

Local

County Commissioners: Veterans' services, B2H extension letter on agenda

By Todd Arriola
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The Baker County Board of Commissioners held its regular bi-monthly session on Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 9 a.m., in the Commissioners Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse.

Present from the Board were Bill Harvey, Chairman, Tim Kerns, Commissioner, and Heidi Martin, Executive Assistant. Mark Bennett, Commissioner, was absent.

For Citizen Participation, Arthur Sappington, Coordinating Officer of the Jefferson Mining District, was the first individual given the floor. He discussed emails he had sent to the Board, concerning the legality of Oregon Senate Bill 838, signed into law in August 2013, affecting small-scale placer mining (involving minerals mostly dispersed by sources such as rivers or settling ponds) in Oregon by limiting the issuing of permits.

He mentioned there are some California court cases, which once resolved, could affect the resolution of mining issues in Oregon. A major issue is the legality of the State of Oregon prohibiting or limiting an activity, while federal law allows it, such as suction dredging, he said.

Ken Anderson, retired mining geologist and engineer, was also present to read a letter to the Board voicing his concerns about access and use of the land, and the restrictions on that use.

He talked about the role farmers, ranchers, fishermen, miners and others play in harvesting from the land, and how government agencies have been, and are placing too many restrictions on natural resources, limiting economic benefits.

Ed Trindle, local rancher, was present to discuss with the Board some issues with property the County owns in the Lime area.

He said that some fencing needs to be installed, and he brought up the question of who exactly would be paying for the fencing (there are cattle in the area).

Harvey said to Trindle that the Board just recently began discussions about the property, and that it



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Rick Gloria (far left) updated the County Commissioners on local, available veterans' services.

would have to be inspected to determine where and how fencing would be installed, what is to be done with the property, etc.

The minutes from the January 7, 2015 Commission session were approved, with a motion from Kerns, and a second from Harvey.

Rick Gloria, Veteran Services Officer (VSO) for Baker County, was present to give an update about veteran services to the Board.

He discussed VetraSpec, a secure, online management system implemented by the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) three years ago, which streamlines the veteran claims process, by allowing VSOs to access their data from any computer with internet access, and by storing information in a central location.

Gloria said currently, there are 107 veterans from Baker County enrolled in VetraSpec, and around 2,000 veterans here, representing about 12 % of the total population of the county.

He said that just with these 107 claims resolved, compensation recovered for the veterans was in the amount of \$195,409.

He said that Baker County veteran services are advertised using sources such as the internet, and local media, and it is working, considering the responses he's receiving.

Gloria discussed with the Board the Transportation of Veterans in Highly Rural Areas Grant Agreement, # 2014-HRTG-0114, between the Oregon

Department of Veterans' Affairs and Baker County, in the amount of \$45,000.

Gloria said that the local Disabled American Veterans (DAV) van has been available to transport veterans to Boise and Caldwell to the VA facilities, but it isn't wheelchair accessible, and isn't available for transport to locations west of Baker City.

Because of this, Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc. will have a van available, which is wheelchair accessible, to transport veterans throughout eastern Oregon, including to the La Grande VA clinic, and to the VA facilities in Boise and Caldwell.

For information concerning the transportation service, or other veteran services, Gloria can be contacted at 541-523-8223.

With a motion from Kerns and a second from Harvey, the Board approved an agreement between Advantage Dental Clinics, LLC, of Redmond, Washington, and the Baker County Health Department.

This agreement includes a collaboration between the parties to "pilot" a dental screening project within the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program.

With a motion from Kerns and a second from Harvey, the Memorandum of Understanding Between Baker County and Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc., and the aforementioned Grant Agreement # 2014-HRTG-0114 were approved.

With a motion from

Kerns and a second from Harvey, a CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) Sub-Recipient Agreement between Baker County and the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD) was approved, concerning group training opportunities for micro-enterprises and entrepreneurs in Baker, Union and Wallowa counties, for low and moderate income members.

The Board approved a letter from the Commission, addressed to Don Gonzales, Manager, Vale District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), officially requesting a 90 day extension to the comment period on the Idaho Power Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line Project, the deadline of which is currently March 19, 2015. Several reasons were cited for this request in the letter.

The Board, with a motion from Kerns and a second from Harvey, will continue until the next regular session the discussion concerning Order No. 2015-103, An Order Directing The Baker County Sheriff To Make Sale Of County Property; Fixing The Minimum Price And Providing A Portion Of The Conditions And Terms Of Sale. This is a foreclosure property located at 1244 3rd Street, with back taxes in the amount of \$4,836.05.

The next regular session is scheduled for Wednesday, February 4, 2015, 9 a.m., in the Commissioners Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse.

Radon, Cascadia events topics for Oath Keepers

By Kerry McQuisten
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The Baker County Chapter of the Oath Keepers met Tuesday evening in the Council Chambers at City Hall, where they will continue to meet monthly every third Tuesday. With about 35 present, the group's meetings appear to be gaining in popularity.

County Commission Chair Bill Harvey gave the first presentation, a general update on his first two weeks in office, which included attending a meeting in Pendleton with the Forest Service, and a difference of views with City staff and Council regarding watershed management issues.

The primary focus of the meeting, though, included two presentations: the first from Jason Yencopal of Baker County Emergency Management, the second from Robin Nudd of the Baker County Health Department.

Yencopal reported on Oregon's preparedness efforts regarding the danger of a "Cascadia event." The Cascadia subduction zone is a convergent plate boundary reaching from the top of Vancouver Island down to the northern part of California, separating the Juan de Fuca and North America plates.

Said Yencopal, "That's dealing with a 9.0 magnitude earthquake off the coast—what that would do statewide." He explained that Oregon, for emergency management purposes, is divided up into the coastal region, the I-5 corridor, and then eastern Oregon.

Yencopal recently met in La Grande with seven other emergency managers from across the state to work on moving a plan forward. The plan in progress will also reach outside Oregon, as managers collaborate with Washington State. Eastern Oregon may also work with Idaho.

"If a Cascadia event happened, and it's at that 9.0, we would feel something in Baker County," he said.

Dick Fleming, who was in the audience, provided some additional geologic knowledge. "Every 300-400 years, there's been a 9.0 or higher on the coastal fault ... We're overdue," he concluded.

Yencopal says a statewide training exercise is planned in 2016 for such an event. He said, "A 9.0 over there will probably be a 3-something in Baker County, and that shake is gonna last from three to five minutes. So that's where this building (City Hall), the Courthouse—that's where you might see some damage because of that prolonged shaking."

While the County has recommended families keep at least a 72-hour emergency kit on hand, Yencopal says the new plan may expand to recommendations of a two-week or even three-week kit, which is the level of preparedness he would like to see for Baker County residents.

Concern was also expressed in the audience about what would happen should a quake take out Mason Dam. "In Baker City, we have about an hour and a half before the flood hits town," Yencopal said. "And it depends—some of that could even be longer depending on how much debris is collected."

Emergency Management is also making progress on a Spring Preparedness Expo, and is working with Lincoln County Emergency Management toward possibly borrowing their expo trailer. Yencopal also hopes to bring various preparedness vendors on board.

Robin Nudd of the Baker County Health Department then took the floor and spoke about a recent statewide press release that outlined the risk factors determined for radon gas for specific cities. As reported in last week's issue, Baker City ranks at moderate risk, while neighboring La Grande is at high risk.

"This time of year is the best time to check for it (radon) in your homes, because you've got your house locked up tight trying to stay warm," Nudd said. She explained that radon is "a naturally occurring gas that comes up through the soil." Radon is a known cancer-causing agent, and is especially proven to cause lung cancer even in non-smokers.

She said if local hardware stores don't have kits in stock, they can be purchased online for around \$15, and both long-term and short-term testing kits are made.

Nudd said there are businesses that can deal with unhealthy radon levels in homes if detected.

The Oath Keepers also announced some additions to the local leadership of the group. Bob Nelson of Baker City has come aboard to head up security and tactics.

Michele Cooper is the new team leader for administrative tasks.

Kody Justus will move into more of an overall lead position, organizing and running meetings in place of Tom Sherwood and Jim Iler, who will focus on the Halfway/Richland area group.

Oath Keepers is a national organization dedicated to protecting Constitutional rights while encouraging community preparedness and self-sufficiency. The Baker County chapter launched in summer of 2014.



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Robin Nudd spoke to the effects of radon and how to obtain an at-home testing kit.



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Jason Yencopal discussed the local effects of a Cascadia event.

Flue fire ignites home

In a growing list of Baker County flue fires this winter, Tuesday afternoon around 4:30 p.m., a single-wide mobile home on Miller Avenue in South Baker caught fire.

American Red Cross - Cascades Region assisted one adult and one dog.

The fire occurred at Mike Misuria's home 2246 Miller Avenue.

Red Cross provided food, clothing, lodging, comfort kit, and information about disaster mental health and disaster health services.

Baker City man arrested in Wheeler County for meth

On Sunday, January 18, Wheeler County Sheriff's Office received information regarding a suspicious vehicle in the area of Highway 26.

A Sheriff's Office patrol located the vehicle parked with the passenger passed out in the driver's seat on Highway 26 at Milepost 86.

During the course of the investigation a large amount of Methamphetamine and over two pounds of Marijuana were located in the vehicle.

The sole occupant, Aaron Curtis Lott of Baker City, was arrested and lodged at Grant County Detention Center on Distri-



Photo Courtesy of the Wheeler County Sheriff

A large amount of Methamphetamine and over two pounds of Marijuana were located in this vehicle.

bution of Methamphetamine and Distribution of Marijuana.