

BUFFALO PEAK GOLF COURSE



Buffalo Peak Golf Course photo

The Union County Board of Commissioners approved a restructuring plan Wednesday for Buffalo Peak Golf Course that will reduce the golf course's number of full-time positions by one, trimming the annual operating budget by at least \$50,000.

Budget cuts at golf course

■ County commissioners approve plan to trim personnel budget by at least \$50,000

By Dick Mason
The Observer

UNION — The stage is set for Buffalo Peak Golf Course to begin operating more efficiently and with a leaner budget.

The Union County Board of Commissioners approved a restructuring plan Wednesday that will reduce its number of full-time positions by one, trimming the Union golf course's annual operating budget by at least \$50,000.

The plan, according to Commissioner Donna Beverage, is designed not only to reduce expenses but also increase revenue by calling for a greater focus on marketing. Buffalo Peak has lost money every year since Union County bought it from the city of Union about 20 years ago.

"We need to save money out there. I don't want Buffalo Peak to go down," said Union County Commissioner Matt Scarfo at Wednesday's board of commissioners meeting in La Grande.

The restructuring plan will reduce the number of full-time, benefited positions Buffalo Peak has from three to two. Those positions are a head golf professional, a maintenance/mechanic and a grounds superintendent. The grounds superintendent position has been open since July following the

retirement of Burr Betts, who served in the position for about eight years. The mechanic/equipment manager was then temporarily appointed to assume some of the responsibilities the grounds superintendent had while a further review of staff structure was done by the county commissioners.

The new plan calls for the golf course to have a general manager and an equipment manager/grounds superintendent. The general manager will manage Buffalo Peak's pro shop and its course, Beverage said.

The full-time employees now at the golf course will be required to resign but will have the opportunity to apply for the two new full-time positions Buffalo Peak will have under the restructuring plan.

"Drastic times demand drastic measures," Commissioner Paul Anderes said. "It is a good plan, a step in the right direction."

The three full-time positions Buffalo Peak now has, when filled, cost \$203,336 a year in salary and benefits. The course's full-time employee expenses will fall to about \$150,000 a year under the restructuring plan, saving it at least \$50,000.

"(The projected savings) is a conservative estimate," said Shelley Burgess,

the administrative officer for Union County.

Union County soon will advertise for the general manager and equipment manager/grounds superintendent positions. Beverage said she hopes the county will have the new positions filled and the restructuring plan operating by mid-January.

Buffalo Peak will continue to have seasonal employees under its new plan. Clubhouse attendants, grounds maintenance workers and an irrigation specialist will be paid hourly wages.

"Everything will stay about the same (with regard to seasonal workers)," Beverage said.

The commissioner describes Buffalo Peak as an important Union County amenity in the same way a public library or pool are. She said this became apparent to her about three years ago when a local meeting about Buffalo Peak was attended by about 70 people. Many at the meeting said Buffalo Peak is a big reason they live in this area, Beverage said.

The commissioner is confident this amenity is now on more solid ground because of the restructuring plan.

"I feel good about it. It is a small step forward but an important step," Beverage said.

County officials seek revenue sources for parks

By Samantha O'Conner
and Jayson Jacoby
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — Declining revenue from the two Baker County parks on Brownlee Reservoir due in part to low water levels and blooms of toxic algae has county officials looking for other ways to raise money to run the parks, some with short-term potential and others that would be more sustainable sources in the long run.

Officials also have discussed the possibility of asking Idaho Power Company to take over operation of Hewitt and Holcomb parks on the Powder River arm of the reservoir about 3 miles east of Richland.

"It's not a sustainable operation," said Karen Spencer, the county parks coordinator.

"We try desperately to take care of the needs of the people who come in and use the parks, but with fewer and fewer people coming out all the time, the revenue that is normally generated is greatly reduced," said Bill Harvey, chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners. "So it's a struggle to keep a parks director and two part-time people out there working when they don't have anywhere near the revenues we used to. So it's a struggle to find some mechanism that will work to keep the park open."

The county collected a yearly average of about \$57,680 from the two parks during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 fiscal years through a combination of camping fees, season passes and sales of ice, firewood and water.

The yearly average for the previous two fiscal years, 2014-15 and 2015-16, was about \$70,900.

During the 2008-09 and 2009-10 fiscal years, revenue from the parks averaged about \$85,000 annually.

The biggest factors in the recent decline in revenue are low water levels in Brownlee, which at times has made it difficult to launch boats, and advisories regarding blue-green algae, Spencer said.

Both issues discourage people from using the parks, which means less revenue for the county, she said.

Ed Elms, chairman of the county's parks advisory board, said those bad years have lasting effects.

"It's hard to get those people to return," he said,

talking about boaters who can't launch a boat due to low water.

Despite these cyclical challenges, the parks department has largely been self-sustaining in the past, Spencer said.

But that was due in part to occasional revenue from the sale of timber cut from parcels the county owns, and from the sale of some of those parcels.

Between 2004 and 2012, logging added about \$85,000 to the parks department's budget.

But the county hasn't received any logging revenue since the 2011-12 fiscal year, according to county records.

School district moving forward

■ Enterprise moves ahead with upgrades outlined in TAP facilities report

By Ellen Morris Bishop
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — Come Monday, there will be a lot of work going on around the Enterprise Elementary School.

Last year, the Enterprise School District began evaluations of its facilities, funded by a Technical Assistance Program Grant. The team of evaluators, led by the Wena-ha Group of Pendleton, found a few issues that couldn't wait for the more comprehensive facilities improvement plan now in the works to be completed.

Those fixes included making temporary repairs to the junior high school roof, repairing a cracked beam in the small gym, and improving drainage behind the elementary school and on the elementary school's large grassy playground.

The Enterprise School Board gave the go-ahead for these first repairs, and will begin work Monday on the last phase of them — improving drainage behind the elementary school and on the west end of the playground.

"Without the TAP evaluation, we might not have known about the beam," said Enterprise School District Superintendent Erika Pinkerton. "And fixing the drainage issue might not have gotten the attention it deserves."

Replacing the cracked beam in the little gym was a top priority. The work was completed in late September, for a cost of \$25,000. The funds came from the school district's capital project funds, Pinkerton said.

The junior high school roof was also patched. Recommended work included resealing roof-to-wall transitions at the perimeter and the parapets.

Work to divert storm water from the elementary school building and control runoff on the west end of the playground will begin Dec. 13.

Contracted to Steve Lindley of Union, the project will create a swale between Fifth Street and the elementary school that will capture and prevent water from running down the steep slope just east of the school and into the building. Work also will include moving an older shed to a more suitable and drier site. The \$23,780 cost of the project will also come from the school district's capital projects fund, and should be completed in about a week, Pinkerton said.

DAILY PLANNER

TODAY

Today is Friday, Dec. 6, the 340th day of 2019. There are 25 days left in the year.



TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT

On Dec. 6, 2017, President Donald Trump declared Jerusalem to be Israel's capital, defying warnings from the Palestinians and others around the world that he would be destroying hopes for Middle East peace.

ON THIS DATE

In 1790, Congress moved to Philadelphia from New York.

In 1907, the worst mining disaster in U.S. history occurred as 362 men and boys died in a coal mine explosion in Monongah, West Virginia.

In 1923, a presidential address was broadcast on radio for the first time as President Coolidge spoke to a joint session of Congress.

In 1957, America's first attempt at putting a satellite into orbit failed as Vanguard TV3 rose about four feet off a Cape Canaveral launch pad before crashing down and exploding.

In 1973, House minority leader Gerald R. Ford was sworn in as vice president, succeeding Spiro T. Agnew.

In 1998, in Venezuela, former Lt. Col. Hugo Chavez, who had staged a bloody coup attempt against the government six years earlier, was elected president.

In 2007, President George W. Bush announced a plan to freeze interest rates on subprime mortgages held by hundreds of thousands of homeowners.

LOTTERY

Megabucks: \$7 million
4-8-14-38-39-48

Mega Millions: \$285 million
23-43-60-63-69-19-x2

Powerball: \$130 million
8-27-44-51-61-14-x3

Win for Life: Dec. 4
15-22-48-56

Pick 4: Dec. 5

- 1 p.m.: 9-1-0-9
- 4 p.m.: 0-6-3-3
- 7 p.m.: 5-9-9-5
- 10 p.m.: 3-0-7-5

Pick 4: Dec. 4

- 1 p.m.: 6-1-5-3
- 4 p.m.: 2-5-9-3
- 7 p.m.: 7-7-7-5
- 10 p.m.: 2-5-8-9

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Americans have always been able to handle austerity and even adversity. Prosperity is what is doing us in."

— James Reston,
American journalist

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