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The Eagle/Richard Hanners
Jack Southworth explains why he planted turnips on pasture land at his ranch near Seneca as part of a USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Services tour on May 15.

Building up soil at Southworth Ranch

Bear Valley rancher continues heritage of testing techniques

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Bear Valley cattle rancher Jack Southworth kept 18 rangeland and soil science professionals on their toes as they toured his ranch near Seneca May 15.

Southworth had as many questions for them as they did for him as he described his approach to maintaining and improving grass on land his family settled on in the 1880s.

The USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service hosted the Grazing Land Soil Health Field Tour across Eastern Oregon. Participants came from Oregon, Washington, South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana.

Short seasons

The Southworth Ranch began in 1885 as a sawmill and grew into a town with a post office and stage stop. The town later moved a mile or so south, and the land became a cattle ranch.

Seneca has the official record for the coldest temperature in Oregon — negative 54 degrees in 1933. Cold soils cut down on cheatgrass and medusahead grass, but it isn't Bear Valley's notorious cold winters that limit grass growth, Southworth said — it's the short growing season.

At 4,690 feet elevation, the harsh realities are a short 45-day growing season with the threat of frost every month, Southworth said. Precipitation is limited to less than 15 inches, with most of that in the winter.

One of Southworth's top goals for his grass land is moisture retention. He expects to see warmer and drier conditions this year, and capturing and storing moisture is key to growing grass — which in turn feeds cattle.

Soil armor

Armoring the soil is No. 1 among the five principles of soil health, which are promoted by the NRCS. Soil armor will protect soil from wind or water erosion, and it will reduce soil evaporation.

Southworth demonstrated his approach to armoring soil at a pasture that was replanted in 2012. The brown soil between the bunchgrass left by the seed drill needs to be

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The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Matt Krumenauer, left, and Joe Koerner from Restoration Fuels LLC stand next to a triple-pass rotary dryer that will be repurposed for use as a torrefier kiln at the torrefaction plant in John Day.

TORREFACTION ACTION

Construction underway for \$15M biomass plant in John Day

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Progress is being made on construction of a \$15.5 million torrefaction plant at the Malheur Lumber Co. mill in John Day. The plant could be running by September, Matt Krumenauer, vice president of special projects for the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, told the Eagle.

"This is the largest single investment in John Day since the Malheur Lumber Co. mill was built," he said.

The Endowment is the parent entity of Restoration Fuels, which will operate the plant. Work on concrete foundations and utilities began earlier this year, Krumenauer said.

"That's the hardest part," he said. "After that, you just put everything in place and bolt it together."

The Oregon Department of Environmental

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The Eagle/Richard Hanners

A handful of briquettes made from torrefied wood at a research facility in Louisville, Kentucky.

Celebrating '62 Days

Festivities include parade, bed race, mock shooting

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Beautiful, sunny skies greeted visitors and participants at this year's '62 Days Celebration in Canyon City, marking the discovery of gold in Canyon Creek in 1862.

Families gathered in the downtown city park between events or checked out the visiting vendors.

The parade moved down the highway at 11 a.m. with dirt bike stunts, a smoking 1927 Model T, queens and princesses on horseback and the Whiskey Gulch Gang can-can girls. Gary Gregg, the 2019 parade grand marshal, and his wife, Loleita, rode in Del Raymond's Wild West stagecoach.

"We invite everyone to participate in the parade next year," parade organizer Melissa Galbreath said. "We



Eagle photos/Richard Hanners

Gary Gregg, the 2019 grand marshal for the '62 Days parade in Canyon City, and his wife, Loleita, ride in a stagecoach driven by Del Raymond.

would love to see more horses, mules, family floats, organizations and businesses."

At 2 p.m., with 200 wit-

nesses present, a cowboy stumbled out of Sels Brewery and was accused of stealing a horse. He ran back inside

to find his pistol and returned to a hail of gunfire. Standing on the gallows charged with shooting an unarmed man, the horse thief replied, "He had two arms."

When they weren't climbing on the playground equipment or panning for gold, children competed in a watermelon eating contest or dug for treasure in a wood shavings pit on Washington Street.

Peggy Murphy reported 80 visitors at the Grant County Historical Museum, and most of them likely toured Mayor Steve Fischer's historic home — a former schoolhouse.

The bed race took off with eight adult entries and four kids entries at 3 p.m. Jeshua, Caleb and Ethan Sheedy collected a \$25 prize for first-place in the children's contest. For the adults, Jessica Knowles and Kennedy and Etoile Bengé placed first for \$35.

The hardest task was climbing into oversized pajamas at

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Three young prospectors get ready for the '62 Days parade in Canyon City.



With hands behind their backs, children compete in the watermelon eating contest during '62 Days in Canyon City on June 8.

