

Aspen remnants get second chance

Projects on private land could provide lessons for others

By **Scotta Callister**
Blue Mountain Eagle

DAYVILLE – Some Grant County aspen groves are getting a new lease on life in projects that also aim to provide lessons for resource managers and private landowners.

Forest Restoration Partnership (FRP), a Philomath-based nonprofit, contracted with Grayback Forestry out of John Day to build fences and do other work to protect aspen stands damaged by fire in 2006.

“We’re really looking at an emergency-room-type of treatment here,” said Darin Stringer, a consulting forester and FRP



Still-green aspens stand tall behind a new buck-and-pole fence.

director. “We’re trying to get a new age class of aspens re-established.”

FRP obtained a \$93,000 grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service through its Conservation Innovation Grant program to do the work in Grant County, along with similar projects in Crook and Klamath counties. FRP also obtained in-kind matches from other agency partners, and put out a call for private landowners interested in participating in the project. The landowners pay part of the cost of work done on their land.

In Grant County, the work is under way on land owned by Jim Dovenburg and Tom and Connie Thompson.

Stringer said the goal not only is to save aspens, but also to create demonstration projects to show how various treatments work. A third part of the project is to create a user-friendly manual for other landowners with aspens to manage. He hopes the manual will be available next spring through the OSU Extension Service and online.

Stringer said saving aspens has an emotional appeal for people.

“I don’t think I’ve met anyone who doesn’t like quakies,” he said.

But it’s also important for wildlife and ecological diversity.

When healthy, stands of quaking aspens – with their white bark and shimmering leaves – provide habitat for small mammals, nesting cavities for a variety of birds, including neotropical migratory species, and forage for a variety of animals.

“It’s a really important species,” said Stringer.

That’s true even though aspens are but a small part of the

natural resources of the region. Aspen, he said, may account for less than 1 percent of the local landscape now.

It hasn’t always been that way, however. Aspen stands have been shrinking – and dying – across the Northwest in recent decades.

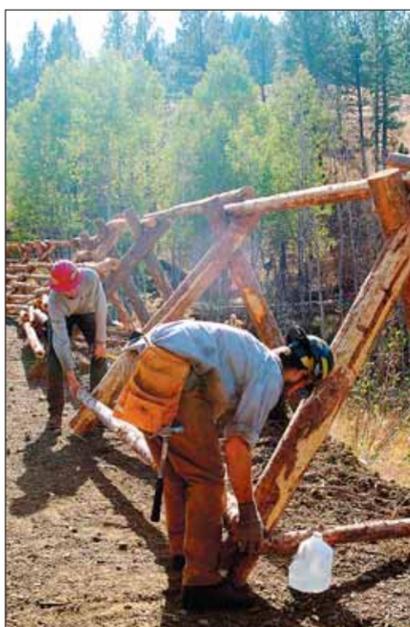
Man’s success at fire suppression in the past century is one of the culprits. Ideally, fast-moving fires would sweep through a grove every 20-30 years, cleaning out competing brush and older trees. Fires warm the soil, and the heat triggers a new flush of root sprouts that crop up the next spring.

However, suppression of those periodic fires – combined with over-browsing by animals, encroachment of invasive brush and trees, and loss of groundwater – resulted in weakened stands.

Aspens are relatively short-lived – 80 to 100 years – and many of today’s stands feature mature or dying trees, with little or no new growth.

Since the aspen grove is really a single clone, it is extremely susceptible to any disruption of the natural cycle, Stringer said.

In the event of a catastrophic fire – like the one in Murderers Creek in 2006 – the green growth above ground may be destroyed, leaving no structure to feed the



Grayback workers Don Gabbard (left) and Mat Elliott position a pole in a fence that is being built to protect a fire-damaged aspen grove.

roots of the clone. Stringer said the whole grove could die, “and it could happen very quickly.”

Techniques for restoring aspen stands include building fences to protect new sprouts, thinning out other trees, removing junipers and burning out underbrush. The FRP project is using both buck-and-pole and the taller big-game fencing.

Stringer said the fences will need to stay up for seven to 10 years. Once the new growth is established, the fences can be removed – although some landowners like the look of the buck-and-pole fencing, he said.

FRP plans to monitor the effectiveness of the work over time, and Stringer cautions that the results won’t be immediate.

“It’s going to be a long process – maybe five to 10 years – before we can really see the aspen up and growing,” he said.



From left, producer Beth Harrington, leading actress and John Day resident Charlene Hopkins, cameraman Todd Sonflieth.

OPB: Show features local talent, historic figures

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Andy Lockhart played the part of Jay McKern – Mt. Vernon resident Wilma Bauer’s father – who was treated for lockjaw by Hay. Harrington herself played the part of Lola Johnson who, as a young girl, went to Doc Hay for bronchial problems.

In addition to scenes of Doc Hay checking pulses, re-enactments were also done of Hay

mixing herbs in a pot as well as an episode of then city councilman, Gordon Glass, shining a flashlight inside the darkened building when it was first reopened back in 1968. Until then, the long-abandoned store had been closed up for about 20 years, according to museum curator Christy Sweet.

The program will air on OPB sometime in 2009, with the date to be announced later.

Public can view street plan

Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY – A community open house for the John Day Local Street Network Plan will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 19, in the Grant Union High School Library, 911 S. Canyon Blvd. John Day residents, property owners, business owners, and other interested parties are encouraged to attend.

The John Day Local Street Network Plan is intended to provide guidance for future local street connections and bicycle/pedestrian routes within the City of John Day. The open house is an opportunity for the public to meet the consultant

project team, learn more about the project, and explore opportunities for future local street connections and bicycle/pedestrian transportation routes within the city.

Peggy Gray, city manager, said public input is important in developing a plan that reflects the community’s goals and values.

Anyone who would like to comment but is unable to attend can contact the project manager, Matt Hughart at Kittelson & Associates, Inc. 610 SW Alder, Suite 700, Portland, OR 97205, or by phone at (503) 228-5230, or e-mail to mhughart@kittelson.com.

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- Health Fair and Blood Draw
- Look Good, Feel Better
- May Day
- Parent Resource Fair
- Physical Therapy
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- Prenatal Classes
- Orthopedic Educational Seminars
- Relay for Life
- Seat Belt Safety Course
- Sports Physicals
- YMCA
- Young Life

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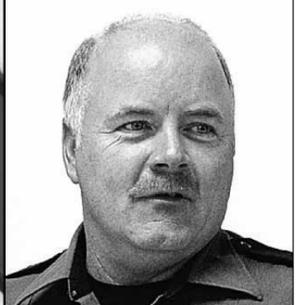


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