

Outdoor Rec / Local

LEGAL NOTICES

DISTRICT MEETING NOTICE

Medical Springs Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors will hold its regular monthly board meeting at Pondosa Station, on Monday, February 20, 2017 at 7 PM to discuss fire department operations. Equal opportunity provider.

Snow slides

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The Rye Valley slide was the biggest one Smith had seen in his 30-year career, he said, and, "...when it slides off there and hits the road, it packs, and it gets just as hard as concrete. You break out chunks half the size of the backhoe we were digging it out with. It compresses bit time, when it hits that road... We just had to dig it, because it was so big, and so long, that there wasn't any piece of equipment that was going to get through it..." He said that a bulldozer could have been used, but transporting it to the location would have proven difficult and time-consuming, and steel tracks aren't the best option on packed snow.

Smith said, "Most of them, they don't ever make it to Dispatch (the Burnt River slide, about a mile below Clark's Creek, was the sole one reported to Baker County Consolidated Dispatch, by Pam Haney, Three Valleys Ranch reported the Rye Valley slide, about four miles from I-84, and passersby reported the others, he said). They just call here, we go clean them up,

and nobody ever knows it happened." Half-joking, he said, "You would call the person who's going to clean it up."

Smith said that the Road Department generally sees the most issues in the Morgan Creek area, along Snake River Road, because of the steep slopes. Three of the slides on Thursday were in that area, with two toward Donner Creek, and the other two on Friday closer to Richland.

"We haven't had that much snow on those hills in years. I can remember back in the late 80s and 90s, it was an every day occurrence... We just haven't had the snow in the last ten, fifteen years, like we had twenty, twenty-five, thirty years ago. And, Snake River Road, you know, there's eighteen to twenty inches of snow down there, too. And, even the lower land has that much snow, so, you lay that much snow on those steep slopes, and, as soon as it warms a little bit, they just delaminate. They'll bring down full sagebrush, and sticks, and rocks the size of basket balls. They're pretty violent, when they happen," Smith said, though, he noted there was no damage caused by the slides.

Smith spoke about the major effort to battle drifting snow, and to keep roads open. "It's been a good old-fashioned winter, for sure," he said. On the plus side, he said, the new,

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thicker grader blades the Department had purchased are working well, and, other than a transmission issue on one of the graders, there haven't been any major breakdowns this season yet.

Unlike other preventive measures, Smith understandably couldn't offer any kind of community warnings, because, "You can't avoid it, and, you can't plan for it... You never know when they're going to happen. Noise can cause them, an engine breaking on a truck, causing vibrations, guns--anything can trigger them."

He said that February 15 is historically the "out of the woods" moment, when plowing roads tapers off for the season, making way for the next chapter--water from the melting snow. "Believe me, this year, with as much snow as we've had, there will be a next chapter. You just don't know--it could come off slow. It's up to a higher power. If it comes off easy and slow, and, at least sheds the valley snow, and, starts walking it up the hill, we'll be okay... What kills us is, if it starts staying up above freezing at night... As long as it freezes back at night (after getting up to the 30s or 40s, that will bring it off slow," he said.

"We've had way more compliments, than we've had complaints—it's been quite refreshing. People are really appreciative... We've been burning the

candle at both ends," Smith said. This year, staff included twelve regular Department personnel, plus two part-time in Halfway, two part-time in Baker, and one part-time in Unity, with an additional two who could be called in to assist, when needed.

Charles Green Road, which intersects with McCarty Bridge and Conn Road, north of Baker, was the only closed road noted, and it had been in that status for about a month, however, he said there are no residences located along it (he noted there are hay stacks). This is typical during the winter season, since there is frequent drifting, but he expected it to be open again by this week, or the next.

Smith, expecting more slides, said, "There's still a bunch of snow... As soon as that temperature gets to the right point, they'll fall again... If you happen to come across one, where the road's closed, give the Road Department a call, and we'll get out there as quickly as we can. Obviously, if you get trapped (blocked by slides while in a vehicle), we'll be there immediately."

In non-emergency situations, Smith said, the Department may need to wait until the next day to clear the slide, depending on timing.

The Road Department, at 3050 E Street, can be contacted at 541-523-6417.

Mayors Council luncheon held in Huntington



Eileen Driver / The Baker County Press

City Mayors throughout Baker County braved the snow to attend a luncheon last week.

BY EILEEN DRIVER

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For those who could plow their way out of their cities on January 26, the Mayors Council Luncheon held in Huntington at the VFW Hall was very informative.

Hosted by Huntington's new Mayor, Candy Howland, who has stepped into the Mayor's position with plenty of problems to deal with right off the get go due to the harsh winter, the meeting was attended by representatives from cities throughout Baker County.

First up on the agenda was city updates.

Mayor Sheila Farwell of Halfway was the first to tell of her city's struggles this winter. She reported that Halfway has lost 36 buildings due to collapse from the heavy snow and ice including the Exhibit Hall at the fairgrounds. They declared a State of Emergency on January 25. Sheila Farwell who has been Mayor of Halfway for 8 years has major concerns about the flooding to come when the melt does come and also told of their current project to get their fire hydrants dug out.

Halfway's sewer project had to be put on hold for the winter and they are worried about it being able to resume on time due to the weather.

Huntington's Mayor Howland reported that the city has received help from Baker County Emergency Management who arranged for a DOC work crew to come and dig out Huntington's fire hydrants and sewer drains. Huntington who declared a State of Emergency on January 19th has also had numerous buildings, carports and outbuildings collapse.

Mayor Howland urged everyone to make sure gas meters are also dug out as the cannot vent properly if covered shutting down the gas flow and leaving people without heat.

Robert Armbruster, Sumpter City Councilman, reported that Sumpter has 117" of snowfall standing at four feet and has also declared a state of emergency. He also stated that Sumpter has already depleted their snow removal funds.

He also stated that Sumpter has a new Mayor, Mayor Cary Clarke, who was elected as a write-in along with two new City Councillors, one of whom declined to serve so they are one short and hoping to appoint someone at the next City Council meeting.

After all the turmoil, Sumpter has endured he is hopeful that they now have a functional government in Sumpter. Armbruster also told the assembly that two marijuana dispensaries have opened this week in Sumpter although he is sceptical about how much traffic they will get seeing as how far off the beaten path Sumpter is.

Mike Downing, Baker City Councillor and Acting Mayor, revealed that Baker City had also declared a state of emergency on January 24 and are working hard to get the streets passable.

They have reached an agreement with DEQ on septic issues and currently have two openings on the Baker City Council.

Richland Mayor Mike Patterson, who also only has been on the job for 3 weeks said his city is experiencing the same snow problems as everyone else. He also believes the new City Council seems to be very forward thinking and will function well. His major concerns for the future are the possible traffic problems they expect when Idaho Power gets their new boat launch near Swedes' Landing completed. This will cause their busiest street to become even more busy and they are concerned it won't be able to handle the additional traffic. Richland has been directed by DEQ to take frequent water samples, over the next year, from Eagle Creek which will most likely result in a mandate to install a new water purification system.

Mayor Patterson also stated that Richland will be celebrating it's 100 year anniversary on March 27 of this year and they are not sure yet what form the celebration will take.

The second agenda item the County update was reported by County Commissioner Bill Harvey who informed the assembly that Baker County is working 24/7 to keep the roads open and are very concerned about the weather impact and the results of the coming snow and ice melt. So they are also working on preparing for what's to come.

He also could not stress enough the need to prepare for the massive crowds expected to arrive in the Baker County for the Eclipse on August 21, 2017.

SEE MAYORS COUNCIL
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Another snow plow wrecks

On January 31st, 2017 at approximately 12:34 p.m. Troopers from the Pendleton Area Command responded to a motor vehicle crash on Interstate 84 eastbound near milepost 225.

Investigation revealed an Oregon Department of Transportation snow plow operated by Ryan McLaughlin, age 35, of Pendleton Oregon was traveling eastbound in the fast lane, in the act of plowing, when a 1999 Freightliner-commercial motor vehicle operated by Bryon Kilmer, age 38, of Sweet Home Oregon attempted to pass the snow plow on the right.

While attempting to pass, the commercial motor vehicle struck the snow plow on the passenger side plow wing causing the snow plow to enter the center median and roll onto its side.

Both involved vehicles suffered damage and had to be towed from the scene. No injuries were reported in the crash.

The operator of the commercial motor vehicle was cited for Unsafe Passing

on the Right. The Oregon State Police and Oregon Department of Transportation remind drivers that it is unlawful to pass snowplows on the right while they are in the act of plowing.

Below are tips from the Oregon Department of Transportation on actions drivers should take when they encounter snow plows during winter driving conditions.

Keep a safe distance from plows and sanders. It's illegal to pass a snowplow on the right on state highways.

On most Oregon highways, snowplows have "wing" plows that stick out more than eight feet from the right front edge of the truck. The snow being plowed or blown off the road can contain rocks and other debris that can damage vehicles.

Drivers who try to pass on the right when a snowplow is in operation run the risk of damaging their vehicles, hitting the snowplow or running off the road and into a snow bank or guardrail.

Trying to pass a plow



Submitted Photo

This plow, which wrecked near Pendleton, is the third ODOT plow to do so along I-84 this winter.

on the left also has its problems.

The road behind the snowplow is in much better condition than the road ahead. If conditions are severe enough to require the attention of a snowplow, drivers should use extra care when trying to accelerate and pass other vehicles.

Ruts in the snow can grab tires; icy conditions make it difficult to control any vehicle at higher speeds.

Drivers should give winter maintenance vehicles such as plows and sanders a wide berth.

They do not travel at high speeds and other vehicles quickly overtake them.

Plows and sanding trucks pull over periodically to let traffic pass.

The best advice is to stay at least three car lengths behind and give yourself more time to get where you are going.

Public Works asks people to run water

The Baker City Public Works Department is asking Baker City water customers to run a thin stream of water (size of a pencil lead) at a faucet in their home or business as a preventative measure to keep service lines and meters from freezing.

The cold temperatures

have forced frost deep into the ground to the depth of many service lines.

To encourage cooperation in this effort a credit of two (2) units of water will be reflected on the spring meter read for customers.

A unit of water is 748 gallons.

A continuous thin stream of water will use approximately 39 gallons/day or 1.6 units of water for a month.

The City asks that customers continue running water for the next few weeks or until temperatures are consistently warmer and frost depth

moves back toward the ground surface.

The running of the water can start immediately.

Citizens with more questions can contact Public Works Director Michelle Owen at 541.524.2031 or mowen@bakercity.com, or visit City Hall on First Street.