

**FOREST**

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10 years, with as much as 500 million board-feet of timber harvested.

The contract was partially funded by the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration program, with the Forest Service, Oregon State University and the Blue Mountains Forest Partners partnering to monitor the work. That work could increase to 500 plots in 100 different forest stands in 10 different planning areas in 2018.

Blue Mountains Forest Partners emerged in 2006. The collaborative group's diverse stakeholders include loggers, environmentalists, ranchers, landowners, timber industry representatives, elected government officials and federal land managers.

"Prior to Blue Mountains Forest Partners' inception, management of the Malheur National Forest was plagued by gridlock," the group states in its website. "Not only did this have a negative impact on the local economy, it also prevented forest restoration work."

The group says its mission is promoting the long-term well-being of the forest.

"The forest's declining condition is largely due to a combination of fire suppression, social and legal gridlock that arose as a result of dissenting stakeholders' views and sharply curtailed silvicultural management, outcomes of well-intentioned policies and advocacies that have produced a myriad of unforeseen and unintended negative



Eagle file photo

A view of the Strawberry Mountains from Keeney Fork Road on the Malheur National Forest in Grant County.

consequences," the website states.

**Contract update**

Mark Webb, the collaborative group's executive director, updated the Grant County Court about the group's work.

Grant County's economic opportunities are limited, Webb said. Google won't set up a server center here, so the county will need to focus on its natural resources.

Webb said the collabora-

tive process was mandated by federal law. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands in Grant County are public lands, so citizens across the U.S. have an interest in what happens to these lands. On the other hand, locals needed an additional voice, he said.

Without the stewardship contract, the Malheur Lumber Co. mill in John Day, would have shut down, Webb told the court. About 10 percent of the planning

areas are being treated, and he would like to see that increased to 40 or 50 percent. That increase, however, might trigger more administrative work under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Blue Mountains Forest Partners tries to help the Forest Service avoid litigation and to facilitate stewardship projects, Webb said. No litigation over timber projects on the Malheur National Forest has occurred since 2006, he said, but that

might be because the stewardship treatments were not aggressive.

Webb said he'd like to see more aggressive treatments, but he expected that could spark litigation. The collaborative group might not want to be more aggressive, he said.

**Jobs supported**

According to the study by the University of Oregon's Ecosystem Workforce Program, about 96 jobs sup-

ported by the stewardship contract from 2015 through 2017 were in the private forestry sector and involved harvesting and transporting timber or conducting forest and watershed restoration projects.

Another 36 jobs were at the Malheur Lumber Co. mill in John Day, where harvested timber was processed into lumber and bioenergy products. The stewardship contract also supported sawmill jobs in other northeastern Oregon locations.

The Malheur National Forest hired 55 additional employees to implement and monitor the stewardship contract, and 81 jobs at local businesses in Grant and Harney counties were supported through the economic multiplier effect, the study reported.

On average, about 38 million board-feet of timber was harvested each year under the stewardship contract, with about 15 million board-feet of sawlogs and 8,700 tons of non-sawtimber delivered to the mill in John Day, the study reported.

Webb estimated about one-third of logs harvested on the Malheur National Forest went to the mill in John Day and the rest went out of the county.

According to Blue Mountains Forest Partners, Iron Triangle increased employee wages by nearly \$1 million from 2013 through 2016. The company also increased the number of subcontractors needed to meet the stewardship contract requirements and invested about \$5 million in equipment.

**PROJECTS**

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**Planting and thinning**

Blue Mountain Acting District Ranger Amanda Lindsay, a forester and silviculturist, said about 5,400 acres of tree planting was completed this spring on land burned by the Canyon Creek Complex fire in 2015. Another 3,500 acres could be planted next spring to wrap up that project.

"That will depend on the success of the planting we've already done," she noted.

Last year's hot summer caused seedling mortality across the region, she said. This spring has been cooler and wetter, which bodes well for the seedlings. Lindsay took the position of acting district ranger as District Ranger Dave Halemeier is leaving in July.

Prescribed burns typically take place in spring and fall. About 50 acres near the Sumpter Valley Interpretative Site was burned by Prairie City Ranger District personnel in April, and about 740 acres in the Knox project on Cottonwood Creek, southeast of Prairie City, was burned in May.

About 600 acres of thinning will take place in the Crane Prairie area south of Prairie City this summer. Some of it will be "lopped and scattered," while the rest will be hand-piled. That will be followed by an "under burn" in the fall.

Guzman said three timber harvest

contracts were sold for the 30,000-acre Summit Prairie project, which also will include aspen treatment and thinning. Some fencing projects designed to keep livestock out of critical stream habitat also will take place this year, he said.

On the Blue Mountain Ranger District, four timber harvests on the 19,422-acre Damon project north of Seneca are completed, Lindsay said. Forest crews will return this year for fuels treatment. That will include mastication — using heavy machinery to grind up trees less than 9 inches in diameter — along with chainsawing, hand-piling and slash burning for the rest of the project site.

**Fisheries and roads**

A large fisheries project on the main fork of the Malheur River this year will involve using helicopters or excavators to place large woody debris in a 2-mile stretch of the river to create pools for juvenile fish, Guzman said.

"They'll need to clear a site for the helicopter, so they're falling ponderosa pines," he said.

Both the main fork and the west fork of the Malheur River are designated for protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, he noted.

On the Blue Mountain Ranger District, Bear Creek will be reconnected to the Middle Fork of the John Day River near Galena by opening up tailings piles created decades ago by mine dredges.

Crews also will place woody debris

in the stream for steelhead and chinook salmon. "Beaver dam analogs" can be created by driving posts into the stream bed and weaving willows between the posts. Beavers finish the job of building dams that create pools for juvenile fish.

Two historic mining ponds at Big Creek, which is steelhead, chinook salmon and bull trout habitat also in the Middle Fork drainage near Galena, will be filled using material from nearby mine tailings.

Log jams will be installed on a quarter mile of Long Creek to slow water flow for juvenile fish. A side channel will be reconnected to the main channel to provide fish passage. Two culverts will be replaced nearby on the East Fork of Beech Creek and on Tinker Creek to meet fish-jumping height specifications.

Road closure work across the Malheur National Forest started in April, according to Zeke Langum, the forest's assistant forest engineer. The work is contracted out and involves installing berms and water bars, he said.

The decision to close roads is determined by hydrology, fish, wildlife, archaeology and other staff, and proposals undergo a National Environmental Policy Act review.

Langum, who recently received the Chiefs Award for National Engineering Technician of the Year, said road coverage in the Malheur National Forest is "pretty dense" compared to the Willamette National Forest, where he worked previously.

**UPTMOR**

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"In reality, education is about learning," he said.

"Each student should enjoy learning, and educators should have the tools to support them."

Uptmor said he's confident about the resiliency of Oregon schools after seeing them tough it out through the recent economic recession. Schools were hit hard with budget constraints but are pulling out of that now, he said.

"I believe as educators we should have an engaging plan that meets every student's needs," he said. "Working together with the staff, students, parents and community, we can plan for all students to succeed. I'm excited to see what we can accomplish together."

Uptmor's children are grown up and attending college.

He and his wife, who is working on her Realtor license, will move to the John Day area.

They enjoy camping and four-wheeling and have a summer place in Sumpter.

He said he'd like to meet with community members — for a cup of coffee, a town hall or a barbecue — when he arrives.

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Thanks to the Grant County Court and Northeast Oregon Forests Resource Advisory Committee, Grant Weed Control is able to offer a **50% Cost Share Program for Noxious Weed Control on Private Grazing Lands, through a Title II funded Grant Project.** This program will provide a maximum \$5,000 of noxious weed control services with a \$2,500 maximum landowner contribution to qualifying participants. To be eligible for participation, the treatment property must not be actively irrigated and must be primarily managed for livestock grazing, minimum of 20 acres in size, located within Grant County, and must contain weed species listed on the Grant County Noxious Weed List. Applications for this limited weed control assistance opportunity will be funded on a first come first serve basis.

**Contact the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District Office at (541) 575-1554 or visit 721 S. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845 for applications and additional information.**