

# Lookout

Continued from Page A1

making it easier for fire crews to access remote areas, most lookouts were closed, and many removed.

Mount Ireland remains a valuable cog in the fire-detection system in part because of its elevation — if you head west from the peak you won't hit a higher summit until you get to the Cascades.

But its location is also ideal, said McCraw, the fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's Whitman District.

From Mount Ireland's summit, the lookout can see swathes of the Wallowa-Whitman as well as parts of its neighboring national forests, the Umatilla and Malheur, McCraw said. On especially clear days the views extend east into Idaho and north into Washington.

"It's a pretty critical one," McCraw said.

Mount Ireland also overlooks the municipal watershed for Sumpter, where a wildfire could threaten the city's water supply, McCraw said.

But of course a lookout is only as effective as the person who works there, scanning the hundreds of thou-

## LOOKOUT'S HISTORY DATES TO 1915

The people charged with managing Northeastern Oregon's federal forests early on recognized Mount Ireland's utility as a fire lookout.

Except the peak wasn't called Mount Ireland then.

According to Ray Kressek's comprehensive book, "Fire Lookouts of Oregon and Washington," on Aug 28, 1915, just a decade after the Forest Service was created, agency employees Charles F. Groom and C.C. Davenport climbed the mountain and established a "rag" camp on the white granitic boulders that make up its summit.

At that time it was called Bald Mountain.

On Jan. 25, 1917, the Oregon Geographic Board petitioned the federal government to rename Bald Mountain as Ireland Mountain. The honoree was not the island off the west coast of England, but a man — the late Henry Ireland, former supervisor of the Whitman National Forest, which includes his namesake peak, who died May 31, 1916. (The Wallowa and Whitman national forests were combined in the

early 1950s.) The U.S. Geographic Board approved the change, and at some point later the agency went with the current form, Mount Ireland, rather than the original Ireland Mountain.

The first lookout structure, a simple cabin with a flat roof to facilitate the lookout's work, was built in 1916. A cupola was added to the cabin in 1928, according to contemporary newspaper reports.

The original cabin was removed in 1957 and replaced by the current lookout — a much different structure made of steel with the expansive glass windows typical of lookouts.

Unlike many lookouts, which are perched atop a tower to get above nearby trees, Mount Ireland needs no such artificial means. Besides being the tallest point in the vicinity, the mountain's summit is bare stone, the only trees being whitebark pines stunted by the nearly arctic climate and frequent strong winds.

— Jayson Jacoby

sands of acres where a fire could start.

And for the past two years, McCraw has had to scramble to hire someone for the position, which pays about \$16.90 per hour.

In 2020, Mount Ireland's longtime lookout wasn't able to return to the lofty perch, but McCraw had a fair

amount of time to find a replacement.

Typically the lookout doesn't start work at Mount Ireland until late June or early July, when most of the snow has melted and the wildfire risk begins to rise.

This spring McCraw's challenge was even more acute.

The lookout he had enlisted for the

job backed out late in May.

Then someone suggested to McCraw that he explain his dilemma to associations of fire lookout enthusiasts, of which there are several.

The Oregon Fire Lookouts posted about the situation on its Facebook page on June 4.

McCraw said he has had a "very

good response" from the post, and several candidates have been in touch.

McCraw said on June 9 that he will be able to fill the vacancy in time to have Mount Ireland staffed.

The person he hires will have an interesting summer, to be sure. Mount Ireland is pretty remote even by lookout standards.

You can't drive to the peak.

The roughly 3 1/2-mile hiking trail offsets its modest distance with a significant elevation gain of 2,300 feet — roughly equivalent to climbing the Astoria Column about 18 times. (Except without stairs.)

The nearest settlement is Granite, about 8 miles from the trailhead. Sumpter is about 15 miles.

McCraw said the Forest Service each year hires a helicopter crew to haul in water, propane and other supplies to the lookout. A technician checks the radio equipment on the peak, which includes an antenna and a repeater.

The Mount Ireland lookout usually works until mid to late September, depending on the weather.

Snowstorms are possible in any month at that elevation, but McCraw said in some years dry weather persists into October so the lookout stays on duty through deer season.

# Act

Continued from Page A1

Under the bill's provisions, Stern said, the federal land manager would be mandated to enter into agreements with state and local governments to help fight fires and establish a forest restoration grant program should fire burn within a Wild and Scenic River corridor.

Keerins asked who would be involved in creating the plan.

"Will this be a collaborative effort between agricultural producers and the public land managers?" she asked. "Will this be a blanket management plan further restricting our rural way of life?"

Stern said that local communities and those interested in the process are vital in developing a river management plan.

They help with data collection, establish baseline conditions and identify issues and opportunities that need to be addressed in the planning process, Stern said.

He said that local communities monitor and implement aspects of the plan.

Stern said sections 10(e) and 11(b)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act encourages the participation of federal, state or local governments, landowners, private organizations and citizens in planning, protecting and administering rivers.

Kyle Sullivan, director of the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District, said environmental groups have used the current Wild and Scenic Riv-



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden

EOMG file photo

ers Act to go after public lands grazing.

"That's a great concern ... because it's such a vital part of a small agricultural community," he said.

Stern said the bill, on page 16, reads:

"Nothing in this Act or an amendment made by this Act affects any valid existing right."

He said, farther down the page, on line seven, it goes on

to say "nothing abrogates any existing right, privilege or contract affecting federal land held by any private party without the consent of that party."

Another concern many had during the meeting is that the new bill will impact existing Wild and Scenic Rivers or change their management.

In an email to the soil and water district that was shared with the Eagle, Wyden's field representative Kathleen Cathey wrote that administration of Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers applies only to rivers and streams designated as Wild and Scenic under this act.

Many in the soil and water district meeting had concerns that others nominated these rivers, and locals didn't have a voice.

Cathey said that was her fault in the email.

"I'm sorry for not reaching out proactively," she said. "The door is open now."

Stern said many river segments were nominated and supported by ranchers.

Amy Stiner, South Fork John Day Watershed Council coordinator, noted that the current designations require more permitting to remove juniper from private lands.

Additionally, Stiner said, the current legislation has been used as an "excuse" to inhibit necessary restoration along the South Fork of the John Day River.

"We are concerned that adding designations of this sort to streams, rivers or land in general will add restrictions for managing entities," she said, "private lands included." This, she said, could hinder the multiple-use goal of the public lands.

An additional question the group had was the reason for increasing the stream buffer from a quarter-mile to a

half-mile. According to Cathey, this will allow for more fuel reduction and prescribed fire to reduce wildfire risk and improve habitat.

The group also asked if there were measures to restrict litigation. According to Cathey's email, "Senator Wyden has never been open to barring the courthouse door. This plan allows local stakeholders to help write the river management plans and establish the outstanding remarkable values."

Sullivan said the district is still in the "conversation stage" and does not have an official opinion on the proposed legislation.

"I think we're still trying to figure out what everyone's trying to do and what flexibility is there," he said.

Others, such as Grant County producer Rick Hensley, are worried about the unintended consequences of the bill. Cathey said in the email that his concerns are "absolutely understood."

Stiner said she is "looking forward to learning more."

"This bill begins the discussion," Stern said. "Our office is still inviting comments and modifications to the legislation and the segments proposed by Oregonians throughout the state."

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is scheduled to hold a hearing on the bill Wednesday, June 23.

Sullivan said the soil and water district will discuss the bill at its meeting July 1. Cathey said comments would be accepted until sometime in July.

**RadioShack Dealer**

dish

verizon

SiriusXM

**DP HOME ENTERTAINMENT**  
137 E. Main St., John Day • 541-575-1637

**DRAIN SERVICES**

DOES YOUR DRAIN HAVE YOU BACKED UP, PLUGGED UP OR CLOGGED???

**541-260-2726**

Same day appointments!

Located in Prineville  
Stay Local!

WE ALSO SPECIALISE IN PUMP STATION MAINTENANCE FOR RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL.  
NEW CLEAN-OUT INSTALLS AND CAMERA INSPECTIONS ARE AVAILABLE.

**Balance Today with Retiring Tomorrow**

No matter where you're starting from, COUNTRY can help you achieve financial security in retirement. It starts with listening to your situation. Then we help you build a straightforward plan with step-by-step guidance. Call me to get started today.

**Debbie Ausmus**  
245 South Canyon Blvd.  
John Day, OR 97845  
**OPEN WED. & THUR.**  
9 am - 5 pm  
**541-575-1113**  
24 hrs/7 days wk

debbie.ausmus@countryfinancial.com

**COUNTRY FINANCIAL**

**CITY OF JOHN DAY**

**City Celebration & Street Fair**

Farmer's Market  
Greenhouse Tours  
Live Music  
Food

**WE'D LOVE TO SEE YOU THERE!**

Friday, June 25th  
6:00- 8:00 pm

**S. CANYON BLVD & SE 1ST AVE**

**eOMEDIA group**

The most valuable and respected source of local news, advertising and information for our communities.

[www.eomediagroup.com](http://www.eomediagroup.com)

**TOM CHRISTENSEN CONSTRUCTION**

(541) 410-0557 • (541) 575-0192

CCB# 106077

REMODELS • NEW CONSTRUCTION • POLE BUILDINGS  
CONCRETE EXCAVATION • SHEET ROCK • SIDING  
ROOFING • FENCES • DECKS • TELESCOPING FORKLIFT SERVICES

A MAN WAKES UP in the morning after sleeping on... an advertised bed, in advertised pajamas.

He will bathe in an ADVERTISED TUB, shave with an ADVERTISED RAZOR, have a breakfast of ADVERTISED JUICE, cereal and toast, toasted in an ADVERTISED TOASTER, put on ADVERTISED CLOTHES and glance at his ADVERTISED WATCH. He'll ride to work in his ADVERTISED CAR, sit at an ADVERTISED DESK and write with an ADVERTISED PEN. Yet this person hesitates to advertise, saying that advertising doesn't pay. Finally, when his non-advertised business is going under, HE'LL ADVERTISE IT FOR SALE.

Then it's too late.

**AND THEY SAY ADVERTISING DOESN'T WORK? DON'T MAKE THIS SAME MISTAKE**

Advertising is an investment, not an expense. Think about it!

**Blue Mountain Eagle**  
MyEagleNews.com

Don't get left behind, call today! Kim Kell 541-575-0710