Daily Planner

TODAY

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 15, the 350th day of 2020. There are 16 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Dec. 15, 2013, Nelson Mandela was laid to rest in his childhood hometown, ending a 10-day mourning period for South Africa's first Black president.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1791, the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution, went into effect following ratification by Virginia.

In 1890, Sioux Indian Chief Sitting Bull and 11 other tribe members were killed in Grand River, South Dakota, during a confrontation with Indian police.

In 1965, two U.S. manned spacecraft, Gemini 6A and Gemini 7, maneuvered toward each other while in orbit, at one point coming as close as one foot.

In 2012, a day after the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, President Barack Obama declared that "every parent in America has a heart heavy with hurt" and said it was time to "take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this."

In 2016, a federal jury in South Carolina, convicted Dylann Roof of slaughtering nine Black church members who had welcomed him to their Bible study.

LOTTERY

Megabucks: $5.6 million
1-8-14-28-36-46

Mega Millions: $262 million
19-31-37-55-67 — 25 x4

Powerball: $277 million
17-54-56-63-69 — PB 20 x2

Win for Life: Dec. 12
1-23-64-77

Pick 4: Dec. 13
- 1 p.m.: 1-2-3-2
- 4 p.m.: 6-9-4-5
- 7 p.m.: 0-7-6-4
- 10 p.m.: 0-9-0-7

Pick 4: Dec. 12
- 1 p.m.: 4-5-0-3
- 4 p.m.: 6-1-3-6
- 7 p.m.: 0-8-2-8
- 10 p.m.: 9-5-3-6

Pick 4: Dec. 11
- 1 p.m.: 4-5-6-1
- 4 p.m.: 5-3-2-5
- 7 p.m.: 9-2-0-3
- 10 p.m.: 7-0-7-6

DELIVERY ISSUES?

If you have any problems receiving your Observer, please call 541-963-3161.

Train traffic set to return to Wallowa County

Bridge work will open up rail line

By Dick Mason
The Observer

WALLOWA COUNY — Trains could be moving again in a major portion of Wallowa County.

Passenger excursion train service, derailed the past three years because of weak bridges at Howard Creek and Water Canyon, could be rolling in Wallowa County in the near future thanks to the efforts of the Wallowa Union Railroad. A new footing has been put in at Howard Creek Bridge, 6 miles southwest of Minam, replacing one that flooding washed out about two years ago. And the replacement of the old bridge at Water Canyon, 5 miles south of Wallowa, almost is complete. The bridge needed replacing because of its declining condition due to its age.

"We are very happy with how the project is working out. This opens up a lot of options for us," said David Arnold of Elgin, vice president of the Friends of the Joseph Branch, a volunteer organization that promotes the development of train service in Wallowa County.

Friends of the Joseph Branch/Contributed Photo
A truck pours concrete recently in 2020 to help put in a new footing at the Howard Creek Bridge in Wallowa County.

The replacement of the footing at Howard Creek was done with concrete from a truck that a railroad flat car transported to the site due to the obstructions on the road to the bridge.

"Clearing the road would have been too expensive," Arnold said.

Trains will not be able to run in Wallowa County until the bridges at Howard Creek and Water Canyon pass Oregon Department of Transportation inspections. Arnold said he anticipates the bridges will easily pass.

"We have been working closely with ODOT throughout this process," he said.

The restoration work started about three months ago.

The total cost of bridge work at Howard Creek and Water Canyon will be $160,000. The work was paid for by a $50,000 grant from ODOT and $110,000 from the Wallowa Union Railroad.

Arnold also said he said is "very optimistic" that Wallowa can be a site for the expanding operations of the WUR's excursion train, which would run from Joseph to Elgin. And he said he its hopeful a ticket office or a small depot can be added in Wallowa for excursion train passengers.

"We need a place for passengers to wait," Arnold said.

The Wallowa Union Railroad, which has headquarters in Elgin, has operated excursion trains along the track from Elgin to Vincent, 23 miles east of Elgin, in recent years. Wallowa Union Railroad has not conducted excursion train runs in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reopening of the rail line in Wallowa County will expand the number of cars the Wallowa Union Railroad can store at railroad sidings. Arnold said the new capacity would be between 200 and 400.

The bridge restoration work also opens the possibility for businesses in Wallowa County to use the railroad for freight train service again, something that has not been done for about six years. Arnold said Wallowa businesses have expressed interest in shipping wood products and beef via rail. Arnold said Wallowa would be one of the best towns in the county for shipping out freight via rail because it has the largest intact portion of land zoned for industrial use.

Arnold said this means it would be easier for businesses to set up distribution sites to move products out of Wallowa County.

LGSD to hold town hall

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande School District will host a virtual town hall Wednesday, Dec. 16, 6:30-7:30 p.m. to discuss COVID-19 data for Union County and related matters.

The forum will feature Carrie Brogoitti, Union County public health administrator, and Zachary Spoehr-Labutta, a physician with Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande. Both have firsthand experience in the county's response to the pandemic. They will address the COVID-19 situation in Union County as well as the plan for distributing the much-anticipated vaccines that soon could arrive on the local scene.

George Mendoza, La Grande School District superintendent, and Scott Carpenter, the school district's director of educational programs, also are participating in the forum to discuss the plan for resuming education in January, after the district's winter break concludes.

The town hall will be available for viewing live at www.lgsd.tv as well as on the school district's Facebook page. The recording will be accessible afterward on Facebook.

EOU earns high marks for inclusive education programs

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University recently announced its program for early childhood education program received an 'A' in diversity from the National Council on Teacher Quality.

"We just got ranked fourth in the nation for early childhood program affordability, Dean of the College of Education Matt Seimears said in EOU's press release, "and we tied with two and three. Out of all the early childhood undergraduate programs in the nation, EOU is No. 4."

The press release also reported Seimears is excited about potential new developments in Eastern's College of Education, including efforts to respond to special education teacher shortages and the new concentration in trauma-invested teaching through the master of science in education.

Seimears said the university is working to develop anti-racism classes and curriculum for PK-12 education partners and also address systemic racism students face in higher education. EOU students will serve as an advisory panel on the project.

"Teaching to diversity is one thing, but making a diverse model is challenging in a complicated way," Seimears said in the press release. "You need the right equipment, the right faculty, the right mindsets and we're doing that."

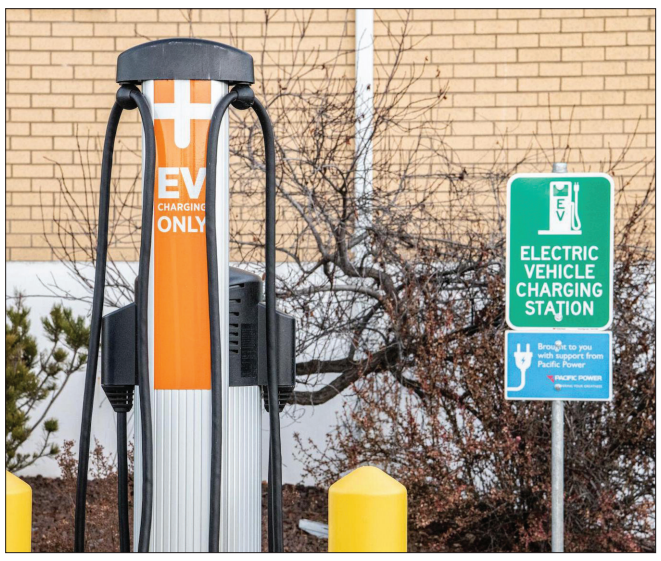
Electric vehicles, charging stations are coming to Wallowa County locations

By Ellen Morris Bishop
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa County is getting facilities to juice up electric vehicles.

Wallowa Resources and Forth, a Portland-based nonprofit dedicated to advancing electric, smart and shared transportation, recently presented a webinar about electric vehicles — EVs for short — for Wallowa County. The hour-long session included information about tax incentives, fueling options, cost savings and where to buy electric vehicles, from tractors to sporty sedans.

"We see EVs as another piece of the puzzle of keeping our energy dollars local and really driving community development goals through renewable energy," said Matt King, Wallowa Resources Renewable Energy Program manager.



Ellen Morris Bishop/For the Wallowa County Chieftain
Wallowa Resources installed a commercial Type 2 charging station outside its door at 401 N.E. First St., Enterprise, in October 2020. Anyone with a credit or bank card can fill up their electric vehicle.

King stressed the opportunities to harness local energy sources, including micro-hydro and solar to produce the power for local residents' electric vehicles.

In October, Wallowa Resources installed a Type 2 commercial charging station outside its front door at 401 N.E. First St., Enterprise. Pacific Power covered the installation cost, and since then, about a dozen EVs have filled up there.

"Anyone can show up with a credit card and charge their car here," King said. "We think they're finding us through some of the apps that show charging stations across the country."

Fill up an empty "tank" (aka, battery) at Wallowa Resources station costs about 20 cents her kilowatt hour, King said. For plug-in hybrids with 8-12 KWh batteries, that's a couple bucks. Fully electric vehicles with bigger batteries would be around $20 to charge for 200-300-mile drive.

Pacific Power's EV cost savings calculator provides more specific figures at https://pacificpower.wattplan.com/ev/.

Although only seven EVs are registered to owners in Wallowa County, there are a growing number of places and options to power up in the county, King said. Those include two commercial locations, one at Wallowa Resources, and another at Enterprise Electric that is not yet operational. In addition there are noncommercial Type 2 stations at Moonshine Glass and Cloverleaf Hall. Several lodging businesses, including Log House RV Park and Campground, Mountain View Motel and RV Park, the Bronze Antler and 5 Peaks RV Park in Joseph, Wallowa Lake State Park, and the Park at the River at Wallowa Lake Village offer Type 1 or Type 2 charging.

A Type 2 charging station is the equivalent of plugging an electric vehicle into a 220-volt outlet, which would take several hours to reach a full charge. Installing one in your home would cost between $800-$2,000, King said. But most EV's come with a kit that will plug into your 240 kilowatt wall socket. Type 3 commercial charging stations, available along Interstate 84 including at the Baker City Supercharger at the Sunrise Inn, and Walmart in La Grande, can fill up a passenger EV in 20-30 minutes.

King said the biggest use for EV's in Wallowa County initially will probably be to "zip around" for local trips.

"A lot of people have a truck for work and a smaller vehicle for highway driving or quick trips to the grocery store. EV's fit great into that situation," he said.

Wallowa Resources and Forth plan to offer tryouts of electric vehicles in Wallowa County in 2021.

Pendleton releases draft ordinance to end Confederate stamp preservation

By Antonio Sierra
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council won't make a decision on changing the law that led to the preservation of Confederate sidewalk stamps until after the holidays, but the text of law already is publicly available.

All ordinances the council passes or amends must have a first reading, usually held the meeting before the council votes. The council has scheduled the first reading for its Tuesday, Dec. 15, meeting, which means a public hearing and vote is on track for Jan. 5.

The Pendleton Historic Preservation Commission originally voted to preserve several sidewalk stamps — concrete etchings that denoted the original name of streets before the city changed its naming conventions in the 1940s — that commemorated Confederate figures like Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File
Protesters gathers outside of Pendleton City Hall in advance of the city council meeting on Dec. 1, 2020, to oppose the restamping of Confederate names on city sidewalks along Southeast Byers Avenue.

The decision garnered opposition from some residents in the community, with a Pendleton man intentionally breaking one of the sidewalk stamps and nailing a pro-Black Lives Matter sign to it.

After initially saying that the council didn't intend to get involved in the matter, Mayor John Turner reversed course by ordering the city halt its efforts to reinstall or restamp the sidewalks along Southeast Byers Avenue where the stamps had been displayed. He also announced that the city would change its preservation policy going forward.

In a staff report from City Attorney Nancy Kerns, she acknowledged the role some residents played in changing the city's approach to stamp preservation.

"There has been expression of public objection to the preservation, in this project and generally, of street stamps which contain the names of national and historical figures who are affiliated with racism," she wrote. "Those opponents of use of these names have requested the City Council to consider change of its policy, which involves the attached amendment of the current ordinance."

The amendment to the city's historic preservation ordinance is fairly narrow in scope. Besides cleaning up some of the ordinance's older language, it specifically targets sidewalk stamps as an exception to historic preservation.

"Street stamps of street and contractor names and dates will not be preserved or restamped in new sidewalk construction," the draft ordinance states.

Members of the public will get one more chance to comment on the proposed ordinance at the council's Jan. 5, 2021, meeting, where people both for and against the ordinance will be given a chance to speak before the council makes its decision. At the council's Dec. 1 meeting, several activists attended to ensure the council stuck to its decision.

Before the Dec. 15 council meeting, council members will meet as the Pendleton Development Commission to decide on allocating money for street repairs.

Staff is asking the commission to approve $6.3 million in street reconstruction projects in and around the downtown area.