be done to lower the size and intensity of fires moving forward.

The bill itself features several provisions to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration, Walden said. For example, thinning projects as large as 10,000 acres could qualify for a categorical exclusion, fast-tracking environmental review. That limit increases to 30,000 acres if the project is developed by a collaborative group.

The bill also requires the Secretary of Agriculture to create a pilot program for resolving lawsuits against forest management projects through arbitration, as opposed to going to court. Plaintiffs would not be able to recover their attorney fees in such cases under the Equal Access to Justice Act.

Finally in Eastern Oregon, the bill lifts the prohibition on logging trees more than 21 inches in diameter, a rule that county officials argue "has no basis in science."

Opponents of the Resilient Federal Forests Act criticize the



U.S. Rep. Greg Walden speaks during a Hermiston Rotary luncheon in September in Hermiston.

bill as a way to maximize the interests of logging companies while severely undermining environmental review laws. Andy Kerr, former conservation director for Oregon Wild, has written the bill would essentially gut the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act and Equal Access to Justice Act to advance the interests of logging.

Walden said the proposal now heads to the Senate with

a strong bipartisan vote out of the House. Unlike the previous four years, he said the administration in Washington, D.C., seems more receptive to advancing the bill to the President's desk.

"I think we have a good opportunity this time," he said. "This time, we're not fighting the headwinds of an administration that wasn't supportive. That changes the dynamics."



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Katree Hoffman

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Payments may be made at the Tax Collector's Office at the Grant County Courthouse in Canyon City, or the payment may be mailed and postmarked no later than November 15th, 2017. Please remember that delinquent taxes accrue interest at the rate of 16% per year. If you have any questions, please call the tax office at 575-0107 or 575-0189.

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