

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Thursday, April 15, the 105th day of 2021. There are 260 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson, baseball's first Black major league player, made his official debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers on opening day at Ebbets Field. (The Dodgers defeated the Boston Braves, 5-3.)

ON THIS DATE:

In 1452, artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci was born in or near the Tuscan town of Vinci.

In 1850, the city of San Francisco was incorporated.

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln died nine hours after being shot the night before by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater in Washington; Andrew Johnson became the nation's 17th president.

In 1912, the British luxury liner RMS Titanic foundered in the North Atlantic off Newfoundland after hitting an iceberg; 1,514 people died, while less than half as many survived.

In 1945, during World War II, British and Canadian troops liberated the Nazi concentration camp Bergen-Belsen.

In 1989, students in Beijing launched a series of pro-democracy protests; the demonstrations culminated in a government crackdown at Tiananmen Square.

In 1990, film star Greta Garbo died in New York at age 84.

In 1998, Pol Pot, the notorious leader of the Khmer Rouge, died at age 72, evading prosecution for the deaths of two million Cambodians.

In 2009, whipped up by conservative commentators and bloggers, protesters staged "tea parties" around the country to tap into the angst stirred up by a bad economy, government spending and bailouts.

In 2013, two bombs made from pressure cookers exploded at the Boston Marathon finish line, killing three people and injuring more than 260. Suspected bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev died in a shootout with police; his brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, was tried, convicted and sentenced to death.

In 2019, fire swept across the top of the Notre Dame Cathedral as the Paris landmark underwent renovations; the blaze collapsed the cathedral's spire and spread to one of its towers, but fire officials said the church's structure had been saved.

Morgan Lake road may become safer

By **DICK MASOIN**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Morgan Lake Road soon may be safer to travel.

The Union County Board of Commissioners voted Monday, April 12, to apply for a \$99,847 matching grant from the state the county needs before it can receive about \$1.2 million from the state's All Roads Safety Transportation program for a Morgan Lake Road improvement project, which calls for widening the steep gravel road and installing guardrails.

The project may not go forward unless the state receives the required matching grant by 2022, according to Union County Commissioner Paul Anderes. Should the grant come through by then, project construction could start in 2023.

The match funding grant Union County is requesting would come from a portion of the \$2.6 billion Oregon will receive from the American Rescue Plan Act,



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

Two vehicles pass Feb. 11, 2020, on the narrow Morgan Lake Road near La Grande. Union County in 2021 is seeking a state grant to help provide funding for a \$1.3 million project to widen the road and install guardrails.

which Congress passed in early March for COVID-19 pandemic relief, according to Courtney Warner Crowell, coordinator for Gov. Kate Brown's Regional Solutions Program. This program's advisory committee is cre-

ating a priority list of programs that could receive funds from a share of the American Rescue Plan Act.

Crowell, in a letter to the Union County Board of Commissioners, asked that requests be only for projects

ready to start soon after matches for funding are provided. The Morgan Lake project fits the bill.

"It is shovel ready," Anderes said.

The Union County Board of Commissioners

also voted to apply for a \$453,561 matching grant via the Regional Solutions Program for the reconstruction of River Road, which runs for 5 miles west of Interstate 84 near North Powder to the Anthony Lakes Highway, which extends to the Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort. The Federal Lands Access Highway Project in addition to the matching grant would fund the \$4.4 million reconstruction project.

The condition of River Road is declining, and restoring the road would help boost tourism, said Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage. Like the Morgan Lake project, work on River Road could start not long after the county receives a matching grant.

"There would be a short turnaround," she said.

Match funding from Union County for the River Road project is due by September. Should the county receive the funds, restoration work could start by 2022, Anderes said.

Idaho lawmakers hear pitch to absorb three-fourths of Oregon

By **KEITH RIDLER**
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho lawmakers appeared intrigued but skeptical on Monday, April 12, when pitched a plan to lop off about three-fourths of Oregon and add it to Idaho to create what would become the nation's third-largest state geographically.

Representatives of a group called Move Oregon's Border For a Greater Idaho outlined their plan to a joint meeting of Idaho lawmakers from the House and Senate on Monday.

The Idaho Legislature

would have to approve the plan that would expand Idaho's southwestern border to the Pacific Ocean. The Oregon Legislature and the U.S. Congress would also have to sign off.

Supporters of the idea said rural Oregon voters are dominated by liberal urban areas such as Portland, and would rather join conservative Idaho. Portland would remain with Oregon.

"There's a longtime cultural divide as big as the Grand Canyon between northwest Oregon and rural Oregon, and it's getting larger," Mike McCarter,

president of Move Oregon's Border for a Greater Idaho, told Idaho lawmakers.

If everything falls in line with Oregon, supporters envision also adding adjacent portions of south-eastern Washington and northern California to Idaho. Backers said residents in those areas also yearn for less government oversight and long to become part of a red state insulated from the liberal influence of large urban centers that tend to vote Democratic.

"Values of faith, family, independence. That's what

we're about," said Mark Simmons, an eastern Oregon rancher and former speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives. "We don't need the state breathing down our necks all the time, micromanaging our lives and trying to push us into a foreign way of living."

President Joe Biden easily won Washington, Oregon and California in November, while President Donald Trump carried Idaho with 64%. The Idaho House and Senate each have supermajorities of Republicans.

The group's strategy has been to get advisory votes in Oregon counties likely to make the switch. But last November the group had mixed success with two counties opting to join Idaho but two wanting to stay a part of Oregon. Supporters blamed the setback on the coronavirus pandemic and an inability to get their message out. Five more Oregon counties are expected to vote on the matter in May.

The county votes carry no weight, but are intended to sway lawmakers to ultimately approve the plan.

La Grande Parks & Rec seeks input on local parks

By **ALEX WITTWER**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — If you ever wanted to ride a zip-line across Morgan Lake, now is the time to ask.

La Grande Parks & Recreation Department is asking residents for input on local parks in a survey to help guide the department in developing a master plan for the coming years.

"The end goal is to prioritize activities for the parks department for the next five years," said Stu Spence, La Grande's parks & rec director. "It's much better to have a plan and a strategy."

The "Master Plan" survey will run for a few months, culminating in the fall when officials say they expect to finish drafting the plan. The survey garnered more than 250 submissions in its inaugural week. Spence said he hopes to see close to 1,000 survey responses come in.

By spring 2022, the department wants to start implementing

ideas from the survey.

Funds would hit specific targets pulled from the plan — from adding amenities such as bathrooms to Morgan Lake or developing group activities and sports — based on survey responses about where residents' priorities lie.

The parks department isn't off the hook for developing its own ideas and improvements. It will be working toward adding suggestions to the mix, but the survey adds a layer of democracy to the parks department outside of Zoom meetings.

"It's a process where everybody should be providing input," Spence said.

The survey is online at the La Grande Parks & Recreation website, www.lagrandeparks.org, or through a link on the department's Facebook page.

The survey consists of multiple choice questions regarding preferences and takes around 10 minutes to complete.

Joining the ranks



La Grande Police Department/Contributed Photo

The La Grande Police Department on Saturday, April 10, 2021, announced on its Facebook page that Cody Kirby graduated April 2 from the basic police course at the Oregon Public Safety Academy in Salem and now is a certified police officer with the city of La Grande. The basic course runs for 16 week (640 hours) and helps new officers develop basic skills in the disciplines needed for performing patrol work.

Get ready for the North Powder Halibut Feed

By **DICK MASOIN**
The Observer

NORTH POWDER — About 100 tickets still remain for the annual North Powder Halibut Feed, which will run 3-7 p.m. Saturday, April 17.

A total of 150 tickets per each hour-long session will be sold for the drive-thru dinner. Ticket holders will pick up their halibut meal during their time slot. The tickets are \$25 each for a meal that includes halibut, baked potato, french bread, coleslaw and a dessert.

To reserve tickets, call the North Powder School District at 541-898-2244, ext. 8821. When calling, be ready to say how many tickets you want and the time slot you want to pick up the meal. Tickets, after a reservation call is made, can be picked at Powder Valley High School. When



The Observer/File

The Powder Valley High School Badgers volleyball team celebrates winning the 2012 state title. The annual halibut feed supporting the school's girls basketball and volleyball teams is a drive-thru dinner Saturday, April 17, 2021.

people purchase tickets, they will be provided with pick-up instructions.

Proceeds from the halibut feed will go to support Powder Valley High School's girls volleyball and basketball teams.

Baker County search and rescue team helps family stuck in snow

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

BAKER COUNTY — Three members of the Baker County Sheriff's Office's search and rescue team brought to safety a Beaverton couple and their son early Monday, April 12, after their car became stuck in the snow Sunday afternoon on an unplowed Forest Service road in eastern Baker County.

No one was hurt in the incident, said Ashley McClay, public information officer for the sheriff's office.

The Baker County 911 Dispatch Office received a call about 2:26 a.m. Monday from Jason Brunson, 52, McClay said.

Brunson told a dispatcher that his 2016 Ford Fusion sedan was stuck in snow along the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road, also known as Forest Road 39, about 8.9 miles north of Highway 86. Road 39



Baker County Sheriff's Office/Contributed Photo

A Beaverton family's car got stuck in snow along Forest Road 39 in eastern Baker County Sunday afternoon, April 11, 2021. Baker County Sheriff's Office search and rescue members, summoned by a cellphone call early Monday, rescued the family of three. None was injured.

branches off Highway 86 about 9 miles northeast of Halfway.

Brunson was accompanied by his wife, Jennifer, 49, and their 7-year-old son, George, McClay said.

The three search and rescue team members trav-

eled to the site in two side-by-side all-terrain vehicles, equipped with tires rather than tracks. They arrived at 5:38 a.m. and brought the Beaverton family back to the highway.

McClay said Sgt. Eric Colton helped the Brun-

sons arrange to have their car towed. It apparently sustained damage when they were trying to free it from the snow, McClay said.

McClay said the Brunson family was trying to reach the Hells Canyon Overlook. The turnoff to that site, which is along a side road, is about 10 miles farther along Road 39 from where the car became stuck.

Brunson said the car got mired in snow between 4 and 5 p.m. Sunday. The family tried through the evening to extricate the car, he said, without success. Around 2 a.m. Monday he walked about a quarter mile to a point where he had cell service to call 911.

McClay said the car had a nearly full tank of gas, and the family apparently was able to run the engine to operate the heater and warm the interior.

There are no weather stations within 15 miles or so of the site, but a station

at Salt Creek Summit, about 16 miles northeast, recorded a low temperature of 20 degrees Monday. The Baker City Airport tied a record low of 16 degrees Monday morning.

In early March the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, prompted by multiple search and rescue calls this past winter along Road 39 in both Baker and Wallowa counties, issued a press release reminding drivers that the road is a snowmobile route during winter. The Forest Service placed barriers along the road to discourage passenger vehicles. According to the press release, the Forest Service planned to move the barriers farther up the road this spring as the snow receded.

Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash said Forest Service officials notified him recently that the barriers would be removed. A sign remains warning

the road is not maintained during winter, but Ash said he believes the sign is too small to be effective.

He said the Brunsons told search and rescue members they didn't see the warning sign.

Road 39, which continues north into Wallowa County, usually doesn't fully open to vehicles until May or early June.

One problem with Road 39 and several other forest roads that are popular with snowmobilers, Ash said, is that the snow machines compact the snow into a firm but thin surface that can hold the weight of a car. Until it doesn't.

"You can do fine on that compact snow until you break through," Ash said. "Then you're stuck."

He said people who aren't familiar with snowmobile routes don't recognize that a road hasn't been maintained for wheeled vehicles.