

# Harney groundwater worries halt new well permits

## Groundwater pumping is exceeding recharge in Harney basin

By Mateusz Perkowski  
Capital Press

Water regulators have largely stopped permitting new agricultural wells in Oregon's Harney Basin due to concerns about groundwater depletion.

Groundwater pumping is exceeding the rate of recharge in the area, which has prompted the Oregon Water Resources Department to deny most new permits until it conducts a multi-year study of the situation, said Ivan Gall, the agency's groundwater section manager.

"You can see these declines occur over a fairly broad area of the valley,"

Gall said during a recent meeting of the Oregon Water Resources Commission, which oversees the department.

Preliminary data indicates the basin is experiencing an overall downward trend in groundwater levels, but the agency hopes to gain a better understanding by measuring a larger number of wells and conducting detailed geological mapping, Gall said.

"We have some significant holes in our data," he said. "We don't think it's at a crisis right now, but that's also based on not a lot of information."

The agency estimates that 201,250 acre feet of

groundwater rights are used each year, while only about 170,800 acre feet are available for use.

Heavy rains only offer a temporary reprieve from the problem, Gall said. "A really wet year helps for a period of time, but then it rolls over and begins its downward trend again."

Once the agency completes the study, it may continue denying new well permits for agriculture and only allow "exempt" domestic uses, he said.

However, the OWRD will establish rules for the region that may allow an existing permit to be canceled — likely in return for money — so

that a new well can be drilled, Gall said.

OWRD's decision to halt new well permits came after WaterWatch of Oregon, an environmental non-profit, protested several approvals last year.

The group became concerned after seeing the agency issue multiple well permits without determining if water is available or whether the wells would affect surface water, said John DeVoe, its executive director.

"This was happening over and over," he said.

Even so, it was becoming apparent that groundwater pumping in the basin was unsustainable, which would

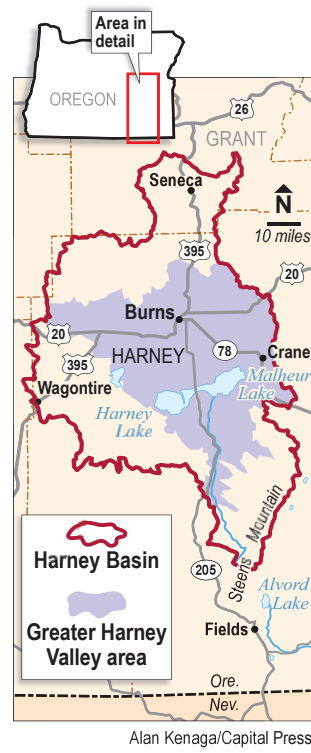
require action to prevent the area from developing more severe problems such as those seen in the Umatilla Basin, DeVoe said.

"I think it's an area that was going to get some scrutiny whether we were involved or not," he said.

The Harney Basin experienced a major increase in well drilling over the past decade for farm uses, said Gall.

However, it's difficult for OWRD to deny permits unless it has data to support such a decision, and the agency's resources are limited, he said.

"The development got ahead of the data collection," he said.



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

# Fight over fuel standard kills transportation plan

By Peter Wong  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — One day after it surfaced, Oregon lawmakers gave up Thursday on a transportation funding plan linked to alternatives to a recently approved standard for low-carbon fuels.

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said there were too many political roadblocks for the package to win legislative approval this late in the 2015 session.

"The issue remains to try to find a way through the politics of this building — and the politics outside — to do what I think everybody wants to do," Courtney said Thursday.

"I'm just so sorry we could not break through... It's not over. But it is over for this session. We will keep working at it."

Courtney created a special Senate committee, which heard testimony Wednesday on the elements of the plan crafted by a bipartisan group of lawmakers in closed-door meetings in Gov. Kate Brown's office.

One of them was Sen.

"It represented the best of what we do. It was bipartisan. It took into account urban and rural interests."

Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose

Betsy Johnson of Scappoose, one of a handful of Democrats who opposed the fuels standard.

"It represented the best of what we do," Johnson said. "It was bipartisan. It took into account urban and rural interests. It took time to craft a plan on this complex subject. Some may quibble with the particulars, but I thought this was a good effort."

But environmental groups were firmly against including repeal of a new law, which Democrats supported and Republicans opposed, requiring the carbon content of fuels to drop by 10 percent over the next decade. Brown signed that bill in March.

Nineteen House Democrats signed a letter to that effect last week, and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, added her voice to theirs Wednesday.

"Today's hearing made it

clear that the Senate proposal does not live up to the Clean Fuels Program in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and growing Oregon's clean economy," she said in a statement.

Environmental groups and others also raised questions about the projected reductions in carbon emissions from the alternatives contained in the Senate proposal.

During the hearing, Matt Garrett, director of the Oregon Department of Transportation, said that an estimate of reductions from proposed technological improvements in traffic flows would yield only 20 percent of the amount calculated originally for the bipartisan group.

"We had some unexpected numbers thrown our way," said Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, one of the negotiators and a member of the Senate committee.

"Basically what I think it did was to solidify the po-

sition of House Democrats, and some of the Senate Democrats, on this issue.

"Given more time, we could have refined the numbers and shown a carbon reduction that would have beaten the low-carbon fuel standard. But now we have not been given that opportunity."

Kruse also said that environmental interests told him a couple of weeks ago, during the closed-door negotiations, that they preferred the standard to any alternative package of reductions.

Proposed alternatives included a gradual reduction in carbon content of fuels as they become available commercially — to 5 percent — plus conversion of more cars and buses to electric or natural gas, and improvements in bus systems and traffic flows.

"Sometimes this building is frustrating," he said.

Environmental groups say there should not be a linkage of the issues.

"Oregonians deserve clean air and safe roads. To pit one against the other is a false choice and helps no one. We need both," said Andrea Durbin, executive director of the Oregon En-

vironmental Council.

For funding, the plan called for an increase of 4 cents per gallon in the current 30-cent state tax — plus increases in vehicle registration fees — to raise money for road and bridge repairs and specified state highway projects.

Separate tax and fee increases would have funded expanded transit service in some districts — TriMet, Wilsonville, Canby and Sandy — and a computer upgrade for driver and vehicle records.

Courtney said he informed Brown in a telephone call late Wednesday that "we cannot get to the top of this hill."

Brown said in a statement after Courtney's announcement:

"The testimony at the hearing from business leaders and local government officials, as well as newspaper editorials and input I have received from many Oregonians, underscores the significant statewide support for investments in transportation. As I said back in March, if it takes longer than this session to accomplish, I'm willing to continue these discussions."

# Crews replace breakers at OTEC site

Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative crews were busy at the John Day substation last week, replacing outdated equipment and making other improvements.

Lara Petteclerc-Stokes, OTEC spokeswoman, said the work included routine replacement of two 69-kilovolt transmission circuit breakers and some general maintenance work. The equipment being replaced was more than 50 years old.

The new circuit breakers will provide improved protection for transmission lines from John Day to Prairie City and Unity and to Seneca and Burns, she said. They also are expected to be maintenance free.

OTEC also is painting part of the structure.

The work, expected to wrap up July 2, is not related to the plans to erect a new fire station on adjacent property.

**Capital Bureau**  
www.MyEagleNews.com

**THANKS**  
to everyone who made the  
**5th Annual CASA Golf Scramble**  
**A HUGE SUCCESS!**

To the John Day Golf Club for hosting the event; and to Melissa Galbreath and Ryan Torland our MCs. To all the golfers, everyone who joined us for the barbecue and auction, and special thanks to those that made the fantastic food possible: Ed McCrary — Ribs Extraordinaire, Margie McCrary and Bonnie Britton in charge of the kitchen, Dan Propeck on the grill, fantastic salads by Lori Hickerson, Linda Watson, and Sandie Gilson, delectable brownies and homemade cookies by Alena Smith, Hailey Delaney and Aaron Roth, chips donated by Frito Bob, bottled water donated by Gardner Enterprizes, and Judy Hudson for making her famous cinnamon rolls to kick off the day!

**EVENT SPONSORS:**  
Debbie Ausmus, COUNTRY Financial  
Doug's Motor Vehicle Repair  
Boyd Britton Welding  
Mobile Glass of Oregon  
Iron Triangle, LLC  
Triangle Oil, Inc.  
Ed Staub & Sons Petroleum  
Ed Staub & Sons Shell Stations  
Cornerstone Surveying, Inc.  
The Outpost Pizza Pub & Grill  
True Value Hardware  
Squeeze In Restaurant  
Duke Warner Realty  
Southworth Brothers Ranch  
Bank of Eastern Oregon  
Les Schwab Tire Center  
The Grubsteak Mining Company  
Nydum's Ace Hardware  
JD Rents & Power Equipment  
Len's Drug  
Land Title Company  
Ferguson Surveying & Engineering  
Cornerstone Christian Fellowship

**AND A SPECIAL THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO DONATED THEIR PRIZE WINNINGS:**

1st Place Winners: Roof Creek Guttering Team — Scott Myers, Mitch Saul, Colt Carpenter, and Alex Finlayson  
Longest Drive Winner: Alex Finlayson and Melody Jackson  
Closest to the pin: Randy Horner

Funds raised will meet all program costs to support volunteer advocacy for the children for a MONTH!

**Radio Shack**  
Pioneer Feed & Farm Supply  
GIBCO Ag & Industrial  
1st Choice Auto Body  
A Flower Shop N More  
Field's Grassfed Beef  
Java Jungle Tropical Tan  
Jeanette Hueckman  
Ed Herrera —CASA Volunteer Advocate  
CASA Board members - Sandie Gilson, Stacie Holmstrom, Lori Hickerson, Linda Watson and Aaron Roth

**AND A SPECIAL THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO DONATED THEIR PRIZE WINNINGS:**

1st Place Winners: Roof Creek Guttering Team — Scott Myers, Mitch Saul, Colt Carpenter, and Alex Finlayson  
Longest Drive Winner: Alex Finlayson and Melody Jackson  
Closest to the pin: Randy Horner

Funds raised will meet all program costs to support volunteer advocacy for the children for a MONTH!

**CAUSA**  
Grant Harney County CASA

**McDonald's**  
Jorge J. Ribeiro  
Owner/Operator  
742 West Main  
John Day, OR 97845  
541-575-1023

Serving Grant County for 50 years!  
**Chester's Thriftway**  
Proud of being Locally Owned & Operated — 541-575-1899

**Bank of Eastern Oregon**  
"CELEBRATE THE SPIRIT OF YOUR HOMETOWN"  
Member FDIC  
John Day 541-575-1862 • 200 W. Main  
Prairie City 541-820-3321 • 178 NW Front St.  
Equal Housing Lender

**Eastern Oregon Realty**  
Jerry Franklin, GRI, ABR, SRES  
Broker / Owner  
HOME 541 820-3721  
OFFICE 541 575-2121  
EMAIL jdayc21@centurytel.net  
160 East Main St., John Day, OR 97845

**Blue Mountain HOSPITAL DISTRICT**  
Quality Healthcare Close to Home  
170 Ford Rd., John Day, OR 97845 • 541-575-1311

**Virginia McMillan, DDS PC**  
IMMEDIATE DENTAL COMFORT  
LONG TERM VALUE  
541-575-0550

**Pioneer Feed & Farm Supply**  
831 West Hwy. 26, John Day, OR  
541-575-0023  
80 S. Broadway, Burns, OR  
541-573-3053

**The Outpost**  
Breakfast  
Lunch & Dinner  
201 W. Main  
541-575-0250

Greetings, Grant County!  
Tourist season is upon us! Your Chamber now has seven-day-a-week coverage for visitors to our county! The bicycle shop that rented space from the Chamber has been busy, and as businesses we like being busy! Since they are also providing visitor services on Saturdays, another volunteer has stepped up to provide coverage on Sundays. This gives us terrific coverage over the summer!

The Grant County Greenbacks program is beginning to gain traction. We sold our first batch of \$15 and \$25 Greenbacks to merchants in June. A separate bank account has been opened at Bank of Eastern Oregon specifically for the Greenback program.

Just a brief recap of Greenbacks. Think of it as Grant County's "The Buck Stops Here" program. Anyone can buy Greenbacks at face value from the Chamber. Participating merchants honor them on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

Greenbacks that you, as a merchant, take as payment from customers for goods and services, can be redeemed at any time from the Chamber on a dollar-for-dollar basis. This is not a discount program. It is a "shop local" program. Think employee incentives, promotional contests, radio "winners"—and ask customers who buy from you if they would like a Grant County Greenback in change. Let's keep it local! It helps businesses, employees and families, and gives visitors one more thing to remember us by.

This is the one-year mark from when the Chamber accepted its problems, you reached out to help, and we followed through and recovered! Thanks to each and every one of you who had faith in us.

The end of June also marks the time that I rotate out as president. The turnaround has attracted new board members who bring a lot to the chamber and work well together. Staying on another year would have been a joy, but book two of my Armageddon Story novel series will be out next month! The series has three more books remaining, so I will be busy!

Jerry Franklin takes his turn in the president's hot seat beginning in July. And I think someone new may be looking at that spot for next year.  
Craig McMillan,  
President

**Eds**  
Ed Staub & Sons  
PROPANE  
541-575-0804  
OIL  
541-575-1348  
243 N. Canyon City Blvd.,  
Canyon City, Oregon

**NAPA**  
JOHN DAY AUTO NAPA  
721 W. Main St.  
John Day, OR  
541-575-1850

**Oster Professional Group**  
Certified Public Accountants, PC  
101 N.E. 1st Ave. John Day, Oregon 97845  
541-575-2717 • 541-573-6151

**SUBWAY**  
eat fresh.  
121 S. Canyon Blvd.  
John Day • 541-575-0782

**Grant County Chamber of Commerce**  
Grant County Chamber Members Advertise Here  
Contact the Grant County Chamber for more information  
541-575-0547

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK!  
161 E. Main, John Day • 541-575-0632  
**True Value**  
HARDWARE

**LEN'S DRUG**  
541-575-0629  
120 E. Main, John Day  
www.lensdrug.com  
We're here when you need us!

**DAYVILLE MERC**  
207 W. Franklin Ave, Dayville  
Cold Drinks • Groceries • Snacks  
Gifts • Friendly Services  
541-987-2133