

# CONTRACT

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The city will pay Union County \$315,400 in 2022-23 for law enforcement services, \$337,603 in 2023-24 and \$350,771 in 2024-25 during the first three years of the pact.

The payments the city of Elgin will make during the final three years of the contract will be dependent on the cost of living increases granted to Union County's sheriff's deputies. The increases will be negotiated by the Union County Sheriff's Office with the Union County Law Enforcement Association. Increases

greater than 4% for materials and services would be negotiated between the city and county.

In another action item the Union County Board of Commissioners voted to adopt a total budget of \$58.447 million for 2022-23, up 14% from the 2021-22 budget. The spending plan calls for Union County to keep all of its positions and programs except for two corrections positions. The corrections officer positions are being cut due to rising personnel costs and because some revenue the county anticipated receiving for the positions did not materialize, according to Shelley Burgess, the administrative and budget officer for Union County.

Burgess said four corrections positions were added a year ago with approval of the budget committee and that two of these positions are now being cut. She said at the time the budget committee believed the county would receive grants and other funding that would help pay for the four positions.

"The grants and funding we were hoping for did not come in fully," Burgess said. Of the two positions to be cut, one is unfilled, which means the reductions will result in one layoff.



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

Deputy Morris Capers, with the Union County Sheriff's Office, on Friday, May 20, 2022, returns to his vehicle after checking out the Elgin Stampede Grounds during his patrol.

Also at the June 29 meeting, the board of commissioners voted to approve the distribution funding

from the Union County's Transient Room Tax, also known as its motel tax. The board voted to pro-

vide the Union County Fair Association with a grant of just more than \$26,000 for a bleacher replacement project, a total of \$30,000 to the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show for the first two phases of its exterior lighting project, \$6,500 for the 2022 Eastern Oregon Film Festival, \$3,000 for the city of Union's Fireworks Committee for this year's Fourth of July celebration and just more than \$2,200 for the Union County Chamber of Commerce for its crop tour video project.

The distributions approved by the board had all been recommended by Union County's Transient Room Tax Committee.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald, File

The view from a vantage point on the Mount Emily Recreation Area on Wednesday, June 22, 2022, extends east across the Grande Ronde Valley to Mount Fanny.

# MERA

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commence as early as August.

"People had a lot of reactions and none of it was good, a lot of surprise, a lot of worry," said Forrest Warren, MERA Advisory Committee chair.

The August timeline has since been put on pause, according to Wright.

The forest management project at MERA was introduced by Union County for improving forest health and reducing wildfire risk, as well as conducting logging for profit, with the proceeds going back into the recreation area. The plan was the subject of a back-and-forth debate months prior to the project starting and tension only grew after the first phase was completed last winter. Many citizens expressed concerns over how the logging was handled and the resulting damage to the area.

Wright acknowledged nobody in the county is happy with how the first 50 acres of logging went last winter. He explained the winter proved to be too unpredictable for the project, as the ground did not freeze enough to provide proper conditions.

"It's good that we got a 50-acre snapshot rather than a 300-acre one. That way the company can rectify those mistakes moving forward," Warren said.

## Summertime concerns

If the second phase of the Red Apple Forest Management project were to take place to August, concerns have been raised about the impact on locals who regularly use the trails and on

the tourism draw MERA provides to La Grande.

A lot of locals use the trails and throughout the summer there are youth programs at MERA, according to Tyler Brooks — a MERA Advisory Committee member and board member of the Blue Mountain Single Track Club. During the summer, the tracks club holds youth mountain biking events at the recreation area every Monday night and other people from the community put together events for youths at MERA, Brooks said. The club also puts on two races for adults, in August and October.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Warren and others.

"I hope that the county commissioners will work with the MERA Advisory Committee on a plan to manage this popular area in a way that works for everyone," said Nicole Howard, La Grande city councilor.

An additional concern is logging during fire season. Despite the large amount of rain that fell during the spring, vegetation has started to dry out and fuel conditions are rapidly changing with the recent summer weather, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry.

ODF announced on Tuesday, June 28, that fire season in the Northeast Oregon District began July 1. This means fire prevention regulations on industrial logging and forest management activities on state lands are now in place.

Warren explained that fire restrictions also would be followed of the MERA project if logging were to take place during fire season.



Dick Mason/The Observer

Ted Ivester of the Grande Ronde Radio Amateur Association listens for Morse code radio signals at Bird Track Springs Campground on Saturday, June 25, 2022.

# RADIO

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## Off the grid

Bird Track Springs Campground was an ideal site for the event because it forces radio operators to function in an environment in which they have no access to operational electrical outlets, just as they might during a natural disaster.

"It is off the grid," said GRRAA member Tyson Brooks.

Brooks said Field Days provide excellent learning opportunity when they can be conducted in places like Bird Track Springs.

"It is a simulation of what we need to do to run radios away from civilization," Brooks said.

Radio operators thus had to rely on batteries and electricity from solar panels and gas fueled generators to power their equipment.

Many of the operators set up their antennas with the help of fishing reels and poles. Operators loaded reels with fishing line and then cast it high into trees to help set up antenna wire. The antenna wire made it easier to reel in signals from throughout the United States and dis-



Dick Mason/The Observer

Jason Fouts, a member of the Grande Ronde Radio Amateur Association, prepares to cast fishing line into trees at Bird Track Springs Campground on Saturday, June 25, 2022. Fouts used the fishing line to help him set up antenna wire.

tant countries during the contest period that ran from 11 a.m. June 25 to 11 a.m. June 26.

GRRAA members made 790 contacts during Field Day. A total of 168 of the contacts were via Morse code, 451 were via voice and 171 digital connections, also described as computer-assisted radio.

A total of 446 contacts were from the 48 contiguous states, five were from Alaska and five were from radio operators in Hawaii. Contacts were made with radio operators in Canada

and other foreign countries, including Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, Qatar and Uruguay.

No contacts were made with radio operators in Ukraine. GRRAA member Mike Orcutt said many ham operators may be reluctant now to operator their radios because it would give away their location to Russia's military, which invaded Ukraine in February.

"They could triangulate their position, which could make them a target," he said.

## Waiting in line

Orcutt, who used a digital system to make contacts, said there were times when it seemed like everything was happening at once.

"Sometimes I would be making a contact and I would have three or four others waiting," Orcutt said, explaining that he could see that radio operators were in line via his computer screen.

Contacts between operators were just long enough to exchange bare bones information including the call signs of their club and their location. After an exchange was completed, operators would record the strength of the signal they received.

Brooks said people communicating via ham radio on Field Days do not tend to get to know each other well because exchanges are short. He said though that he has made many friends he first met over the air and knows of many others who have become radio buddies.

"Some people will meet over the radio and be friends for their rest of their lives even though they may never meet each other in real life," Brooks said.

# SURVEY

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respondents (60%) see wildfire as a very or somewhat serious threat in their local community. Five out of 10 people (53%) see wildfires as a direct threat to themselves and their families.

When asked about their greatest concerns over the impacts of fire, most Oregonians (83%) said they were worried about the health impacts of smoke. Loss of wildlife and fish habitat registered as the second-highest level of concern among Oregonians, with 82% saying they had great or moderate concern.

Eight out of 10 (79%) of respondents had moderate or great concern about the loss of public forestland.

"We already lost so many trees to logging, we should try to save as many as we can," said Mandee Seeley, a Deschutes County resident.

Survey results show that 75% of Oregonians agree with Johnson. The remaining respondents lean toward or agree with, the idea of allowing a wildfire to burn out naturally.

A respondent from Polk County, who declined to be named, was blunter when it comes to managing wildfire.

"We just can't let our state burn to the ground," she said.

Just how many Oregonians have had to evacuate due to wildfire? According to the survey, 19% of respondents said they have evacuated their homes due to wildfire. Some 43% of respondents said they have an evacuation plan in place.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is an independent, nonpartisan organization. The center partnered with Pamplin Media Group and the EO Media Group, which owns The Observer.

The survey has a margin of error of about 2.5%.

## Grande Ronde Hospital & Clinics proudly welcomes Emma Peiris, MD

Dr. Emma Peiris is a Primary Care Internist joining us at the GRH Regional Medical Clinic. She is board certified in Internal Medicine. Emma's practice focuses on general internal medicine with emphasis on older adults. She believes that building relationships with her patients and their families allows her to provide outstanding medical care. She enjoys guiding patients through the medical system and making sure they understand her recommendations and the recommendations made by their other doctors. A passion for rural healthcare and love for the outdoors brought Dr. Peiris to GRH. During her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family doing outdoor activities and playing complicated board games.



Emma Peiris, MD

Please help us welcome Dr. Peiris and her family to our community!!



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