Wallowa Resources • Summer 2011

WR Quarterly Connection

Whitman in the Wallowas

By Erin Kanzig, Whitman in the Wallowas student and Wallowa Resources intern

This spring Wallowa Resources embarked upon a month-long venture with twelve intrepid students on a pilot program: *Whitman in the Wallowas.* Partnering with Whitman College professors Don Snow and Delbert Hutchison, executive director Nils Christoffersen and Wallowa Mountain Institute director Holly Akenson created a unique summer class delving into the heart and character of Wallowa County.

Unlike the traditional classroom, the students did not filter in and out of a room a few hours a week, but instead spent June bumping elbows in their outdoor kitchen, sleeping in tents, and learning while on the road. The students jumped at an opportunity to be the guinea pigs of an innovative course aimed at looking at a place holistically: through natural and cultural history, hands-on experience, and most importantly, through listening and discussing with Wallowa County residents, learning about rural issues and interests. For some, it was an introduction to the realization that meat production on the family farm scale is tenuous and involves long, dedicated hours of the whole family, plus friends. Others marveled, wide-eyed, as they learned how to identify plants, both indigenous and noxious, and then stop by a rancher's home to hear about weed control techniques.

Camping throughout the month on private and public land, the self-sufficient crew sometimes would circle around the campfire to read aloud from Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, which served as a conduit for experiencing Wallowa County. Leopold remarks that, "Civilization has so cluttered this elemental man-earth relationship with gadgets and middlemen that awareness of it is growing dim. We fancy that industry supports us, forgetting what supports industry."

In stomping around the top of Mount Howard in snow shoes learning about wolves, inhaling the scent of burning hair and flesh at a branding, and traveling by

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horseback down the Imnaha, the college students began to realize the complexities of a working landscape and of how across America rural places are becoming increasingly unknown to young people. Junior Ryann Savino sums up her lessons from the course, saying that, "For me, the people of Wallowa County were what made the program. I couldn't have felt more welcomed to such a beautiful place. I'll always remember that, and of course, their stories."

The course split into three sections, beginning with the concrete and moving towards the more abstract. Professor Hutchison led the way in natural history down in the Imnaha canyon, cultivating interest in delicate phlox and vivid penstemon, even as rain dumped ruthlessly on the waterlogged learners. Moving north into Leap territory, Christoffersen and Akenson took the reins in a whirlwind tour of the county, stopping by to learn from ranchers, new residents, county commissioners, innovative business owners, loggers, foresters, fisheries workers and more. Packed in were lessons on the history of economic, social and ecological change that the county has matured through. Professor Hutchison reflected that, "Wallowa County is full of contradictions and challenges, as would any place struggling constructively to deal with issues associated with figuring out ways for people to sustainably live and work on the land, which is also home to other critters and processes. What was amazing was how impressively the folks in Wallowa County are doing just that – working together, listening to one another, and creeping their way forward into uncharted territory."

Finally, after recording notes and conversations in weather-marked journals, the students moved up into a more secluded spot at Billy Meadows, and under the guidance of Professor Snow began developing essays on Wallowa County and their reflections and insights to the place that had graciously hosted them.

On a crisp, blue sky evening at Enterprise City Park, a gathering of people came to share in the delights of food, friendship and writing as many of those who had taught the Whitman students now sat side by side on picnic tables with other Wallowa County residents and students, enjoying lasagna and ice cream, and later, the presentations of what the students had written. Shorter "epiphany" pieces, as well as excerpts from longer essays, were presented, illuminating ideas like land use, tourism, community collaboration, predator-prey relationships and personal revelations. These essays are being compiled into a book that will be available at Wallowa Resources in the fall.

New Market for Small Logs!

By Nils Christoffersen

Ten years ago Wallowa Resources invested in the Joseph Timber Company. The goals for the partnership were clear – diversify the mill's production and marketing capacity, and sustain the market for Wallowa County's timber assets and jobs. That effort failed, and we lost our saw mills. But Wallowa Resources never stopped investing to generate value and jobs from small logs and woody biomass.

Today, thanks to new partners and broad public and private sector support, Wallowa County is home to an innovative new business – *Integrated Biomass Resources.* This company is building a biomass campus at the site of the last operating saw mill outside the city of Wallowa. When it's completed, the new campus will provide 24-30 jobs, and create a market for 100,000 tons of small logs.

The campus will manufacture a wide range of small wood products including short saw logs, pulp logs, post and poles, firewood, craft chips, hog fuel, and heat logs. In creating a local market for all small logs on public and private land, the campus will reduce harvesting costs and increase recovery and utilization. Trial treatments completed this year suggest harvesting costs may be reduced 15-18% ($/ton) and recovery may increase 18-22% (tons/acre).

Those types of gains improve the returns to owning and managing forest land, sustain jobs in the woods, and create an important market niche for the campus. They also contribute to improved saw log supply to the Boise Cascade saw

mills, and to local thermal energy users like the Enterprise School District.

Wallowa Resources Community Solutions Inc. will build a biomass fired energy plant for the campus. This combined heat and power plant will provide heat to dry a variety of wood products, and electrical power to the processing equipment.

We will continue to support the development of the campus, and pursue each and every opportunity to continue to add value to our working forest lands and create more forest jobs.

Yellow Starthistle Rears its Ugly Head

By Mark Porter

Yellow starthistle has been near the top of Wallowa County's list of worst weeds for at least two decades. Land managers and noxious weed specialists have been looking optimistically to biological control agents to help stop this plant from dominating much of our grasslands. Five agents have been in place for several years and they are helping slow starthistle down. Unfortunately, the amount of yellow starthistle that showed up this year – and the places that it showed up – let us know very clearly that we cannot rest.

It seems like every starthistle seed in the ground germinated this year! Two cool wet springs in a row brought every historic patch back – including places where we haven't seen plants for years. Not only was there more starthistle this year, but our most effective biological control agent, the yellow starthistle seed head weevil, appears to have suffered a population crash in the region. Asotin County Weed Manager Nelle Murray conducts annual surveys for biocontrol agents in the Lower Grand Ronde and Snake River country. This year she documented much lower numbers of seed head weevils, but good numbers of flower weevils.

The only positive thing about this excessive starthistle growth was our ability to respond. Members of the *Wallowa Canyonlands Partnership* worked on both sides of the Oregon-Washington state line to aerially treat over 3,000 acres of yellow starthistle with herbicides. That represents a 3,000 acre bumper crop that will not produce seeds! This containment effort reduced the amount of starthistle on the edges of the infested area and treated outlying populations in Joseph Creek Canyon and the Troy area. Although The Nez Perce Tribe and the US Forest Service are still working through the NEPA process before they are authorized to use aerial treatments, over 18 landowners participated in this aerial spraying program. It is the joint efforts and commitments by multiple adjacent landowners that make the fight against this noxious weed so successful!

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Wallowa Resources in the News . . .

- Governor John Kitzhaber appointed Holly Akenson, Wallowa Mountain Institute Director, to serve a 4-year term on the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. Holly serves as the "East of the Cascades" representative on the 7-person commission.

- SOLV, an organization of Oregon volunteers, will present Wallowa Resources with its 2011 Citizenship Award for Community Groups. Wallowa Resources was selected for its work promoting community and environmental health in Wallowa County, highlighted by community weed clean-up events led by Sarah Ketchum, Watershed Stewardship Program Coordinator.

- The US Department of Energy awarded Wallowa Resources a $500,000 grant for our work with Integrated Biomass Resources to build the Biomass Campus in Wallowa County.

In addition to the articles presented here, Wallowa Resources is working on a broad variety of educational, range stewardship, natural resource, policy and watershed restoration projects throughout Wallowa County. To find out more about what is happening at Wallowa Resources, just go to www.WallowaResources.org or call us at 541-426-8053 today!

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