



# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



Follow us on the web

TUESDAY • April 13, 2021 • \$1.50

Good day to our valued subscriber Ted McKenzie of Wallowa

## Throwing an SRS to boost schools, roads

### Oregon, Idaho senators making bipartisan push to reauthorize Secure Rural Schools

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — The budget outlook for public schools in Union County is set to receive a boost.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden's office announced Union County will receive \$746,677 in federal Secure Rural Schools funding in 2021.

SRS provides funding for rural counties and school districts to replace revenue from falling forest receipts due to a national decline in timber harvesting. The money will be part of \$39.3 million in Secure Rural Schools funding, which 31 Oregon counties will receive for schools, roads, law enforcement and other essential services.

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage said in Union County most of the money will go toward schools and roads. She said the SRS money Union County receives comes with guidelines stipulating how the county can spend the funds.

"It is very critical for our schools and roads," Beverage said.

Union County Public Works Director Doug Wright said the SRS funding his department receives always is welcomed.

"It is a very important part of our budget," Wright said.

He said his department relies on the funding for general operations, road projects and plowing snow.

Wallowa County will receive \$1.02 million in SRS funding, and Baker County will get \$801,102.

The \$39.3 million the 31 Oregon counties will receive is the last the SRS's current authorization will provide. The SRS program has been in place since 2000 and has been reauthorized many times since for rural counties nationwide.

"For the better part of two decades, SRS payments have maintained an economic lifeline for rural Oregonian counting on quality schools, dependable infrastructure and more in their communities," Wyden said in a press release. "The ongoing challenge of dealing with COVID-19 and its

See, **Funding**/Page 5A



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Kerry Searles tests a harrow Thursday, April 1, 2021, on the Melville family's Cornerstone Farms just outside of Enterprise. The Melvilles — like other Wallowa County farmers — are getting ready for planting season.

## A time for (no-)tilling

### Wallowa County farmers treat soil gently to gain greater results

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — With the arrival of spring, most Wallowa County farmers are gearing up to break ground for planting season.

But maybe "break ground" is the wrong term, since most here are advocates of "no-till" farming. No-till — or direct seeding — involves no or minimal cultivation, the application of herbicides to fight weeds, and the planting of cover crops that cattle can graze and will return nutrients to the soil.

"We got rid of our tillage equipment — the plows, the discs and the cultivators — over 40 years ago," said Tim Melville, patriarch of the family-owned Cornerstone Farms near Enterprise. "We have fields that have not been tilled in over 40 years. We just rotate one crop after another year after year."

He sees the practice as environmentally friendly.

"We stop soil erosion to next to nothing from both wind and water," he said. "The other big advantage is you're sequestering carbon because all your residue is being cycled back into the soil by all the biology that is created in those top few inches. They're consuming all that residue — it just disappears. All the worms and bugs that are in that soil are consuming the res-



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Kurt Melville of Cornerstone Farms welds a part on a no-till grain drill while overhauling the machine Wednesday, March 31, 2021, in preparation for planting on the Melvilles' farm near Enterprise.

idue. A plant is mostly carbon, (and) they breathe it in."

Melville sees the relationship between man and plants as one where each helps the other.

"They (plants) are taking what we breathe out and turning it into something we can breathe," he said. "It's what you call a symbiotic relationship."

The Melvilles — including Tim's wife, Audry, and their sons Kevin and Kurt and their families — farm about 5,000 acres in the county raising a wide variety of crops.

They hope to get started planting this week, Kurt Melville said.

"We grow everything," he said. "Wheat, barley, hay, flax, canola, timothy hay, peas, oats, mustards, quinoa. A lot of things."

Other growers in the Wallowa Valley have followed the lead of the Melvilles, who began their no-till practices in the late 1970s.

"They were the 'groundbreakers' in no-till," said Mark Butterfield, who farms

See, **No-till**/Page 5A

## Oregon lawmakers to tackle redistricting

### House Republican leader again calls for independent commission

By **PETER WONG**  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Supreme Court will enable lawmakers, not Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, to get first crack at redrawing legislative district boundaries despite a pandemic-caused delay in federal census data.

The court issued an opinion Friday, April 9, giving legislators until Sept. 27 to come up with a

plan — even though the Oregon Constitution sets a deadline of July 1. After Sept. 27, if legislators do not come up with a plan, the Constitution gives the task to the secretary of state.

The U.S. Census Bureau says it will be late summer before it will release census-block data, which Oregon and other states rely on to redraw their political maps after each 10-year census. Nothing in state law bars Oregon

#### OREGON REDISTRICTING BASICS

- The Legislature is primarily responsible for drawing congressional and state legislative district lines.
- Oregon received five congressional seats as a result of the 2010 Census.
- Oregon expects to gain a sixth U.S. House seat as a result of the 2020 Census.

from using other sources of data.

Senate President Peter Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek, joined by Republican minority leaders, asked the court for an extension beyond July 1. Fagan said the court lacked the authority to order an extension, and that any delay would interfere with the timetables for the 2022 primary

election. The filing deadline is March 8, 2022, for the May 17 election.

The justices decided the matter based entirely on written arguments and did not conduct a hearing.

The court's order takes effect Monday, April 19, unless Fagan

See, **Districts**/Page 5A

#### INDEX

Classified.....4B	Home.....1B	Obituaries.....3A
Comics.....7B	Horoscope.....4B	Opinion.....4A
Crossword.....4B	Letters.....4A	Sports.....6A
Dear Abby.....8B	Lottery.....3A	Sudoku.....7B

#### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight  
28 LOW  
Cold



Wednesday  
55/27  
Breezy

#### CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 42  
2 sections, 14 pages  
La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).  
More contact info on Page 4A.



8 51153 00100 6

THURSDAY SCHOOL STIMULUS

Online at [lagrandeobserver.com](http://lagrandeobserver.com)