Press Release - Willow Creek Idaho

The hilly terrain of Willow Creek Idaho creates a series of unique microclimates throughout the proposed AVA.

August 5, 2013

On June 20, 2013, the petition to form the Willow Creek Idaho AVA was accepted for formal review by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau in Washington, DC and is pending the rulemaking process.

The petition was crafted by Martha Cunningham, 3 Horse Ranch Vineyards, with the assistance and collaboration of Clyde J. Northrup, Ph.D. Department of Geosciences, Boise State University, and Gregory V. Jones, Ph.D. Department of Environmental Studies, Southern Oregon University.

The proposed area resides in the Snake River Valley AVA (established in 2007), the third largest approved AVA in the western US. Like other large AVAs (Columbia Valley, Central Coast, Willamette Valley and others) it was originally created to encompass a broad region with general similarities in climate and geography. However each of these large areas has been sub-divided into smaller AVAs that capture within-region differences in climate, geology, and soil. This petition represents the first step for similar subdivision within the Snake River Valley AVA by proposing the creation of the Willow Creek Idaho AVA.

Willow Creek has long been on maps of the region, dating to the map of the Territory of Idaho, 1876, which identified Willow Creek as the intermittent stream flowing from east to west in the area of the proposed AVA. Furthermore, it was an important stage route to the gold mines of the region. Idaho's Sheep King, Andy Little, had a homestead on Willow Creek. More recently, Willow Creek has been used as a geographic reference in Idaho gem maps, endurance horse back rides, a new bridge, a recent fire, and AAA road maps.

Located in the foothills north of Eagle, Idaho, in higher, more rugged terrain than much of the Snake River Valley, the proposed AVA contains rolling foothills, benches, alluvial fans and badlands commonly underlain by alkaline lake bed deposits.

Due to the hilly local topography and source materials, soils are well-drained and rich in rock and mineral grains, with relatively low water holding capacity and low organic matter contents.

Pronounced micro-climates in the proposed AVA contribute to a regionally unique phenology and chemistry of wines produced from grapes grown in the Willow Creek area.

Currently the proposed AVA has 67 acres of grapes planted with nearly 500 acres planned by both existing and new growers over the next few years.