

# OREGON PALEO LANDS CENTER

November 2021

## **Our Mission Statement**

*The Oregon Paleo Lands Center (OPLI) works with the Gateway Communities of the mid-John Day Basin (Condon, Antelope, Fossil, Service Creek, Spray, Mitchell, Kimberly, Dayville and Monument) to build social and economic vitality through efforts:*

*To conserve, interpret, and promote the natural and cultural history of the John Day Basin/Blue Mountains through time.*

*To develop and connect, with partners, the John Day Basin/Blue Mountains' visitor services, recreational services, natural and cultural history education opportunities.*

*To welcome, educate, and connect visitors, schools, area residents and businesses at the Oregon Paleo Lands Center (OPLC), and through other media.*

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## **Presidents Message**

**Jeffrey Kee**

### **“2022 A Fresh Look at the Paleo Center”**

Zoom, there goes 2021. Ready or not here comes another year. Got plans? Your Paleo Board does!

This last year and a half forced everyone to be more patient about what we are doing and how we do it. Fundamental shifts seem to have forced organizations to recognize the impact their employees, volunteers and leaders can have. We learned that our favorite places could reduce their hours of operation and that the value of remote rural real estate increased with access to the internet. Americans saved more money than they have since the 1930's, due to the pandemic. The shutdowns stimulated more demand for access to outdoor recreation than ever. RV sales went through the roof and out of state residents inundated some Oregon trails, parks and outdoor facilities. The Painted Hills Unit of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument experienced significant increases in day use and camping, even where it is not allowed. This was a strain on the Monument, that still has a backlog of maintenance challenges from the last decade, and on local public safety and road providers.



Your Paleo Lands Center opened for five months in 2021 with volunteer hosts through Oregon State Parks. The Oregon Heritage Commission sponsored our new online regional history video, **A River Flows Free**. It continues to receive praise from visitors and partners, offering the 10,000-year history of the John Day Basin's inhabitants in 29 minutes. **SEE Home Page, [www.paleolands.org](http://www.paleolands.org)**. Plans for 2022 include re-engaging agency partners to finish the John Day Basin Interpretive Strategy. Our Find Time regional guide is also getting updated and reprinted for its 5th version.

2021 donations allowed us to re-stain our fine Visitor Center. Thanks to local contractor Wolfgang Grote for the great job. After the Wheeler County courthouse, we may have the best-looking building in the region. Significant 2022 needs include updating our computers, online video capacity, building security, and visitor/donor tracking systems. We continue to recruit for new Board members to assist projects like these.

With your continued support we will continue to share the wonders of the John Day Basin and send visitors to local services in our region. **Contact Jeffrey Kee: [jkee@hevanet.com](mailto:jkee@hevanet.com)**

## **Bald Eagle Watch, John Day River 2021-22**

The upper John Day River (Prairie City to Service Creek) is one of Oregon's best places to watch bald eagles, who winter on the river December-March (Source: Oregon Eagle Foundation). Perching winter Eagles can also be spotted on major tributaries, including the North Fork, Middle Fork, and South Fork. You can find them in mature Ponderosa Pines or Northern Cottonwoods., that have good views of the river. In one hot spot, (Hwy. 19-207 between Spray and Service Creek), you may be able to spy as many as one Eagle per mile in large ponderosas, on winter mornings.



Oregon is famed for winter Eagle watching, with major events at Cove Palisades State Park and the Winter Wings festival at the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge. On the John Day you can discover the eagles, on your own. There are no organized eagle festivals here, but the John Day Eagles put on a good show, hunting for fish, and sometimes in aerial competition. Eagles may weigh 10-14 pounds and have a 10 ft wingspan; Nests may be 10 ft across and weigh half a ton.

Declared our national symbol in 1782, Eagles then numbered around 100,000 nesting birds. It wasn't always this way. In 1963, as Bald Eagles hovered on the edge of extinction. There were 487 nesting pairs known in the lower 48 states. US Fish and Wildlife reports today there are 71,467 pairs (2020).

“Shortly after World War II, DDT was hailed as a new pesticide to control mosquitoes and other insects. However, DDT and its residues washed into nearby waterways, where aquatic plants and fish absorbed it. Bald eagles, in turn, were poisoned with DDT when they ate the contaminated fish. The chemical interfered with the ability of the birds to produce strong eggshells. As a result, their eggs had shells so thin that they often broke during incubation or otherwise failed to hatch.”

Bald Eagle Fact sheet US Fish and “Wildlife Service, 2021

<https://www.fws.gov/birds/management/managed-species/eagle-management.php>

Bald Eagles are back from the edge of extinction, after their 1978 listing as an Endangered Species and recovery. They are ready again for John Day River winter explorers. Local and state roads along the John Day River are well maintained, and should reward winter travelers who venture to see our national bird in action.

## **Something Big in a Big Basin...**

### **The Humongous Fungus of the Malheur National Forest compiled by Jeffrey Kee**

Did you know Oregon’s John Day Basin harbors the largest living organism in the Northwest...the world...and the known universe?

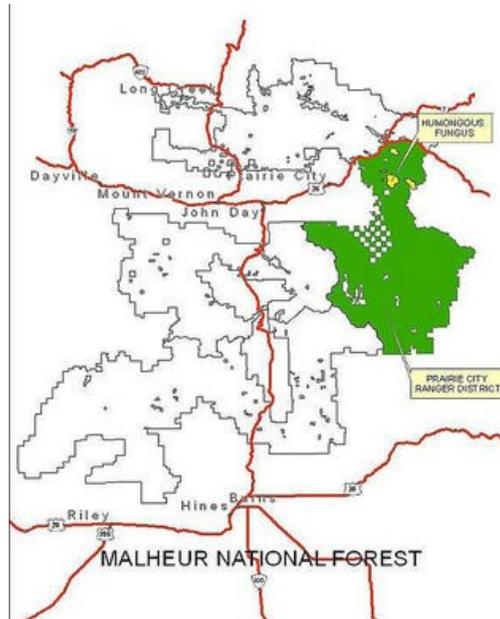
It is an edible honey mushroom fungus that lives South of Austin Junction in Southeastern Grant County.



Eclipsing a quaking aspen grove of 108 acres in Utah known as ‘Pando’, the Humongous Fungus located on Forest Service lands has been recognized as the largest living organism on earth. Covering 2,385 acres this edible mushroom is a parasite that colonizes the roots and kills trees to support itself. It can also survive for years as a saprophyte in dead down woody material. Scientists have estimated it may weigh up to 35,000 tons and be almost 9000 years old.



The *Armillaria ostoyae* specie grows in the 1.7 million acre, Malheur National Forest 11 miles Northeast of Prairie City, Oregon. The mychorizial fungus produces an edible mushroom fruit with a stem and flat caps, emerging after the first fall rains. It is stalked about 2 to 4 inches tall with a cap that is usually 2 to 5 inches wide. Colors can range from light brown to cream and pinkish.



Do not consume any mushroom that you do not have a positive identification of!

According to the Forest Service the best viewing location is just East of the gravel pit at the end of FS road 2652-592, South of State Highway 26. It occurs in both the Reynolds and Clear Creek tributaries to the John Day River.

An individual can collect 1 gallon of edible mushrooms on FS lands without a permit. Any commercial collection requires a permit. Permits and maps can be obtained at the Prairie City District office at 327 SW Front St. Prairie City Or 541-820-3800 <https://www.fs.usda.gov/malheur>

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**THANK YOU**  
**for your ongoing support!**

## Oregon Paleo Lands Center Needs You!

You can support the Oregon Paleo Lands Center in a variety of ways. Your financial support now in 2021 is vital to continue our mission of exploring, teaching about, and protecting Oregon's paleo lands. Donor benefits include a 10% discount on retail merchandise at the Oregon Paleo Lands Center in Fossil, a regular newsletter with information about scientific discoveries, history, and news of the Paleo Lands, and advance notice of upcoming OPLI and partner organization events. All donations are tax deductible.

Interested in volunteering at the Center or serving on the Board?  
 Contact us at [paleolands@gmail.com](mailto:paleolands@gmail.com) or [www.paleolands.org](http://www.paleolands.org) or at PO Box 104, Fossil, Oregon 97830 (541) 763-4480.