

BLM eyes land purchase east of Boise

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

BOISE — The U.S. Bureau of Land Management wants to buy 275 acres east of Boise.

The Alta Harris Family Foundation offered the parcel to BLM. The agency said acquiring it would help preserve intact winter range for big-game animals, enhance protection of wildlife habitat and recreational uses, and preserve open space in the Boise foothills.

Mike Williamson, a BLM spokesman in Boise, said the agency does not have a specific wildfire-related goal associated with the proposed

acquisition, though buying the property would prevent future development and the expansion of the wildland-urban interface.

The agency would assume fire suppression and other related responsibilities for the parcel, which is adjacent to state-owned land and has a private road nearby.

“The big value for this property is that it is critical wintering range for mule deer and elk,” Williamson said.

Domestic sheep grazing occurs on adjacent BLM land in the Boise Foothills.

Williamson said if the new parcel is acquired, it will be evaluated to deter-



Capital Press File

A band of sheep grazes in the Boise foothills. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is considering buying land in the area.

mine if grazing would continue to take place on it, and how much. That would

which the parcel borders.

“So it is possible it will be considered for sheep grazing because it is adjacent to (grazing), but that wouldn’t be determined until there was a grazing permit renewal,” he said.

Money for the purchase would come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Williamson said the appraisal is underway and a purchase price is yet to be determined.

BLM is taking public comments through Jan. 7.

The agency said comments from members of the public, organizations and other interested parties help identify issues it may con-

sider in the environmental assessment, which the National Environmental Policy Act requires. Officials said comments are most helpful if they refer to specific issues, resources and actions that should be analyzed.

“The scoping process is an essential part of our planning process and ensures public involvement in the decision making process,” BLM Four Rivers Field Manager Brent Ralston said in a statement.

Comments should go to Ralston, 3948 Development Ave., Boise, Idaho 83705; or BLM_ID_FourRiversOffice@blm.gov.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Beef prices are helping drive up inflation not seen since the early 1980s.

Back to the early 1980s: Inflation hits 39-year high

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The annual inflation rate hit a 39-year high Dec. 10, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a year-over-year increase in the Consumer Price Index of 6.8%.

Energy and food prices led the way. Minus those two volatile categories, the inflation rate was 4.9%.

Central Washington orchardist April Clayton said her farm hasn’t benefited from higher food prices, but is paying more for fuel, chemicals and labor.

“We’re not seeing the increase in grocery stores reflected in returns on the farm,” she said. “Everything in the (supply) chain is going up, and it’s hitting us hard.”

The 6.8% inflation rate is the worst since June 1982. Other large contributors to inflation included housing, clothes, household furnishings, and new and used vehicles.

Energy costs overall rose 33%. Fuel oil rose 59%, gasoline 57.5% and electricity 6.5%.

Food prices increased 6.1%, with beef prices rising 20.9%, the most among major food categories.

Meat, poultry, fish and eggs increased 12.8%, while fruits and vegetables rose

4%. Dairy products went up 1.6%.

President Biden blamed inflation on the global pandemic and said the Build Back Better Act would help families pay for health care and child care.

“For anyone who, like me, is concerned about costs facing American families, passing BBB is the most immediate and direct step we can take to deliver,” he said in a statement.

White House Economic Council Director Brian Deese and Deputy Directors Sameera Fazili and Bharat Ramamurti blamed meat packers for rising meat prices.

Tyson Foods, JBS Food and other meat packers are profiting from an uncompetitive marketplace, the economic advisers claimed in a White House blog.

In response, the North American Meat Institute, which represents meat packers, said the White House was making a desperate bid to shift blame for inflation.

The Meat Institute said the White House was ignoring rising fuel costs, labor shortages and supply-chain problems.

“The White House Economic Council is again demonstrating its ignorance of agricultural economics and the fundamentals of supply

and demand,” Meat Institute President and CEO Julia Ann Potts said in a statement.

R-CALF CEO Bill Bullard, whose organization represents ranchers, endorsed the White House’s view. Cattle prices continue to slump, even as retail prices rise, he said.

“There is no question that the marketplace is broke and that the White House is correct,” Bullard said. “We are grateful that this administration has focused on this very serious problem.”

The CPI includes spending by 93% of the U.S. population, missing some rural residents and farm families.

Clayton, who operates an orchard with her husband, Mike, near Wenatchee, said the farm’s costs are rising faster than the 6.8% inflation rate.

Labor makes up about three-quarters of the orchard’s budget, and it must compete for workers with three larger nearby farms, she said. Piece-rate pay rises along with minimum wages guaranteed under state and federal laws, she said.

“All of this is having an effect on us,” Clayton said. Unlike some other manufacturers, farmers can’t be pass on the costs, she said. “Unfortunately, in agriculture that’s not something we can do.”

Meta seeks ways to boost water reserves in rural Oregon county

By **MICHAEL KOHN**
EO Media Group

PRINEVILLE, Ore. — Crook County is situated in one of the driest parts of the state — it’s one of two counties in Oregon to be completely in the highest level on the U.S. Drought Monitor. Now, one of the county’s biggest employers is trying to combat the drought with an aggressive water restoration program.

Facebook’s parent company, Meta, which operates a data storage center on the outskirts of Prineville, is implementing two projects it says will improve water availability in Crook County.

The social media giant says the projects will help it to achieve its water conservation goals, which include being “water positive” by 2030, meaning that it will return more water to the environment than it consumes at its facilities.

Meta, which also owns Oculus, Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp, plans to accomplish this feat by part-

nering with environmental groups and federal regulators to restore degraded habitats in Oregon and five other states. It is also upgrading its technologies to make its data centers more water efficient.

Technological developments in the last decade, as well as the use of outside air for cooling, have allowed Meta’s data centers “to operate 80% more water efficiently on average compared to the industry standard,” said Melanie Roe, of Meta.

“We see opportunities for additional gains in the coming years, particularly as our infrastructure grows, and we’ll need to develop water-efficient designs for different climates,” Roe added.

Meta is under a microscope in the places where it operates as its data centers use large amounts of water to cool their servers and maintain optimal humidity levels. In Prineville, data centers get their water from the municipality.

In Prineville last year, Meta used 117.5 million gal-

lons — enough water to fill 178 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Meta’s use of water is increasing. The data center, a collection of buildings, is still under construction and when complete will be a 4.6 million-square-foot campus.

To counter that water use, Meta is helping to fund an aquifer recharge project with the city of Prineville. A second project is restoring the degraded Ingram Meadow in the Ochoco National Forest.

Meta says the aquifer recharge project utilizes the natural storage found underground in the city to store water during cooler, wetter winters. A portion of the water can be recovered during hotter summer periods when water is less available.

The project, which became operational earlier this year, works by conveying a portion of winter stream flows in the Crooked River to the local groundwater supply through injection and extraction wells.

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