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Contract for MERA logging awarded

Forest management work at MERA could start in less than a week

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A controversial plan for forest management in the Red Apple portion of the Mount Emily Recreation Area will go forward, but over a longer timeline.

The Union County Board of Commissioners voted Wednesday, Jan. 5, to award ReedCo Forestry a contract for the project, which will include some logging in the 300-acre Red Apple area of MERA. The contract awarded will pay the Union County-based business \$500 an acre for its work.

The Red Apple area is filled with popular trails for hiking and mountain biking and other non-motorized activities. Its users have expressed concern that while fire prevention and forest health is paramount, the proposed project could damage the area's trails and landscape.

The bid awarded calls for ReedCo to do most of the thinning and removal of fuels this winter and in the winter of 2022-23. The original plans were for it all to be done this winter. The bidding process for the work was postponed to allow Union County officials more time to take public input on the project.

Sean Chambers, Union County's parks manager, said he will meet with Jesse Reed, the owner of ReedCo Forestry, to discuss plans for his company's work.

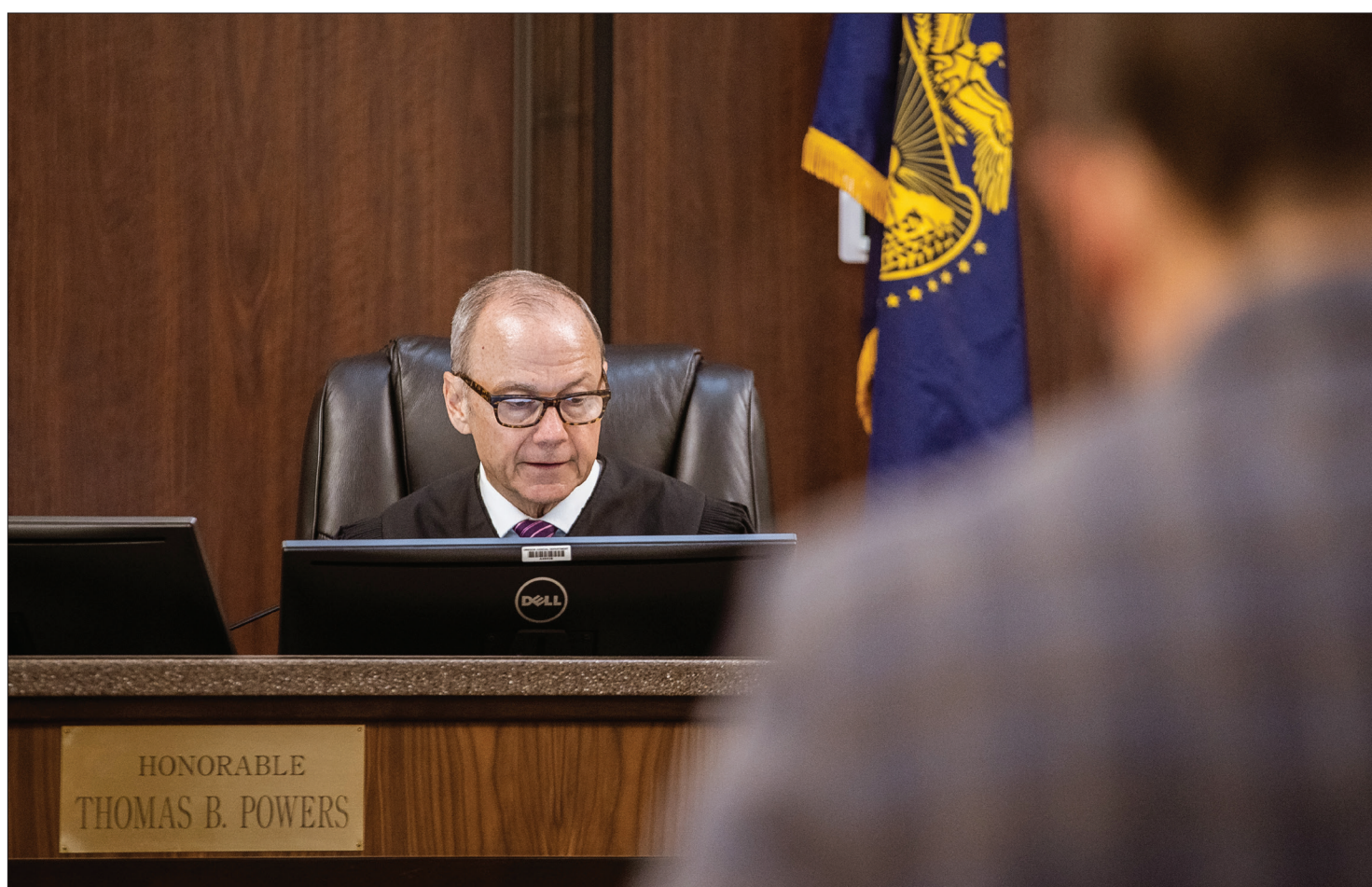
"The work could start as soon as the middle of next week," he said.

Chambers said the two-year timeframe will reduce the negative impacts of the project. He said it is best to do forest management work in the winter when the ground is harder due to freezing conditions and there is snow cover. This reduces the chance of equipment damaging the land.

"Having an extended work window will allow for protection of trails and allow for open public access during the spring and summer without interference with any operations," he said.

ReedCo Forestry was the lone bidder for the project. The company is familiar with MERA.

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Union County Circuit Judge Thomas B. Powers presides over arraignments in the county courthouse on Tuesday, July 20, 2021.

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

In short supply

Some Northeastern Oregon counties grappling with a shortage of deputy district attorneys

By **ALEX WITTWER**
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Counties across Eastern Oregon have struggled over the past few years to hire attorneys to prosecute criminal charges, and officials believe a variety of factors, including uncompetitive salaries, have contributed to the vacant positions.

Wallowa County is bereft of a deputy district attorney for its already strained staff.

Morrow County and Grant County each have only a district attorney to handle cases.

Umatilla County has just five prosecutors — including the district attorney — instead of the normal 10 attorneys.

Union County has fared better, but even its office is down one deputy district attorney.

Only Baker County has a fully staffed prosecution team.

Every other county in Northeastern Oregon has positions open for deputy attorneys. Those positions have been hard to fill, and in some cases have been unfilled for at least three years.

Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter has had an open position since 2018 — except a brief period when a prosecutor fresh out of



Carpenter



Frolander



McDaniel



Nelson



Primus

law school worked for a short stint before leaving to become a local public defender. Carpenter remains the county's sole prosecutor.

"Following his departure, I had no confidence that I would be able to find a replacement," Carpenter wrote in an email, "especially knowing that areas such as Deschutes and Multnomah, which pay much better than northeastern counties can, had numerous openings and I would not be able to compete with them for quality applicants."

Carpenter had an agreement with Grant County that he would serve as county counsel in return for funding for a deputy district attorney position; before then, the role was funded through a grant. Unable to locate a suitable attorney to fill the role as deputy, he resigned from his position as counselor in February 2020.

Likewise, Wallowa County District Attorney Rebecca Frolander has had an open position for three years. She was

the deputy prosecutor there before she was elected as district attorney.

"From 2018 up until we revamped the position in the fall of 2018, I received two applications," Frolander said, "but before I could even get them interviewed they took jobs across the state."

For a long while after Frolander became district attorney in 2012, grants funded the deputy district attorney position in Wallowa County. But it sat vacant for an extended period, and that grant money had to be returned and the position remains open.

The paper chase

Data from the Oregon State Bar during the past decade show the number of examinees per year steadily dropping — approximately 12 less attorneys each year pass the bar based on a simple linear regression model. The exam has not become more difficult over time, but fewer tests are being taken.

In 2020 the pandemic ush-

ered in a "diploma privilege," which allowed newly graduated law students to bypass the bar entirely and receive their license — a first for Oregon. But even then, only 343 attorneys were minted in Oregon that year. It was the lowest number of admissions since 1972 when 310 attorneys passed the bar exam.

Also contributing to the lawyer shortage is a higher number of lawyers retiring or leaving the field. According to a 2017 economic survey released by the Oregon State Bar, nearly 20% of respondents said they planned on retiring within the next five years — or by 2022. Additionally, the average age of practicing lawyers was 47 according to the survey.

But perhaps the biggest reason why lawyers have given the cold shoulder to Eastern Oregon attorney offices is that salaries in the rural wild west don't compete with those in metropolitan areas.

According to the economic survey from the Oregon State Bar, the gap is significant. The 2017 survey showed an Oregon lawyer could expect an average salary of \$105,000 per year. However,

See, **Shortage**/Page A6

Largest wave of pandemic thus far hits state

Oregon could ration medical care as case count spikes

By **GARY A. WARNER**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon is on a "red alert" of the growing wave of the omicron variant of COVID-19 that pushed the daily new case count to 10,451 Friday, Jan. 7, eclipsing the records set over the past four days.

"Once again, COVID-19 has regrouped and is marching across Oregon," said Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state chief epidemiologist, in a Friday press call.

With the new wave forecast to peak on Jan. 27 with 1,650 people in the hospital, the Oregon Health Authority issued a "crisis care" protocol to guide doctors on prioritizing possibly life-or-death care.

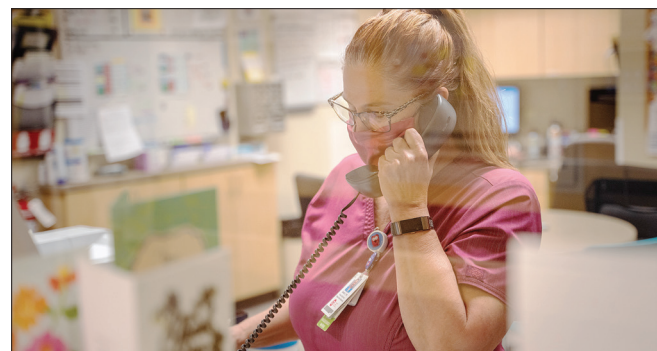
Based on a model already used by Washington and other states,

patients who would not survive if discharged have top priority.

Patients already under care take precedence over newly arriving cases of the same level. If a choice needs to be made between two patients in identical medical situations, the choice will be made at random using a system on OHA's website.

"This is a very difficult topic to consider and

See, **Spike**/Page A6



Grande Ronde Hospital house supervisor Danita Thamert answers a phone in the hospital's ICU on Monday, Aug. 30, 2021. Oregon is on a "red alert" of the growing wave of the omicron variant of COVID-19 that pushed the daily new case count to 10,451 Friday, Jan. 7, 2022.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 25 LOW Partly cloudy		Sunday 33/23 Mostly sunny
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La Grande, Oregon	



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PAINT, HARDWARE AND A NOODLE SHOP

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