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ELGIN

Indian Creek project starts

By ALEX WITTWER
The Observer

ELGIN — A project to remove several dams along Indian Creek near Elgin is underway.

Trout Unlimited, in partnership with Hancock Natural Resource Group, is planning to remove two outdated diversion dams on the creek, along with removing an old roadbed and its culvert in an effort to restore spawning habitat and rearing grounds for juvenile fish, including Lower Snake River steelhead, chinook salmon and bull trout.

Some of the fish species this project will help are endangered, including the redband trout.

“It is really helpful to have a return back to the state it was supposed to look like, and that allows for more resilience in the ecosystems,” said Emery Hansell, river communications specialist with Trout Unlimited.

The groups plan to break ground on the project this week. Officials expect the project will run approximately three to four weeks in total, and open up nearly 10 miles of connected habitat in the area.

Removing the obstructions, according to officials, will allow for the easier passage and rearing of juvenile fish as they travel through the Grande Ronde River. But that’s only one benefit that will come with the removal of the dams.

“There is more than just the passage going on,” said Levi Old, Northeast Oregon project manager for Trout Unlimited. “You will, a lot of times, have a constricted floodplain so you’re moving water more efficiently through an area near the dam, which affects the local geomorphology. By removing these two dams, we’re going to open up about 1.5 acres of historic floodplain habitat that had been cut off.”

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‘We would have had to close’

Local restaurants embrace impacts of nationwide pandemic struggles

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — With restaurants in need, grant funding has helped keep the doors open for some local favorites.

The Small Business Administration awarded \$28.6 billion worth of federal government funds to aid restaurants across the country impacted by COVID-19 through the Restaurant Revitalization Fund. In early May, more than 2,000 restaurants in Oregon received funds from the grant, eight of which are in Union County.

“We would have had to close,” said Bruce Rogers, owner of Local Harvest in La Grande. “We were of course thankful for it because we wouldn’t have stayed open without the grants we received.”

Local Harvest joined Mamacita’s International Grill, Side A Brewing, Merlyn’s Catering, Moy’s Dynasty and Le Bebe Cakes Bakery as restaurants in La Grande to receive a portion of the funding distributed through the RRF. Gravy Dave’s in Union and The Elgin Station Bar and Grill also received grants.

Restaurants in need

Out of approximately 100,000 restaurants in the United States to receive funds from this grant, Oregon’s percentage of the funds ranked in the top 20 states. After distributing the grants throughout May and June, the funding closed in early July. The New York Times reported that approximately 300,000 applicants from across the country



Alex Wittwer/The Observer
Clarissa Nitz works the front register at Local Harvest in La Grande on Thursday, July 29, 2021. Local Harvest is one of six restaurants in La Grande to receive funds from the Restaurant Revitalization Fund.

submitted applications, but only about a third of the applicants were awarded funding.

Adding up all the applications, a total need of \$65 billion was requested from restaurants across the country. According to the Small Business Association, nearly 5,000 Oregon businesses applied for the grant, requesting \$1.2 billion. This immense need in the restaurant industry has brought about lobbying efforts for Congress to revitalize the program with more funds and create a second wave of grants. “We encouraged everyone who needed it to apply,” said Greg Astley, director of Government Affairs for the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association. “The hole created from the past 16 months to get where we are isn’t going to be easy to get back out of.”

Mamacita’s International Grill received \$178,527 from the

RRF, the most of any restaurant in Union County, while Side A Brewing (\$109,128) and Moy’s Dynasty (\$100,523) also reached six figures. Despite leading the county, these numbers are well below the national average of about \$270,000 per restaurant and well below the largest recipients in Oregon, with Capers Cafe and Catering Co. in Portland receiving \$6.9 million.

Keeping the doors open

For Rogers and Local Harvest, the \$56,597 received from the RRF was a means to continue employing the staff and keeping doors open through tough times.

“We were able to take care of the people who bust their butts for us. That’s how it helped us the most,” Rogers said.

The rise in product prices have been the most detrimental

to the Local Harvest, alongside the obvious decrease in customers during the pandemic. Rogers said prices are up nearly 25% at his restaurant due to a major increase in supply prices.

Rogers primarily used the grant money for payroll, which allowed the business to maintain its indoor dining. Many restaurants in the area and across the country were forced to close indoor dining during the peak of the pandemic. While a take-out-only model decreases overall sales, it allows businesses to spend less on costs related to keeping a building open such as utilities and server wages.

“If we’re losing more money staying open, we’ll just close and lose less money,” Rogers said. “Don’t get me wrong, we’re grateful for every bit of help we got. We’d rather close the inside

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Return of the mask mandate

Governor orders masks worn indoors as COVID-19 hits record levels in Oregon

By GARY WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown on Wednesday, Aug. 11, ordered face masks worn indoors in public places by everyone age 5 and older beginning Aug. 13.

During the press call, Brown said the highly contagious delta variant was pushing the virus spread to the point that each infected person was infecting eight others.

“Moving forward, for the immediate future, masks will be required for all indoor public settings,” she said.

The mandate applies to adults and children older than 5. On public transit, it also includes children older than 2.

Brown also urged, but

did not mandate, wearing masks in crowded outdoor situations. She also urged private companies and other organizations to enact their own indoor mask policies.

Projected peak

Brown’s order came the day after the Oregon Health & Sciences University’s infectious disease experts forecast the state could see more than 1,000 COVID-19 patients per day in hospitals by early next month. Oregon would be about 500 staffed beds short of what it needs for all patients if the rate hit its projected peak.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state epidemiologist, said this “fifth wave” of COVID-19 to hit the state in the past 18 months



Kristyna Wentz-Graff/Oregon Public Broadcasting, File
Oregon Gov. Kate Brown tours a drive-thru COVID-19 vaccination clinic at Portland International Airport on April 9, 2021. Brown ordered face masks be worn indoors in public places beginning Friday, Aug. 13, as state health officials worry the highly contagious delta variant of COVID-19 is getting out of control.

is different than earlier spikes.

More than half the population is vaccinated, but the “relentless” delta

variant is spreading rapidly through the estimated 1.2 million Oregon residents who are not inoculated. That group includes

children younger than 12 for whom there is no federally approved vaccine.

OHA has reported patients arriving at hospitals are younger, sicker, require more care and stay longer.

“The COVID-19 situation is dire,” Sidelinger said, with the delta variant “far outpacing even the grim scenarios in our latest reported projections.”

Hospital capacity

The mask mandate is a policy U-turn for the Oregon Health Authority and Brown, who had relinquished decisions on COVID-19 restrictions to county supervisors as of June 30.

With the delta variant rapidly filling hospitals to capacity across the state, Brown had urged counties

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 61 Low Clear and mild	HOT	Friday 98/65 Very hot
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