

# RECYCLING

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This ban has Waste-Pro and its operations manager, Darin Larvik, preparing to approach the La Grande City Council with ideas on how to remedy its financial situation.

Before the ban, China purchased recycled material, even contaminated material, for prices higher than local paper mills were willing to pay. In the past seven years, three Portland-area mills have closed. According to NPR, before the ban the U.S. exported half of its recycling, a third of which went to China. But now, with China not accepting unsorted paper and post-consumer plastics, the prices on both products have plummeted, making recycling substantially less economically viable.

Peter Spindelov, recycling specialist with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, said recycling is not currently lucrative.

“We still encourage stuff to get recycled because there are a lot of benefits besides economic, and right now it’s an economic deficit,” Spindelov said.

In recent months, Waste-Pro has had to pay around \$85 per ton to processors to take recycled material. Larvik said it costs the company \$63.50 per ton to send waste to the landfill. The prices for residential mixed recycling and cardboard have plummeted 113 percent and 67 percent, respectively, Larvik

said. This difference means it costs service providers more money to recycle than it does to send waste to the landfill.

“It’s a detriment to be recycling because of the huge, unprecedented, very quick drop in demand due to China dropping out of the market,” Spindelov said.

Before China backed out of the market receiving payment for recycled materials was standard, he said.

“For many years, that was true for most materials out there, that the processors were paying good money to the collectors to collect that,” he said.

The economic deficit Waste-Pro is facing — the total loss from September 2017 to June 2018 is more than \$20,000 — means Larvik, as a service provider to the city, he must bring the La Grande City Council and Union County Commissioners potential solutions to fix the economic issue.

One solution is to raise the rates for the recycling program. Larvik proposed a \$1.24 per month increase as part of this solution. In Portland, the average household had its rates raised \$2.55 per month in May.

Another potential solution is altering what is acceptable to recycle. This would mean county residents would no longer be able to recycle materials such as glass and paper other than cardboard. This solution would reduce the amount of recycled materials in the county by more than 50 percent, Larvik



Cherise Kaechele/The Observer

China’s ban of recycling has made an impact locally at the Waste-Pro center.

said. The solution would also include a small rate increase.

The last solution would be sending all recycling to a landfill. This solution would still call for a 95 cent per month increase. Under Oregon law, when it costs more to recycle materials than it does send them to a landfill, recyclable materials can be disposed of.

Larvik said there is a lot to consider when deciding on which course of action the community should take with its recycling.

“At the end of the day, (it is a) discussion about what is important to us,” Larvik said. “Is it an economic decision? Is it an environmental decision? Is it a humanitarian decision?”

When contemplating this question, Larvik quoted Aldo Leopold, an environmentalist and conservationist: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when

it tends otherwise.”

This decision will ultimately come from the La Grande City Council and Union County Commissioners, Larvik said.

“I’m a service provider. I’ll do what the community wants us to do,” he said.

Larvik also said he believes La Grande residents are avid recyclers, noting 80 percent of La Grande residents put their recycling carts on the curb for every pickup.

In 2016, Union County recovered 6,916 tons of waste. Recovery includes recycling, composting and burning recyclable materials for energy.

According to the DEQ’s disposal concurrences report, Waste-Pro disposed of 28 tons of residential comingled recycling in November 2017 instead of sending it to a processor. Larvik said the disposal concurrence happened on one day because his processor — backed up with recycled materials due

to China’s stricter inspections of recyclable material — allowed him to send only some of his recyclables. To make sure he could continue to store incoming recycling (it’s against the law for Waste-Pro to store it outside) he sent those 28 tons to the landfill. That amounts to 0.4 percent of the total amount of recovered material in Union County in 2016.

While La Grande has not had to dump much of its recycling in a landfill, Spindelov explained why it might be the case that the law would allow Waste-Pro to do so.

“Out there in La Grande, you collect the materials so you have the cost of collection, and then you have the cost of shipping it to Portland because that’s where all the

processors are, and then they ask you to pay them for it when you drop it off,” Spindelov said. “(It’s) going to be a lot cheaper to ship the garbage locally to a landfill than it is to ship it all the way back to Portland to a processor.”

Across Oregon there have been 26 disposal concurrences since Sept. 1, 2017. During that time, 11,490 tons have been disposed of, comprising 2 percent of all materials collected for recycling.

Spindelov said he believes the market for recycled materials will fix itself, eventually.

“I’ve got to emphasize that this is something that I think will work itself out, but it might be a couple years, because you don’t just open a paper mill on the drop of a dime,” he said.

## Recycling by the numbers in Union, Baker and Wallowa counties

Union, Wallowa, Umatilla and Baker counties recovered material rates in 2016 were much lower than the state average.

In Union County, only 25 percent of waste was recovered compared to the state rate of 42.6 percent. For the past three years, Union County has recovered 25 percent of its waste, which is the lowest percent recovered in Union County since 2001.

Overall, the state of Oregon is not recovering as much waste as it had previously. Oregon recovered 49.5 percent of its waste in 2013, and the 2016 figure of 42.6 percent is the lowest since 2000.

The goal set for Union County by Oregon Senate Bill 263 in 2015 was 25 percent of waste recovered annually by 2025. The goal was the same for Baker and Wallowa County, while it was only 20 percent for Umatilla County.

—Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

# QUARRY

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plication is not complete.

In the application, obtained by The Observer, Smejkal requests approval to construct a rail spur and begin aggregate processing of the rock that includes light crushing, screening, washing and stockpiling to be able to export the finished product exclusively through the rail for industrial development.

Hartell said technically there are two small previous quarry sites at this location but this proposal is being considered a new site.

A big game management plan has yet to be submitted to the department, Hartell said.

In the application that has been submitted, Smejkal mentions he is committed to entering a

“habitat conservation easement of up to 4,724 acres with the Oregon Mule Deer Foundation, in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to preserve critical elk and mule deer habitat in the region on the property ... and commonly referred to as the ‘ponderosa.’”

According to the application, the project area will be located primarily within undeveloped timber and grazing areas.

The closest homes or businesses are more than 2,700 feet away. Operations will be between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. and any blasting required will be conducted on a published schedule and will occur between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The application states dust generated by construction and operational activities will be controlled via countermeasures like

water spraying. Any extraction or processing activities that produce air, noise, dust, odors or other pollutants will require an air contaminant discharge permit from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality or comply with other regulations.

The project will not require groundwater extractions and will not extend

deep enough to affect the groundwater aquifers, according to the application.

The potential visual impacts of the project will be “greatly reduced,” according to the application, through earthen berms adjacent to the 100-foot setback from the property lines. The visual impacts will be most noticeable along the I-84 corridor.

Smejkal’s application claims that the project will generate as many as 15 to 20 family-wage jobs. It will also generate temporary jobs during construction and will include local and regional expenditures for building materials, goods and services.

With the approval of the rail use, the contents of the project will be shipped ex-

clusively through the Union Pacific Railroad.

The next Union County Planning Commission meeting begins at 7 p.m. Aug. 27. Hartell said public comments will be taken at that meeting. However, since the quarry has not yet officially submitted the entire application it therefore may not be on the meeting’s agenda.

# COUNTY

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9,999-square-foot building. McClure said the hope is to have the building completed by March 1 so the U.S. Forest Service can move in before fire season.

July 1, 2019, is the target date for the base’s outdoor components including its helipads and parking area. The rappel base will include four landing sites for helicopters.

Wright said the new base will allow for more efficient operations, and the building will be more energy efficient. “(The new base) will fit the needs of rappel base operations more appropriately (than the present building and facilities),” he said.

The present rappel base is located in an older building at the airport. The base has been operating at the airport since crews from rappel bases in Enterprise and Ukiah were moved there two years ago. The base has approximately 30 employees.

Construction of the new rappel base will be funded with a \$3 million loan Union County has received from the state and a \$1 million ConnectOregon IV state grant, McClure said.

The Forest Service will lease the rappel base from

Union County, which will use its lease payments to pay off the \$3 million loan over a 20-year period, McClure said.

The base will be for helicopter rappelling flights. Helicopter rappelling is a means of quickly delivering firefighters to remote areas. Once dispatched, a helicopter and its crew fly to the location of a wildland fire. At the scene, it is determined whether the helicopter can land or if it will be necessary to deliver firefighters by rappelling. For a rappel, a helicopter hovers over the intended spot and then firefighters slide down ropes up to 250 feet with the help of a descent device, according to the U.S. Forest Service’s website.

Other Oregon cities that have rappel bases include John Day, Prineville and Grants Pass.

In other matters at Wednesday’s meeting, the Union County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution honoring Mike McArthur, executive director of the Association of Oregon Cities, which is a statewide organization representing Oregon’s 36 counties. McArthur, based in Salem, will retire at the end of this month after serving as AOC’s executive director for 14 years.

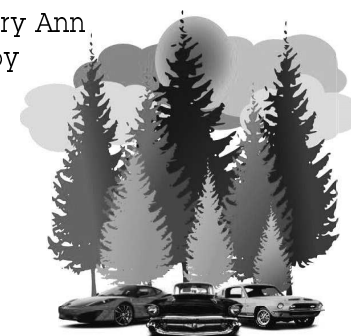
**The Timber Cruisers Car club thank these individuals and businesses who supported the 2018 Grande Ronde-A-View Weekend, July 20th-22nd. Because of your generous support and donations, this annual event was once again a huge success. Thank you all! We couldn’t have done it without you.**

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