



Grant will fund staff for Paleo Lands work

The project works to attract "edu-tourists" to the fossil beds of Wheeler County

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The Oregon Paleo Lands Institute, which is attempting to strengthen the economic link between the state's renowned fossil beds and the struggling Wheeler County communities that border them, has received a three-year, \$180,000 grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust.

The institute will use the money to hire an executive director and continue its "Paleoscene" natural history classes, among other projects.

"This is the largest grant the paleo project has received of any kind," said Richard Ross, president of the institute's board of directors. "This is a really big opportunity for the paleo project because it hasn't had dedicated staff before."

The institute is based in Fossil, the Wheeler County seat. The county is the least populated and among the poorest in Oregon, and it has been hit hard by the decline in resource-based industries such as logging.

However, Fossil is situated within reasonable drives of the three units of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. The Paleo Lands Institute hopes to attract what are called "geo-tourists" or "edu-tourists," travelers with an interest in learning about the natural history of the region.

Institute board members include city and county officials, ranchers, teachers and others with expertise in geology, community planning, paleontology and biology.

Ross, a retired Gresham planner who has owned land in Wheeler County for many years, said the institute will interview finalists for the director's position within the next two weeks.

For more information about the project, visit www.oregonpaleoproject.org.

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