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County OKs deal with Elgin for patrols

Elgin contract for law enforcement services ratified by Union County Board of Commissioners

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — It's official, a new six-year law enforcement contract between the Union County Sheriff's Office and the city of Elgin is in place.

The Union County Board of Commissioners voted to ratify the contract at its meeting on Wednesday, June 29, eight days after the Elgin City Council approved the contract on June 21. The city council did so after voting in May against a proposed

contract to retain the services of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

The council intended to reestablish Elgin's police department to replace the enhanced law enforcement services Elgin has been receiving from the Union County Sheriff's Office for about 10 years. Had the Elgin City Council not changed course, the Union



Bowen

County Sheriff's Office would have had to lay off two of the three deputies who currently serve Elgin. The deputy who would not have been laid off would have been transferred to an open position in the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen said after the vote he would be writing letters to offi-

cially tell the two deputies that their positions are secure.

"I will tell them that their jobs are no longer in jeopardy," Bowen said after the meeting.

Under the terms of the new contract, which takes effect July 1, Elgin will continue to receive a minimum of 420 hours of law enforcement services a month.

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Survey: Wildfire fears calm after spring rains

Poll gauges concerns of Oregon residents heading into wildfire season

By **MICHAEL KOHN**
The Bulletin

SALEM — Significant rainfall this spring noticeably greened up the Oregon countryside and appears to have calmed nerves across the state, according to a survey about wildfire danger conducted in June by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.

The survey, conducted from June 2-11, found that 60% of respondents felt wildfire was a threat to their local community. In May 2021, that number was 68%.

The wildfire perception survey interviewed 1,446 Oregon residents 18 years or older. The survey sought to gauge how concerned Oregon residents are heading into what officials have warned could be a dangerous wildfire season.

In mid-May Gov. Kate Brown warned that this year's fire season could be extreme due to drought and climate change. But May and June were relatively cool and wet in the Pacific Northwest, lowering drought levels across the region.

Oregon's only remaining swath of exceptional drought — the highest level of drought according to a U.S. drought monitor — is located in an area straddling Crook and Jefferson counties.

"Considering the extremely wet spring, it is not a major surprise that when asked about their area of Oregon, Oregonians' concern for wildfire has decreased a bit since May of last year," according to a statement from the polling group.

While the fear of fire danger in the short term has been slightly lowered, 88% of respondents expect wildfires to increase over the next 10 years. Nine out of 10 Oregonians (92%) see wildfires as a serious threat to "people living in Oregon."

However, not as many people believe they are in harm's way. Just six out of 10

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A CRITICAL LINK

Grande Ronde Radio Amateur Association members set to help in an emergency

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A group of Grande Ronde Valley ham radio operators are helping keep an iconic part of the past alive while securing Union County's future.

The individuals are the members of the Grande Ronde Radio Amateur Association, many of who use Morse code, a communication tool that was all the rage for much of the 1800s when the telegraph was the king of long range communication.

Morse code is used far less frequently today but many members of the Grande Ronde Radio Association are keeping their Morse code skills sharp because in an emergency sending radio messages via Morse code can be far faster and more effective than sending them via voice.

One reason is that less radio bandwidth is needed to send messages via Morse code and another is that it can be easier to understand them because they are simpler.

"With Morse code you don't have to deal with the complexity and nuance of voice," said Ted Ivester, of the GRRAA.

Ivester and other members of the club were hard



Dick Mason/The Observer

Joel Hinshaw of the Grande Radio Amateur Association listens for radio signals at Bird Track Springs Campground on Saturday, June 25, 2022.

at work keeping their Morse code skills sharp last month while participating in American Radio Relay League Field Day, an annual international event, at Bird Track Springs about 5 miles southwest of Hilgard State Park.

The amateur radio enthusiasts had a single primary objective — to prepare Union County to have a link to the outside world in the event of a disaster like an earthquake, flood or windstorm which could knock out all Internet, cellphone or landline communication in the Grande Ronde Valley.

Such a disaster could leave ham radios as the valley's only connection to the outside world.

"We would be the last line of communication," said GRRAA member Joel Hinshaw.

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Dick Mason/The Observer

Joel Hinshaw of the Grande Ronde Radio Amateur Association prepares to set up an antenna at Bird Track Springs Campground on Saturday, June 25, 2022, with the help of fishing line he cast.

MERA forest management project timeline currently unknown

Phase two of Red Apple Forest Management might happen earlier than originally planned

By **ISABELLA CROWLEY**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The second phase of the Red Apple Forest Management project at Mount Emily Recreation Area could happen earlier than anticipated, but the timeline is

still undecided, according to Doug Wright, director of Union County Public Works.

In June, the MERA Advisory Committee held a special session to discuss how the forest management plan would continue without Sean Chambers and to allow people time to air opinions. Chambers left his position as the Union County Parks coordinator in early June. Prior to his departure, he was the main point person from the county on the Red Apple project. In Chambers'

absence, Wright is acting as the project head until a new parks coordinator is hired.

"We're still working out details for the project and won't know more until the next MERA meeting in August," said Wright.

This uncertainty about the timeline is different from the message Wright shared at the special session. During the meeting, Wright announced the second phase of the forest management plan might

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Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald, File

The lush green foliage along a trail at the Mount Emily Recreation Area near La Grande on Wednesday, June 22, 2022, is evidence of a wet spring.



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