

CHD

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are many, but limited, resources available to the community that people are often unaware of. In the interest of developing stabilization and independence, jail diversion helps connect people to those resources."

Davis stressed the jail diversion program isn't a "handout," however.

"We're connecting people to resources, not giving out free rides," he said. "Our intent is to stabilize them so they can move forward independently in life."

Aaron Grigg, mental health director at CHD, oversees the jail diversion program and coordinates with the sheriff's office when needed. He said one of the "biggest barriers inmates face out of jail is finding employment."

"For some, it's hard to resist crime with no income," Grigg said.

That's where Escobar, supported employment and education specialist, comes in. Escobar not only helps inmates prepare for interviews, create resumes and find jobs suitable with their

individual skill sets, but also focuses on getting inmates to complete their GED.

"Even with a simple part-time job, they get a confidence boost that's really cool to see," he said. "That's the spark they need to become a productive member of the community."

Brown recalls one success story in particular that inspires the jail diversion team to continue serving inmates with behavioral health issues.

"One graduate from jail diversion has been involved since 2016," she said. "He completed parole, completed his mental health services and went on to become a peer mentor at the jail."

Davis then chimed in with his experience working with this person.

"To know this individual came from a life of crime and addiction makes their turnaround unbelievable," he said. "He decided to become successful in the community."

While the official jail diversion program is fairly new, Grigg said CHD has a "long-standing" agreement with the county jail to intervene whenever an inmate with



Amanda Weisbrod/The Observer

The jail diversion team poses outside of the Union County Courthouse during a meeting with the sheriff's office.

mental illness is in crisis.

"We have had a presence at the jail for a long time," he said. "Our jail diversion program is part of what the state wants mental health programs in each county to do."

In October 2018, the Behavioral Health Justice Reinvestment Steering Committee, composed of 28 officials from Oregon law enforcement, health care, government officials and more submitted a recommendation on policy for how to divert people with

mental illness from the

criminal justice system.

Their plan, titled the Behavioral Health Justice Reinvestment in Oregon, said "without access to effective community-based health care for substance addictions and mental illnesses, too many Oregonians wind up in crisis and then in emergency rooms or jail, leading to high costs and poor health and public safety outcomes."

In Union County, Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen and the deputies managing the jail are happy to work alongside

members of CHD to keep individuals in the community, not behind bars.

"The jail diversion program alleviates our jail capacity challenges by delivering mental health services in the field where they are most needed," he wrote in a statement. "We fully support CHD with this program."

Brown, who is focused on the therapy side of the jail diversion program, started hosting trauma groups in the jail at the beginning of the year to help incarcerated men deal with trauma and substance

abuse issues in an open space. She said the women's group will start in April.

"The goal of the groups is to bring awareness to topics they might not want to talk about," Brown said. "These men have the idea they can't look vulnerable, so they struggle with emotions."

Brown said every inmate likely experiences some sort of trauma that may lead to mental health issues in some situations. Grigg agreed, stating he has never seen a situation of a criminal who has a drug and alcohol abuse history without an accompanying trauma history.

At its core, CHD's jail diversion program helps the inmates of Union County work through their personal trauma through therapy sessions, case work and employment assistance in order to reintroduce them to the community as a productive and successful person.

"It's not about teaching them that they're victims — it's about helping them take control of their situation," Grigg said. "If people can heal, they can improve. We're trying to provide healing for people so they don't keep coming back." ■



Observer file photo

La Grande Superintendent George Mendoza walks in the Greenwood parade at the beginning of the 2017 school year. Mendoza received high praise during his evaluation this week.

SCHOOL

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recognized for his ability to manage the daily operations of the school district and to focus on goals set by the board — all of which develops and strengthens education in La Grande.

Justice in the letter said because of Mendoza's performance, the board has unanimously agreed to offer the superintendent a new three-year contract. The educator is in the first year of his current three-year contract.

Mendoza took the reins of the school district in June of 2017, succeeding Larry Glaze, who retired after serving as superintendent for 10 years. Men-

doza came to the La Grande School District from the Morrow County School District, where he was its assistant superintendent.

The superintendent said he is grateful for the support he receives from the school board, the district's staff, educators, administrators, families and the community.

"I am thankful that we are all working together as a team," Mendoza said, adding that he is "excited about the school district's potential."

He said his primary focus continues to be doing everything he can to help students.

"I want make sure they are ready to learn," Mendoza said. "We want them to become lifelong learners." ■

HOLIDAY

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There will be live Irish music. The party will be from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Those looking for more drinks than dinner can go to the annual pub crawl hosted by La Grande Mainstreet Downtown. Stops included in the crawl are Ten Depot, The Longbranch, Benchwarmers, Side A Brewing, American Legion, JSD, The Hideout, Moy's, Cinco de Mayo and Bud Jackson's. Participants can ride the trolley for free to different locations between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. From 10 p.m. to 2:30 a.m., Loveland's Safe Ride program will give free rides home.

A \$10 lanyard, which can be purchased at any of the participating bars, grants admission to the crawl and access to drink specials.

Although the annual pub crawl used to be St. Patrick's Day themed, it is no longer officially related to the holiday. According to a representative from La Grande Mainstreet Downtown, this is because some people took issue with associating the holiday with drinking.

This complaint isn't a new one. In a 2015 opinion article in The New York Post, writer Tim Donnelly said binge drinking isn't an appropriate way to celebrate cultural holidays.

"I'm all for drinking (all times of the year). Just don't kid yourself thinking you're 'celebrating' these holidays with a ... bar crawl — you're just getting drunk," he wrote.

He suggested parades, musical performances and themed dinners are more respectful ways to celebrate.

The association of St. Patrick's Day with binge drinking might have a dark history as well. History.com notes in the late 1840s, when there was an influx of Irish immigrants to the U.S., newspapers portrayed Irish people in cartoons celebrating the holiday as "drunk, violent monkeys."

It was because of these concerns that LGMSD redefined the annual pub crawl. The intent of the event remains the same: to encourage people to come downtown and support local businesses. ■

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US eases land restrictions meant to protect bird in West

By Matthew Brown
The Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — The Trump administration on Friday finalized changes to sweeping federal land use plans for Western States to ease energy industry restrictions in a way officials say will protect a struggling bird species.

The changes by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management will guide future efforts to conserve greater sage grouse, ground-dwelling birds that range across portions of 11 Western states.

Environmentalists have said the widely-anticipated move will undermine protections for the chicken-sized bird. They would allow more oil and gas drilling and other activities on grouse habitat.

But the administration secured key backing from Democratic and Republican governors in affected states.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown (D) said in a statement the changes marked "a shift away from planning toward active conservation and landscape management."

The birds are known for an elaborate mating ritual in which males puff out a yellow air sac in their chest as they strut around breeding grounds known as leks. Their numbers have plummeted due to energy development, disease and other factors.

Opponents are expected to challenge the changes in court. Brian Rutledge with the Audubon Society said the revisions will make it harder to stop the long-term decline of sage grouse by giving oil and gas companies access to crucial grouse habitat.

"It's a free for all, based on prioritizing fossil fuel extraction over any other use of the federal landscape," Rutledge said.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management Acting Di-

rector Brian Steed told The Associated Press the changes address concerns aired by state officials that previous policies governing millions of acres of federal land were too restrictive.

Those policies were largely enacted under former President Barack Obama. They were memorialized in a 2015 partnership between Western states and the federal government.

Steed said the broad revisions to the Obama-era plans were meant to move beyond what he called a "one-size-fits-all" approach under the old rules. He said the changes give more flexibility to land managers and states concerned about balancing economic development with protections for the bird.

"Our intent was not to throw out the plans, but to make them better respond to the needs on the ground," Steed said. "We're doing that in a very careful way to ensure the bird's protections are still in effect."

The birds once numbered in the millions but the most recent estimates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service places the population at between 200,000 to 500,000.

The 2015 plans capped years of negotiations and were intended to prevent grouse from being listed as a threatened or endangered species.

Such a designation could have brought severe limitations on grazing, energy development and other activities across the bird's range, which covers some 270,000 square miles.

Under President Donald Trump, Interior Department officials have vowed to lift obstacles to drilling. Grouse protections have long been viewed by the energy industry as an obstacle to development. ■

BEVERAGE

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there will be ongoing confusion and disagreement as to how each Revised Plan is to be implemented," French added in the release.

Beverage said the meetings in D.C. were about the 2005 Travel Management Rule for motorized vehicle use in the Blue Mountains Forest Plan. The forest plan is an outline that "describe(s) the social, economic, and ecological goals of National Forests and provide(s) frameworks for future management decisions," according to the U.S. Forest Service's website.

The Forest Plans for the Umatilla, Malheur, and Walla-Walla National Forests have been under revision for nearly 15 years, according to the press release. The Final EIS, three Revised Plans, and the draft Record of Decision were released in June 2018 for the pre-decisional objection process. Approximately 350 objections were filed on a variety of issues, most signifi-

cant being access and travel management, impacts of the plan decisions on local communities, the Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy, wildlife issues, and forest management. Objection resolution meetings were held in five different communities in November and December of 2018. Over 300 people participated, voicing concerns and clarifying objections on a wide variety of issues.

Beverage said one commissioner from each county in the Eastern Oregon Counties Association participated in these meetings, which included meeting with the Chief of the Forest Service, Rep. Greg Walden's Office, Sen. Jeff Merkley's office and US Department of Fish and Wildlife. "The forest service is moving forward," Beverage said. "Their goal is to build relationships and trust with local communities."

She said they want to re-engage with local teams and constituents to get work done on the ground.

"We have to trust (them)

to be successful and when we don't work together for the common good of the forest then no one wins."

French said those who have worked on this plan for the last 15 years deserve recognition for their hard work and commitment.

"I also realize how much dedication, energy, time, and effort that the public has put into this process," French said. "I am confident that the information and data collected and analyzed, as well as the breadth of objection issues, can be used to inform our next steps."

Existing Land and Resource Management Plans, as amended, will remain in place as the Forest Service determines next steps for the Umatilla, Malheur, and Walla-Walla National Forests.

In the coming months, Forest Service officials will engage stakeholders to explore ways of working together to support a path forward on shared priorities including

strengthening local economies, reducing wildfire risk, ensuring access, and supporting healthier watersheds, according to the release.

"We are committed to the responsible stewardship of National Forest System lands and confident that we can find common ground for the long-term sustainable management of these forests," said Regional Forester Casamassa. "I look forward to joining local and state officials, partners, Tribes, and members of the public to explore how we can best work together in shared stewardship to pursue common objectives."

Beverage said this is a huge success for the forests.

"This is a monumental decision that has never happened in history," Beverage said. "We are thrilled we were able to have this relationship. We're happy the Forest Service came out to the forests and saw what we're dealing with, and they listened to us." ■



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