

Wilderness experience offers retreat for veterans

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A former elk hunt camp in the Wallowa Mountains has been transformed into a wilderness retreat for combat veterans.

Divide Camp honors the service of post-9-11 wounded combat veterans by giving back through outdoor adventures. The camp offers hunting, fishing and other sporting and recreational activities.

The camp's goal is to aid healing and build hope for service members wounded in action. The camp is currently accepting applications from veterans from Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

Divide Camp provides comfortable lodging, home-cooked meals and transportation. At no charge to the veterans served, the camp features 40 acres of remote forestland, five cabins, a shop and an outdoor picnic shelter.

Julie Wheeler, Divide Camp executive director, has served as a critical incident stress debriefer. In helping others prevent post-traumatic stress disorder, Wheeler is familiar with what happens when people are exposed to high stress and trauma.

"I know it takes a long time to overcome," she said. "I think they need help beyond what's provided by the VA (United States Department of Veterans Affairs), which is drugs and therapy. I just believe nature is an amazing healer."

Wheeler has seen the benefits of Divide Camp, including utilizing veterans as volunteers, staff and board members.

"They get a lot out of doing something for their fellow vets," Wheeler said. "I think sometimes they miss a sense of purpose and camaraderie they had in the service."

Receiving its nonprofit status in April 2014, the camp officially opened this year, although it served its first veteran in 2013. The camp schedules guests from June through mid-November.

The outdoor experience, combined with the camaraderie among participants, allows them to relax, often for the first time since returning from deployment, Wheeler said.

A recent guest told Wheeler, "This gave me a chance to 're-boot.' I found myself doing things I never thought I'd do again. This is so much better than talking to a therapist."

For more information including a camp application, contact dividecamp@charter.net or visit www.dividecamp.org.