

# LOCAL BRIEFING

From staff reports

## Traffic, street maintenance commission meets

LA GRANDE — The City of La Grande Parking, Traffic Safety and Street Maintenance Advisory Commission will meet at 5:30 p.m. Jan. 23 at the Public Works Department, 800 X Ave. For more information, call 541-962-1325.

## Biochar demonstration set for Wednesday

WALLOWA COUNTY — ROI Equipment will use its

mobile carbonator unit to give a demonstration on converting slash piles left over from logging and fuel reduction projects into biochar — a product that can be used to improve soil health — from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 23 north of Enterprise on Highway 3 across from NF-46 Road. This event is put on by Wallowa Resources Community Solutions, Integrated Biomass Resources, Ragnar Original Innovation, ODF, USFS, My Blue Mountains Woodland, Forest to Farm and USDA NRCS.

## BMTD seeks board members

LA GRANDE — The Blue Mountain Translator District is seeking new members for its board of directors. The board is the elected body governing the district, making decisions regarding policy, finance and administration. Applicants must be registered to vote in the district boundaries (rural areas surrounding all cities in Union County as well as Baker City and Haines). The time commitment includes attending

one meeting per month and reviewing regular correspondence from district staff. For more information, contact Alex McHaddad at 541-963-0196

## Registration open for parenting class

LA GRANDE — Parenting with Love and Logic, a seven-session parenting class sponsored by the Union County Family Law Committee, will begin Jan. 30. Each Tuesday evening session will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Head

Start Building at 1810 14th St., La Grande. The class teaches parenting ideas applicable to all ages of children. Parents will learn helpful ideas for setting limits, avoiding power struggles and taking the anger out of discipline.

The class is facilitated by Mary Lu Pierce and the cost is \$10 per person for its workbook. Child care is provided but limited. Spaces will be awarded at the time of registration. Early registration is advised by calling Pierce at 541-910-4004.

## Order oysters by the gallon

WALLOWA — The Wallowa Volunteer Fire Department will hold its annual Steak and Oyster Feed from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. Feb. 9 at the Wallowa Senior Center. Cost is \$30 for all-you-can-eat oysters or a rib steak and sides. Hot dogs will be available for children. Orders for oysters by the gallon must be made by Jan. 25.

For more information or to place an order, call John at 541-263-0308.

## OBITUARIES

### Gerald L. Dudley

Union

Gerald L. Dudley, 80, of Union, died Jan. 20 at Grande Ronde Hospital. An obituary is forthcoming. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

### Marjorie J. Harris

La Grande

Marjorie J. Harris, 97, of La Grande, died Jan. 18.

An obituary is forthcoming. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

### Ethel Morehead

Joseph

Ethel Morehead, 87, of Joseph, died Jan. 18 at a local care center. A memorial Mass will begin at 10 a.m. Feb. 2 at St. Katherine Catholic Church in Enterprise. Interment of cremains will be at Hillcrest

Cemetery in La Grande. An obituary is forthcoming. Arrangements are entrusted to Bollman Funeral Home.

### Gene A. Springman

Imbler

Gene Allen Springman, 75, of Imbler, died Jan. 20 at Grande Ronde Hospital. An obituary is forthcoming. Arrangements are entrusted to Daniels-Knopp Funeral, Cremation & Life Celebration Center.

## PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

### LA GRANDE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Accident: One person was reported injured in a traffic accident on the 1900 block of Adams Avenue Friday. The accident was reported at 11:26 a.m.

Arrested: Bryan Michael Nearing, 40, Island City, was arrested on a charge of a restraining order violation.

### UNION COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Arrested: Angella Farrell Thamer, 41, unknown address, was arrested on a state parole board warrant charging a parole violation violation connected to

an original charge of burglary.

Arrested: Roy Edward Yotty, 55, unknown address, was arrested by the Everett, Washington Police Department on a nationwide warrant charging order to show cause on an original charge of unlawful possession of meth.

Arrested: Shawn Robert Lee, 54, unknown address, was arrested on a charge of second-degree burglary and on a Crook County warrant charging failure to appear in court on a charge first-degree theft.

Arrested: Savana Ann Whipple, 31, a transient, was arrested while lodged in the Union County Jail on a charge of aggravated harassment.

### Public Safety Report

The Public Safety Report is compiled from police blotter information supplied by local law enforcement agencies and fire department reports. Individuals named as arrested and/or charged with crimes in this report are presumed innocent until proved guilty in a court of law.

# Baker County sage grouse receives \$1.7 million in aid

■ The organization protecting the struggling bird population received an award to help improve conditions for the species

### By Jayson Jacoby

WesCom News Service

The campaign to aid Baker County's struggling sage grouse population has received a nearly \$2 million boost.

And that might just be the start of a multimillion-dollar effort to not only protect the chicken-size bird but also to improve the condition of rangeland, much of it privately owned, across the county.

The \$1.7 million award from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, approved last week, is the first installment in a planned \$6.2 million from the Board, which receives its money from the Oregon Lottery, over the next six years.

Local officials also hope to use the state money to leverage federal grants and other sources that could make available several million dollars more to combat invasive weeds, deal with predators and do other work to aid sage grouse recovery, said Mark Bennett, a Baker County commissioner and a member of the governor's sage grouse council.

"It's really exciting," said Bennett, who also owns a ranch in the southern part of the county that harbors sage grouse.

"We will be able to make a difference, a critical difference, and primarily on private land," he said.

More than 70 percent of the sage grouse habitat in Baker County's Priority Area for Conservation is on private property, he said.

The ultimate goal, Bennett said, is to improve the health of the county's hundreds of thousands of acres of rangeland, something that has the potential to benefit not only the sage

grouse and other species but also the productivity of cattle ranches, which are a bulwark of the county's economy.

"This is going to pay dividends not only for the bird, but for the grazing community, recreation, the watershed," Bennett said.

The sage grouse has been what Bennett calls the "sentinel species" for the condition of those rangelands for more than a decade.

Baker County's sage grouse situation is unique in Oregon in that the majority of the bird's habitat here is on private property. Baker County is at the northern fringe of the sage grouse's range in Eastern Oregon, and the county's population accounts for less than 10 percent of Oregon's total.

Most of the bird's habitat and population in the state are in the southeastern counties of Lake, Harney and Malheur, which are predominantly public land.

Environmental groups have repeatedly asked the federal government to classify the bird as a threatened or endangered species, a decision that could curtail activities, including cattle grazing on public land, that could degrade sage grouse habitat.

In September 2015 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to list the bird as threatened or endangered.

But Bennett said the federal agency is slated to review the status of the sage grouse in 2020, and federal protection for the bird, and the possible effects on how public land is managed that could result, remains a possibility.

But rather than simply wait and accept whatever fate might bring, Bennett

said a local group that includes landowners and officials from county, state and federal agencies has been working for years to study why Baker County's sage grouse population has declined by about 70 percent over the past decade or so, and to consider ways to reverse that trend.

"We said if we don't get out in front of this we could have a serious problem," Bennett said.

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grant reflects the work that has been done, he said, since proponents had to show the Board how the Lottery dollars would be used.

Bennett said Marisa Meyer, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in La Grande, and Nick Myatt, who manages the Grande Ronde Watershed District for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, were instrumental in starting the Baker Sage Grouse Local Implementation Team that applied for the Lottery dollars.

Myatt said the grant is a "huge influx of money into the county for private landowners and livestock producers for doing the work we want to do for sage grouse habitat restoration."

Bennett said the Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area, which covers Baker, Union and Wallowa counties and is core member of the local team, will be the fiscal agent for the money.

A committee from the Sage Grouse Local Implementation Team will review applications from landowners for grants and distribute the money, Bennett said. That committee includes representatives from Baker County, the



Courtesy photo

A male sage grouse inflates its air sacs and flares its tail feathers during the species' annual spring breeding ritual.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, ODFW and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, he said.

The Tri-County weed agency was a logical choice to administer the state grant, he said, because invasive weeds, primarily cheatgrass and medusa-head, pose a significant threat to sage grouse by displacing the sagebrush habitat the birds depend on.

The local team's plan for sage grouse lists as its top priority treating invasive plants.

A "threat reduction plan" states that biologists have identified 70,000 acres of sage grouse habitat in Baker County that is dominated by invasive grasses.

Jacqueline Cupples, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in La Grande, and Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the ODFW's Baker City office, wrote the threat reduction plan and also did a considerable amount of the work that went into the application for the Watershed Enhancement Board grant, Bennett said.


"This was a big project for Baker County," he said. "What's really remarkable

is that everybody participated from their own perspective and they took time from their other work to do this. There was a common vision. It's a remarkable partnership. I'm so appreciative of everyone's work."

Myatt said the threat reduction plan, which outlined how the money could be spent in Baker County, was an important part of the local team's application to the Watershed Enhancement Board.

Other partners in the Baker County Local Implementation Team include the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, the BLM, Baker County and the Powder Basin Watershed Council.

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## What's Cooking ?

by Sandy Sorrels of

### TEN DEPOT STREET



Despite the inclement weather, it will be a good week at **Ten Depot Street**. First of all we are serving one of our most popular *Blue Plates Specials* this week, *Chicken Fried Steak* with mashed potatoes and country gravy, comfort food at its best. Also this week since crab is now in season and available, Chef Bill Monda is preparing his famous *Crab Stuffed Alaskan Halibut*, which we will have every night this week.

Monday (tonight) is barbecue night at Ten Depot and tonight we are featuring a *Quarter Chicken with Spicy Southern Barbecue Sauce* for just 11.95.

Then on Tuesday *Ruben Gonzales* is playing. Ruben who moved to Eastern Oregon from Colorado, is a frequent performer in Baker City. The singer-songwriter is joining us for a solo performance. Reuben first

debuted at 10 Depot Street for an open-mic night, and we are pleased to have him back for a night on his own.

Then Thursday night, Greg Johnson returns to *Ten Depot Street* with the *Greg Johnson Quartet*, playing live jazz music. Johnson, who is a professor at EOU and plays a mean saxophone, is accompanied by an all-star line up, Calendra Johnson on vocals, Matt Cooper on keys, Luke McKern on bass and Andy Steele on drums.

We have filled up for the Spanish Wine Tasting on Wednesday which we are doing in conjunction with Beverly Calder of *Bella*. However if you missed this one, we have scheduled two other tastings, one on February 27 with wines from *L'Ecole 41* in the Walla Walla Valley and another on March 13 with award winning wines from *Jones of Washington*.

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