

(Address Correction Requested)

FALL, 1999

John Day Fossil Beds National Monument Newsletter

National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

www.nps.gov/joda

Second Year Survey Results Are In ...

The second visitor survey in as many years was conducted last summer. For 1999, the survey cards were distributed to over 400 visitors at the Painted Hills Unit, and about one quarter of the visitors returned the card. Final results were received from the University Of Idaho last October. There were five ratings to choose from, very poor, poor, average, good, and very good.

In regards to the "overall quality of facilities, services & recreational opportunities," the park received ratings of 36% of the visitors marking GOOD, and 59% marking VERY GOOD. That is an over-all satisfaction rating of 95%, up five percent from 1998. The National Park Service minimum goal for visitor satisfaction is 80%.

Regarding "visitor understanding" of the monument's significance, 75% of our visitors grasp all or parts of the meanings inherent in the fossil resources protected at the monument. This was down 9% from the 1998 rating. This may be due, in part, to fewer interpretive rangers located at the Painted Hills to talk with visitors. The primary reason given by many for visiting the Painted Hills was simply to view the beautiful scenery. The National Park Service minimum goal for visitor understanding is set at 60%.

Windy Point Prescribed Fire Over...

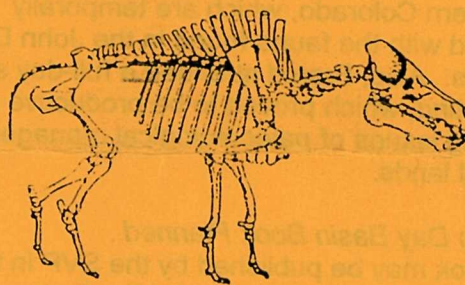
The Fire Management Plan calls for continued suppression of all wildfires. Still, prescribed fires are occasionally called for at the monument in order to return fire as a natural process to the landscape, maintain the historic-cultural scenes, and to reduce fuel loads. With decades of fire suppression, changes have occurred to the lands of the monument. Species diversity had declined, some native vegetation disappeared, and densities of juniper trees have increased.

The Windy Point Burn prescribed fire was implemented at the monument between September 7-10, 1999. The burn was completed with the assistance of the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The 1,723 acre burn included portions of the Sheep Rock Unit on the east side of the John Day River, and north of Sheep Rock peak.

Historically, this area was dominated by a bunchgrass ecosystem, with sagebrush scattered throughout portions of the unit and occasional western juniper in the deeper draws. Specific objectives for the Windy Point burn were to: reduce density of big sagebrush by 20-60%; reduce density of western juniper by 10-50%; and burn 30-70% of total acreage of the selected burn area as a mosaic.

Fire effects studies, including surveys of pre-burned land plots, will help fire managers determine if the Windy Point fire met the objectives. Also, alterations in management strategies will be made, as the effects of the fire are better understood. Please feel free to call Amanda McAdams, Prescribed Fire Specialist, at (541)987-2333 with any additional questions.



Monument Welcomes a New Ranger ...

A hearty welcome to Scot McElveen, the monument's new Resource Protection Ranger! Scot and his wife, Jeannine, come to us from Death Valley, where Scot was the assistant Chief Ranger. Scot has worked in many other parks including the Great Smokies, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Gulf Islands National Seashore, Assateague Island National Seashore, and the Natches Trace. This wealth of experience will add significantly to our staff.

Scot will supervise both the visitor protection function and natural and cultural resources management. He seems quite happy to be in a park that has less crime, fewer visitors, and fewer 100-degree days than his previous assignment. Scot and Jeannine will be living near Foree.

New Administrative Person On Board...

Administrative Technician Jeannine McElveen is the monument's latest permanent employee, having come on board in October. Jeannine grew up in Massachusetts and Michigan. She was teaching in Michigan when she met Scot McElveen whom she is now married to. They moved to Maryland where she worked for the Social Security Administration and Immigration and Naturalization Service. Both she and Scot headed west to work at Death Valley, where she worked as the Superintendent's Secretary. DEVA was beautiful, but she missed trees, vegetation, and wildlife. They happily moved to Kimberly in July. Jeannine has really been enjoying this beautiful area, meeting new people and her new job. Jeannine likes reading, hiking, backpacking, riding horses, fishing, and other sports and outdoor activities. She says they don't have children, but they are looking for a puppy to join their family.

Museum- Paleo News...

1889-1999: One Hundred Years Of Data To Be Organized

This year, Ted Fremd intends to consolidate all of the data that have been collected from the basin during the last 100 years. To this end, a "holistic" data set of Geographic Information Systems, Catalog Records, Field notes and images, catalogued and 'loose' specimens, literature, measured sections, radiometric dates, paleomagnetic samples, isotope geochemistry, paleosol profiles, geologic maps, and more, is being compiled.

A Few Words About SVP 1999...

This year John Day Fossil Beds Paleontology division was in strong attendance at the Society for Vertebrate Paleontology meeting in Denver, CO. Ted Fremd and volunteers Skylar Rickabaugh, Scott Foss, Lia Vella, Al Pajak, and Delda Findeisen were present for the four-day event, in addition to familiar faces such as researchers, Dale Hanson, Barry Albright, and Greg Retallack. Foss, Vella, and Albright participated in an associated field trip to historic bonebeds in the White River badlands of northeastern Colorado, which are temporally associated with the fauna found in the John Day formations. Also, Fremd attended a full-day service wide meeting, which proved to be productive in addressing issues of paleontological management on federal lands.

New John Day Basin Book Planned...

A new book may be published by the SVP in the new Memoir series, and would be the first such volume of this type dealing with a basin-wide analysis from multiple perspectives. The majority of this year's field work will be geared to honing some of the results, re-sampling many of the data points, and collecting additional material to "fill out" missing pieces of data.

In addition to this book, the "layman's" guidebook to the fossil basin is moving along. Discussion with editors at Columbia University Press suggest shooting for a "Scientific American" readership, and including many sidebars and maps. Ideally, technical work from the memoir will be translated effectively for the public guidebook.

Did You Know ...?

The material on exhibit at the Sheep Rock Unit visitor center is less than 0.5% of the park's museum holdings. This is the largest stratigraphically controlled collection of John Day fossils in the world. It is maintained in a dedicated storage facility within the city of John Day, OR. Access is strictly limited in conformance with museum codes. Specimens are available for loan and/or study by qualified investigators upon request in writing. As space permits, many of the specimens will be displayed in future exhibits.

Education News...

"Island of Ash" Simulated Fossil Dig...

On Memorial Day and Fourth of July Weekends, the monument offered a Simulated Fossil Dig for visitors of all ages. The site was developed for school field trips, and will be available to the general public during special events. The simulated site represents an ash fall layer that was deposited right before the Picture Gorge Ignimbrite ash flow event, 28.7 million years ago. Participants in this program learn how to take field notes, record data, measure geographic coordinates off aerial photographs, and systematically remove ash. They also discover fossils!



A New Teacher Workshop...

Ancient Forests and Grasslands of Oregon was presented on Saturday, November 13, at the High Desert Museum. Fifteen science educators from central Oregon, Portland, and La Grande participated. All conducted a series of six lab activities exploring form, function and fossils of leaves, grass, diatoms, wood, fruits, nuts, seeds, and conifers. These were followed by two activities involving a comparison of two plant fossil studies at the painted hills and a study of plant diets and herbivore teeth. The materials used for these activities include fossils, botanical specimens, microscope slides, hand samples and thin sections of petrified wood, and scientific illustrations.

This workshop is part of a new educational outreach kit that will be available on loan to educators and used by monument staff in education programs. The next Ancient Forests and Grasslands workshop will take place on Saturday, February 5th at OMSI in Portland. Prior to the Portland workshop, students from Grant and Wheeler Counties will be invited to test these new workshop activities. For more information about the education programs, please call the monument at 541-987-2333.

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