



SPORTS

Berney, Woodward to be enshrined

Baker County commissioner on state wildfire council, 2A

Inside

Weekend

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Good day to our valued subscriber Chris Christenson of Elgin

Settlement reached in Union City Council ethics case

■ Former city administrator filed complaint in 2017

By Dick Mason
The Observer

A settlement has been reached in a case regarding an ethics complaint filed in 2017 against the Union City Council by former Union City Administrator Sandra Patterson.



Patterson

The Oregon Government Ethics Commission has approved a negotiated settlement in the case. In 2017, Patterson filed a complaint in which she alleged the Union City Council violated Oregon's public meetings law.

Under the terms of the settlement, Leonard Flint, Union's mayor since January 2017, and the six people who were members of the city council in June 2017 received "a letter of education" from the Oregon Government Ethics Commission explaining the statute that appeared to have been violated and how it can best be followed. The councilors who received the letter were Randy Knop, Jay Blackburn, Matt Later, John Farmer, Walt Brookshire and Susan Hawkins. All but Knop are still members of the city council.

"I'm glad that the Ethics Commission will require them to receive training (via a letter of education)," Patterson said.

The former city administrator, who still lives in Union, would like her ethics complaint to result in Union's city government taking a closer look at Oregon's public

See **Ethics** / Page 5A



Body in river sighted, not recovered

■ Search and rescue efforts suspended

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

A body sighted floating down the Grande Ronde River — last seen near Riverside Park in La Grande — has not yet been found.

“Everything was a combination effort by all teams involved.”
— Nick Vora, Union County Search and Rescue lieutenant

Wednesday, after 1 p.m., the body of a white male passed under the North Spruce Street bridge face-down before disappearing in the rapids of the Grande Ronde River. The search and rescue efforts continued from that time on until about 6:30 p.m.

Unless more details come to light or another sighting emerges, recovery efforts for

this case will not continue, according to the La Grande Rural Fire Department and Union County's Search and Rescue team.

There has been widespread speculation over the man's reasoning for entering the river, but nothing is certain.

An Oregon State Police trooper was pursuing a vehicle at 1:43 a.m. Wednesday and found it unattended. Later, they spotted the suspect walking on the side of I-84. When the trooper tried to make contact, the man jumped into the river, according to OSP Public Information Captain Tim Fox.

Fox said it is not clear if these two cases are related, and until the body is found, state police cannot confirm nor deny the man in the river is also the man who eluded police earlier in the morning.

La Grande Fire Chief Les Thomas said the man in the water near Riverside Park was "obviously deceased" when he briefly surfaced.



Cherise Kaechele photos/The Observer

On Wednesday afternoon, multiple first responder agencies set up efforts to recover a body in the river at Riverside Park. In the photos, La Grande Fire Department utilized their ladder truck and worked with the Wallowa County SwiftWaterTeam and the Union County Search and Rescue members to probe the river for the man.

Thomas was in the middle of setting up a rescue plan with volunteers from Union County Search and Rescue and La Grande Rural Fire Department when the body passed beneath the North Spruce Street bridge, the intended rescue location.

Ropes were thrown from both sides of the river to attempt to catch the body, but rescuers were unable to capture it before it entered particularly dangerous rapids.

Over the next five hours, several local and state agencies

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Second arrest made in Cove murder

Observer staff

Another person has been arrested in the case of the Loretta Williams murder.



Hamilton



Lee

According to a press release, Steve Hamilton, 65, was arrested Thursday on charges of murder and conspiracy to commit murder by the Union County Major Crimes Team.

In criminal law, a conspiracy is an agreement between two or more persons to commit a crime at some time in the future, according to the Shelf Law website.

Hamilton is the current executive director of Post Acute Rehab in La Grande.

Williams' ex-husband, Ronald D. Lee, was arrested in February on

See **Murder** / Page 5A

Man shot in face with BB gun

■ Details of incident sparse

Observer staff

One man was shot in the face with a BB gun but couldn't tell law enforcement where it came from or who did it.

According to La Grande Police Chief Brian Harvey, the victim was walking along Albany Street near the Towne Center when he received a glancing injury along the cheek area caused by a BB.

"(The BB) went across the face and hit the lens of his eyeglasses, breaking them," Harvey told The Observer.

The man did not seek medical attention at the time of the incident.

Harvey said the man had no idea who did it, where it came from or any details that could help law enforcement identify the suspect.

"He had his back to the street and was walking into the building," Harvey said. "He has no idea where the source was at all."

Harvey said the call to dispatch was just before 3 p.m. Wednesday. ■

Commissioners pass MERA grazing moratorium, deny ordinance update

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

The Union County Commissioners voted to put a one-year moratorium on grazing at the Mt. Emily Recreation Area on Wednesday due to the public opinion that cattle get in the way of recreational activities.



Beverage

Originally, the proposed moratorium was for five years, according to the MERA Committee's documents submitted to the commissioners. The five-year period was concerning to Commissioners Donna Beverage and Paul Anderes because the uneaten grass could create a fire hazard.

"The impacts of grazing on the

landscape and recreation as well as site suitability were discussed in detail," according to the MERA staff report. "Cost analysis has been considered in the report as well."

MERA, a publicly owned recreation area used for hiking, biking and equestrian activities, has had grazing leases for cattle from June 1 to Oct. 15 every year.

Multiple people submitted testimony in support of the five-year moratorium on Wednesday. All of them use the area for recreation and stated the cattle slow them down when they're there.

Commissioner Matt Scarfo said the business deal of the grazing lease was a "bad business deal."

The county receives between \$3,000 and \$6,000 in annual reve-

nue for the grazing lease, but it costs approximately \$15,900 to \$18,900 every year to repair the damages caused by the grazing cattle.

Because the commissioners felt there was no valid reason to grant a five-year moratorium, the commission approved it for one year.

Also at Wednesday's meeting, the commissioners denied a request to update the Second Amendment Ordinance that the county's voters passed in the November election.

The ordinance expands the definition of firearms and prohibits the enforcement of laws that regulate the manufacture, sale and possession of firearms in Union County. It will require the sheriff to review any state or federal laws affecting

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

Friday
40 Low
Occasional rain

Saturday
49/31
A little rain

Sunday
52/31
Partly sunny

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
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