

Oaks: Prairie, savannah home to a variety of rare species

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like before farming and cities and towns took over here.

Prairie and oak savannah once covered about 1.3 million acres in the Willamette Valley, said Jason Blazar, stewardship coordinator for the Friends of Buford Park & Mount Pisgah. The nonprofit group, whose goal is to protect and enhance the park's unique habitat, organized the effort. The state Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Bonneville Power Administration and the Forest Restoration Partnership helped pay for it.

Prairie and oak savannah are home to a wide range of species, some rare enough to be under consideration for federal listing as threatened or endangered, such as the Western gray squirrel, the Western bluebird, the wayside aster, a bat called the long-eared myotis, the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly and Oregon's state bird — the Western meadowlark.

The grasses and wildflowers once common across the prairie and savannah have succumbed to invasive species such as blackberries, Scotch broom and false brome, Blazar said.

That sweeping open landscape wasn't the work of Mother Nature alone. For generations, American Indians managed it, keeping fir trees at bay by regularly setting fire to the prairie, an effort that renewed the grasses and wildflowers and burned out unwanted tree seedlings, yet rarely climbed into the crowns of oak, whose expansive canopies provided food and habitat for a range of insects, birds and other animals.

With the arrival of farmers, the dwindling of Indian

In this environment, logger aims to leave few footprints behind

On the saddle just below the Mount Pisgah summit, Scott Melcher is overseeing the removal of fir trees and thin scraggly oak this week with a bit of a knot in his stomach.

A third-generation logger from Sweet Home, Melcher knows he's in the heart of an area known for its tree-hugger leanings.

While there may be plenty of park visitors who support the oak restoration project, he knows that some of the hikers watching the work on their way up the trail just flat don't like seeing trees cut down.

But the equipment Melcher has brought to the mountain for this job is

geared for precision work and will leave less of an impact in its wake.

That includes a "single grip harvester," with a cab in which operator Kelly Lee sits. With the harvester's computer console to help him, Lee can neatly grip a fir, slice it off at soil level, strip off the branches, cut the log to sellable lengths and stack it on the ground.

Lee has been doing this kind of precision work so long, he can move easily among the trees, taking out a fir without any damage to an oak growing just feet away, Melcher said.

Once down, the logs won't be skidded across the ground, tearing up the duff, Melcher

said. Another machine, a forwarder, will pluck the cut logs and place them on a vehicle bed to be carried away.

"You won't see a skid trail here," Melcher said. And while the harvester does leave tracks, grasses will quickly grow up in the days after it has gone, he said.

"It's not zero impact, but it's lower impact," he said. While such work isn't as lucrative as more-traditional logging methods, it's becoming a bigger part of his business. Melcher estimates that he's done about 10 restoration projects in the past two years. "It's a fair percentage of the summertime work," he said.

On the east side of the Cascades, Melcher's crews also have worked in the Camp Sherman area, using the harvester and forwarder to thin a ponderosa pine forest, clearing out ladder fuels to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire there.

Melcher understands that people in the Eugene area have a thing for trees.

He hopes that these efforts by loggers to restore sensitive landscapes will ease some of the traditional tension between those who make their living in the woods and those who recreate in them.

"I hope we're bridging this wall between us," he said.

—Susan Palmer

tribes and the suppression of fire, the prairie and oak savannah faded.

Now those ecosystems survive on less than 1 percent of their historic ranges, Blazar said.

Without fire, fast-growing fir trees quickly overtop the sun-loving oak, either killing them outright or limiting their growth. And it's the trees with the broadest crowns that produce the most acorns, which certain species rely on for food, Blazar said.

The restoration project under way at Mount Pisgah will remove scattered fir trees on about 30 acres. Groves of oak crowding each other are also being thinned to enhance the growth of the remaining trees.

"Oaks are just intolerant of shade, either from fir or other oaks," Blazar said.

Such restoration efforts have been occurring across the Pacific Northwest, Stringer said. He and Scott Melcher of Melcher Logging, the outfit clearing the trees at Mount Pisgah, recently worked on a similar project on cliffs overlooking the Columbia River in Washington state.

Among other projects closer to home, The Nature Conservancy is overseeing a savannah on 1,244 acres of private lands in the Coburg Hills.

In the Middle Fork District of the Willamette National Forest, a 455-acre project along Jim's Creek is under way.

Farther north on the Willamette, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde are considering a 1,900-acre restoration project that will include prairie and oak savannah

along the Santiam River.

At the Mount Pisgah project, Friends of Buford Park & Mount Pisgah placed signs along the trail and conducted tours during the summer to prepare park visitors for the changes. While the group has heard plenty of positive comments from hikers, there have been enough concerns about shade to prompt them to leave some trees they had planned to remove, said Chris Orsinger, the group's executive director.

Eugene resident Wendy Harris, who hiked the trail on Wednesday, said that while she had seen the signs this summer, it was still a shock to watch trees coming down. She called Orsinger from the trail to register her concerns. While she was grateful for Orsinger's patient explanation of the project and supports

the idea of savannah restoration, she wishes they would have done it at some less-popular location.

"I appreciate the job they're trying to do, but it will completely change the effect. ... I will no longer be able to enjoy the walk," she said.

But bringing back the savannah at a place where people can see the impact of the changes helps them better understand what it takes to retain such landscapes, Blazar said.

"We're never going to get back to 1.3 million acres, but maybe we can get to 2 percent instead of less than 1 percent," he said.

Appeals court blocks release of Chinese detainees

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court on Wednesday temporarily blocked a judge's decision to immediately free 17 Chinese Muslims at Guantanamo Bay into the United States.

In a one-page order, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit issued the emergency stay at the request of Bush administration lawyers.

The three-judge panel announced that it would postpone release of the detainees for at least another week to give the government more time to make arguments in the case.

It comes after U.S. District Judge Ricardo Urbina on Tuesday made a dramatic decision ordering the government to free the detainees by Friday.

Urbina said it would be wrong for the Bush administration to continue holding the detainees, known as Uighurs, since they are no longer considered enemy combatants.

"We are pleased that the Court of Appeals granted our request for a temporary stay, and we look forward to presenting our case," Justice Department spokesman Brian Roehrkasse said in response to the appeals court decision.

Auditor: Union says its deal with city trumps ordinance

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and reviewing investigations after they are closed. The protocols, Edewaard emphasized, do not address whether the auditor can be involved in an active investigation.

"We're not saying she can't do her job," Edewaard said. "We're just saying she has to work within the established boundaries."

Fenrich, the union's attorney, asserts in her letter that by not following the city-approved protocols, Reynolds' actions violate the officers' association contract.

But Reynolds — who claims that it has been typical for her and former auditor Cris Beamud to suggest topics for investigators to delve into while looking into citizen complaints — appears to be following a different set of rules.

Reynolds said her duties are clearly spelled out in an ordinance approved by the City Council in 2006 that includes information not covered by the protocols agreed to by the union.

The ordinance states that the auditor "shall actively monitor internal investigations to ensure a thorough, objective and timely investigation" and "participate in complainant, employee and witness interviews."

Reynolds said the monitoring function often involves discussions with internal affairs investigators while they gather evidence in a misconduct case.

"We always talk to" investigators, Reynolds said. "It's a real good exchange of information."

But union officials say they want those conversations to stop.

"Our contract trumps the

ordinance," Edewaard said. "She simply cannot get involved with the internal affairs process."

So far, neither City Manager Jon Ruiz nor city councilors have said how language in the protocols could take precedence over the ordinance. If the union files a grievance and the matter cannot be resolved by city officials, an arbitrator would decide it.

The attempt to limit Reynolds' role isn't the first time the police officers' union has asserted its contractual rights in trying to block the auditor's involvement in internal affairs issues.

In June 2007, the union filed a labor grievance alleging that the city — by hiring Beamud and putting her to work — violated a deal in which Eugene officials agreed to review with union leaders the then-new

police auditing system before implementing it.

The issue was resolved six months later when the oversight protocols were finalized and the auditor's office finally began processing complaints.

Given the union's previous resistance, Reynolds said she was not completely surprised to learn about the current issue.

"It's true this is a brand new" complaint, she said. "But there's always something — some monkey wrench. What we need is more cooperation and fewer monkey wrenches."

Edewaard said union leaders generally support civilian oversight of the police department, although they disagree with Eugene's model in which the auditor is an employee of the City Council.

All other city department heads and their employees report to Ruiz.

Access: Police captain informed auditor card was blocked

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woman Melinda Kletzok said Lehner — who was away from the office — declined to speak about the issue because an e-mail Reynolds sent Tuesday to the City Council explaining her side of the story "is subject to legal review."

City Manager Jon Ruiz — Lehner's boss — did not return

a phone message left Wednesday with city spokeswoman Jan Bohman.

Reynolds said police Capt. Steve Swenson showed up at the auditor's office at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Olive Street one day last week to inform her that her key card had been blocked.

But Swenson did not tell her who ordered the change.

"He said he didn't know why" her access to internal affairs was revoked, Reynolds said.

Reynolds is not a police department employee, but her job has involved monitoring internal affairs investigations conducted at City Hall after a citizen files a police misconduct complaint against an officer.

For now, Reynolds can't get

into the internal affairs division unless someone else lets her in.

"I'm not taking this personally because I think this would have happened to anyone in this position," Reynolds said.

"It's not about me," she said. "It's the city's oversight system that's being locked out."

—Jack Moran



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