

Local

NRAC: BLM proposes 2-million-acre designation in Oregon to protect Sage-Grouse

• MEMBER KERNS CONCERNED ABOUT FUTURE COORDINATION MEETING WITH THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

BY TODD ARRIOLA
Todd@TheBakerCountyPress.com

The Baker County Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) met on Tuesday, November 17, 2015, at 3 p.m., in the Commission Chambers of the Courthouse, joined by Jason Spriet, Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) Eastern Region Manager.

Present were NRAC Chair Doni Bruland, NRAC Coordinator Eric Wuntz, and NRAC members Ken Anderson, Jan Kerns, Cynthia Long, Lyle Defrees, Eileen Gyllenberg, Chuck Chase, Kody Justus, Jan Alexander, Alice Knapp, George Keister, Laurene Chapman, and Craig Ward. Also in attendance was Craig Bruland, the sole representation for the public.

Doni Bruland brought the meeting to order, and passed out copies of the agenda, and reminded those present that the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) coordination government-to-government meeting with the County Commissioners will be held on Tuesday, November 24, at 9 a.m., in the Commission Chambers of the County Courthouse.

Kerns expressed concerns about the coordination meeting with ODF, stating that the group lacks experience with working with ODF, and that there don't seem to be issues associated with the agency.

Wuntz responded that, mainly, the discussion would be regarding fire prevention issues, and Bruland said that ODF would be bringing the group up to speed about what the agency is doing. Champman voiced concerns about the scheduling of the ODF coordination meeting, during Thanksgiving week.

Bruland discussed with



Jason Spriet of the Oregon Water Resources Department addressed the NRAC on Tuesday.

the group the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Notice of Proposed Withdrawal to designate about 19,000,000 acres of federal land—about 2,000,000 of that in Oregon, in Harney, Lake and Malheur counties—as "Sagebrush Focal Areas," which would prohibit all new mining claims in the same areas for the next 20 years, affecting miners in Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada.

The BLM states that the proposal is needed to protect the Greater Sage-Grouse from "adverse effects of locatable mineral exploration and mining." Doni said the comment period deadline for this proposal is December 23, 2015, and she and several members expressed the importance of submitting comments.

Bruland asked for any public input, and, there was none noted, during the initial segment of the meeting.

The minutes from the Tuesday, October 27, 2015 meeting were approved, with a motion from Kerns, and a second from Long.

Spriet was present to speak to the committee about the OWRD, first explaining the management area, which is Baker, Harney, Malheur, Union, and Wallowa counties, with

the Eastern Region office locate in Baker City. He discussed a new OWRD voluntary, place-based planning program, which is available to help communities with understanding and meeting Oregon's in-stream and out-of-stream water needs at the regional, basin, or watershed level. He said that \$750,000 is available to help implement the program.

Kerns noted that she would scan the flyer with details about the program, and send copies to members, and the group expressed an interest in participating.

Keister asked Spriet about conflicts with water, between residential use and agricultural use, and Spriet said occasionally, that's the case.

Keister expressed concerns about the available amount of water via the City's watershed, and Spriet discussed this issue, but he was unsure about the amount, though, there is a limit, he said.

Alexander asked whether there is critical ground water in Baker City, and Spriet said no, but there is an area in Cow Valley. Alexander asked about possible reasons for the State to deny new wells, and Spriet said there could be reasons such as contamination, etc.

Bruland said she left the

Water and Water Rights section on the agenda for this meeting, primarily because Spriet was present to discuss any questions regarding his input and edits, however, there would not be a vote on including the section, because public notice hadn't been submitted yet.

Anderson initiated a discussion on the topic of mining, and his Mining section proposal, first explaining the importance of mining, and the impacts to the local and other economies.

He voiced his concerns regarding issues with attempting to work with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the issues with mining regulations.

Anderson discussed improvements made in mining processes, job opportunities, the large amount of mineral deposits, and, the need to improve general opinions about mining.

He and Alexander debated over mining permit issuance time limits and regulations, and Long suggested that the USFS be reminded to follow its own regulations, and the regulations don't necessarily need to be changed.

Alexander highlighted concerns with time limits and permits by stating that miner Ed Hardt has been waiting 15 years for a resolution to issues regarding his Plan of Operations.

Kerns made a motion to ask Alexander to draft a new Mining section which will include references to NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), where applicable, and 228 (Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Subsection 228), with a second from Long, and the motion carried.

Bruland said that the next NRAC meeting will be held in January, because the December meeting has been canceled.

She said items on the agenda will include a Mining section discussion, and a Water and Water Rights section discussion.

The meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 26, at 3 p.m., in the Commission Chambers.

Huntington man charged with sex abuse

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The search of the house, garage and property continued until around 9:30 p.m. with not less than three law enforcement vehicles outside the property at any given time.

In the press release that was released as promised from the Baker County Sheriff's Department later that night, Ash stated that Robert Lee Witter was charged with Sex Abuse 1, which carries a full bail of \$100,000, Furnishing Sexually Explicit Material to a Minor (Luring a Minor) with bail at \$7,500 and Private Indecency, with bail also at \$7,500.

On Tuesday, November 17th at about 7:30 p.m., the Baker County Sheriff's search team again arrived at Witter's residence with trailer in tow, and upon their arrival escorted a woman and young boy, whose relationships to Witter were not disclosed, from the home while deputies again searched the house and grounds well into the night.

As the woman was getting into her car to leave the scene she said, "If you really want to do something in this situation then say a prayer."

Ash estimated that deputies spent another five hours on the second search, and says he doesn't anticipate additional searches to occur.

The charges were initiated by a 13-year-old female resident of Huntington whose name has also not been released due to her age. Thus far, no other victims have stepped forward. According to multiple residents, Witter had frequent contact with a number of children.

Witter is currently in the Baker County Jail awaiting arraignment in Baker County Circuit Court on the above charges; however, Ash said Wednesday that he believes there is a high likelihood additional charges to be added.

Witter is a registered sex offender in Oregon with a conviction for Attempted Sex Abuse 1 in Multnomah County from 2004.

In 2014, according to Ash, the Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue Team rescued Witter from the Pedro Mountain area after he'd crashed his ATV.

"This is a very involved case," said Ash. "We're processing it as fast as we can, but we really want to do a thorough job."

Parents with any concerns are encouraged to contact the Baker County Sheriff's Department.

Baker City man killed in Hwy. 7 crash

On November 14, 2015, at about 6:43 p.m., the Oregon State Police Southern Command Center received a report of a vehicle crash on Hwy. 7 at milepost 48 (near Baker City).

OSP Troopers from the La Grande Area Command and Baker County Sheriff's Office responded to the scene. Preliminary information indicates a 2005 Toyota Camry, operated by Kenneth Ammons Jr., age 69, from Baker City, was traveling southbound when it left the roadway for unknown reasons, traveled about 50 yards before rolling several times.

Ammons was transported by ambulance to the Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City where he was pronounced deceased.

This accident marks the second fatality on Hwy. 7 within a week.

Veterans memorial grants available

The Oregon Heritage of Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is offering grants for the construction or restoration of veterans and war memorials.

"The program is designed to honor Oregon's soldiers and veterans by commemorating their service to the country," said Kuri Gill, coordinator for the program. "Local governments may apply to build or repair monuments on public land."

New monuments should recognize veterans and wars not already recognized. Grants for restoration could be used for broken monuments, missing elements of monuments, or the related design elements of monuments for veterans or earlier wars such as World War I.

Details and the application information are available at <http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/FINASST/Pages/grants.aspx>.


The application deadline is Dec. 15.

For more information, contact Kuri Gill at (503) 986-0685 or Kuri.Gill@oregon.gov

Driver's name released in fatality

The family of the deceased driver from the single-vehicle fatality crash into the Powder River on Hwy 7 near milepost 44.5 on November 11 outside Baker City has been notified.

The driver of the 1988 Dodge Aries was identified as Dale Gleason Larkin, age 51, of Prairie City.



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