

MOSCOW-PULLMAN DAILY NEWS

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BIG PLANS



Contributed photo

Judy LaLonde walks on her alpaca farm near Troy. She is placing 49 acres of the farm under a conservation easement and hopes it will become a park one day.

Troy alpaca farmer preserves land

Fish and Game aim to improve steelhead passage near property

By **Brandon Macz**
Daily News staff writer

Judy LaLonde has preserved her brother's alpaca farm in Troy since his death in 2008, and now she's preserving the land itself by placing 49 acres of it under a conservation easement.

"I've seen more development move out of Moscow," LaLonde said. "It's cheaper

to build here than in Moscow, and it's not that far."

But whoever acquires the forested acreage after LaLonde is gone will have to use it in accordance with guidelines set by the Palouse Land Trust, which will keep a close, permanent eye on the property. She said she'd like to see it become a park one day.

"Somewhere down the line, I'm con-

sidering — as I age and maybe can't live out here — donating the whole piece to the land trust or whoever would like to take it and work on that, making it a park," she said, though she's unsure how long she'll remain on the alpaca farm, which is outside the conservation area. "I'd like to die out here in my garden."

When her brother, Bradley Neuman, died, LaLonde said she found herself in

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possession of an 80-acre farm with 56 alpacas, 20 of which were pregnant. She now has about 17 alpacas and hires Troy High School students to help with the heavy jobs.

While a park may be nice in the future, LaLonde said the forest, creek and deer, moose and avian populations on the conservation land present great educational opportunities.

"I'm interested in having it used for educational purposes and some recreation, but mostly education," she said. "There

can be some little open-sided shelter put in and stuff like that. I want to work with Troy High School and FFA because they can use the land for training on the forest and land and all the things they do."

Amy Trujillo, executive director for the Palouse Land Trust, said LaLonde's is the first easement they've had this year and the first in the city of Troy. The legal agreement was signed July 10.

"The process, they take a while because they're a big thing for the property owner to consider," she said. "We have three other projects that are getting close, and we have eight other projects that are in

the early stage of project development."

LaLonde is hosting an open house 5:30-7:30 p.m. Aug. 24 to celebrate the easement at the alpaca farm at 1021 McKeehan Road.

LaLonde's conservation easement also caught the attention of Idaho Fish and Game, which is working to improve steelhead trout passage in state creeks and rivers by breaking down impediments.

"When Fish and Game found out what I was doing, they came out, and they were very excited," she said.

That's because Big Meadow Creek is a tributary to the west fork of Little Bear Creek and is

a very productive area for steelhead, said Damon Keene, a Fish and Game biologist — if the fish can get to it.

Steelhead are being blocked in Big Meadow Creek by a culvert running under State Highway 8 in Troy, he said.

"It's a 170-foot-long, concrete-lined culvert. It creates what we call a velocity barrier. The water flows through the culvert too fast, and the bottom is too slick for fish to pass," Keene said. "They'll slide down. They won't get stuck in the culvert, but they'll eventually give up.

"We're seeing an over tenfold decrease in fish above as compared to below (in Big Meadow

Creek)," he said. "... That culvert is restricting their access, so adults aren't accessing to spawn, and juniors aren't accessing to rear, as well."

A project to possibly replace and/or modify the culvert to improve travel for steelhead trout is in an evaluation phase currently, Keene said, and will be a collaborative effort with the Idaho Transportation Department. Once an acceptable solution is found, Fish and Game will seek grant funding to complete the project.

"When they're big projects like this, they usually take a few years," Keene said. "We get them done as quickly and as responsibly as we can."

The goal is to assist steelhead to the University of Idaho Experimental Forest, where the upper drainage for Big Meadow Creek is. The increased habitation area should lead to an increase in steelhead reproduction, Keene said.

The Latah Soil and Water Conservation District is also working with the city of Troy and with Fish and Game's support to remove the 93-year-old Dutch Flat Dam that has prevented steelhead from reaching headwaters from Little Bear Creek.

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