



Whitebark Pine Cone Collection
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
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Contributed by Judy Wing, Wallowa-Whitman Public Affairs

The mountains around Anthony Lake are well known for powder snow and less known for the whitebark pine that grow on the windswept slopes. Whitebark pine, *pinus albicaulis*, is a five-needled species most often found near the timberline. And unlike other pines, whitebark seeds neither drop from the cones, nor wait for the wind to provide dispersal. Instead, these pines rely on the Clark's nutcracker, a handsome grey and white bird, to pry the seeds from the cones and cache the seeds for winter snacks.

Or, as happened this fall, the cones are collected by tree climbers gathering the seeds to produce a future whitebark pine population. The whitebark pine is rapidly dying off due to white pine blister rust, mountain pine beetle or a combination of both, and gathering the cones is a way to help ensure future pines.

The first time the climbers worked their way to the tree tops, they covered the cones with wire cages to keep the Clark's nutcracker from harvesting the seeds before the humans. In early October the climbers were back to gather the cones. Nine bushels of cones were harvested from 14 different trees. The cones will be taken to the Forest Service extractor in Bend where the seeds will be removed from the cones, dried, cleaned, and stored. Next spring the seeds will be planted and a new generation of whitebark pine will be started.

An important part of the current effort to prevent the loss of whitebark pines is to identify trees that are naturally resistant to white pine blister rust and use those seeds to produce the new seedlings. Cones from six of the trees near Anthony Lake will be sent for genetic testing.



Whitebark pine trees, located near Anthony Lakes, on cone picking day.