

Fed money loss hurts

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

Josephine County faces potentially tough times in light of discontinued federal funding.

However, several other Oregon counties find themselves in highly similar situations, with no simple solutions in sight.

Neighboring Curry County has a property tax rate just slightly higher than Josephine County's, at 59-cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. But Curry, with a population of around 21,700, also has a very limited tax base.

Like Josephine County, a majority of Curry County's land is owned by the federal government. The county collects slightly more than \$1 million per year in taxes, and more than half of its general fund came from those federal dollars, according to Curry County Commissioner Marlyn Schafer.

"Out of our \$7.7 million budget, over \$4 million was this money," Schafer said. "As far as I'm concerned, we're bankrupt without those funds."

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Sen. Wyden vows strong O&C battle

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U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) addressed several issues currently being considered by Congress during a public forum in Grants Pass City Hall on Friday, Feb. 23.

The Iraq War, federal payments to rural counties and Wyden's health-care proposal dominated the discussion.

Dan Shepard from the Grants Pass Irrigation District thanked Wyden for helping to fund removal of Savage Rapids Dam. Wyden pledged his continued support for the project.

He also addressed the O&C county payments issue, saying that since its passage in 2000, the Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act has brought \$1.5 billion to the state.

"I think the program makes just as much sense today," Wyden said. Wyden, who chairs the Senate Forestry Committee, said that securing those funds for rural Oregon counties was his "top priority."

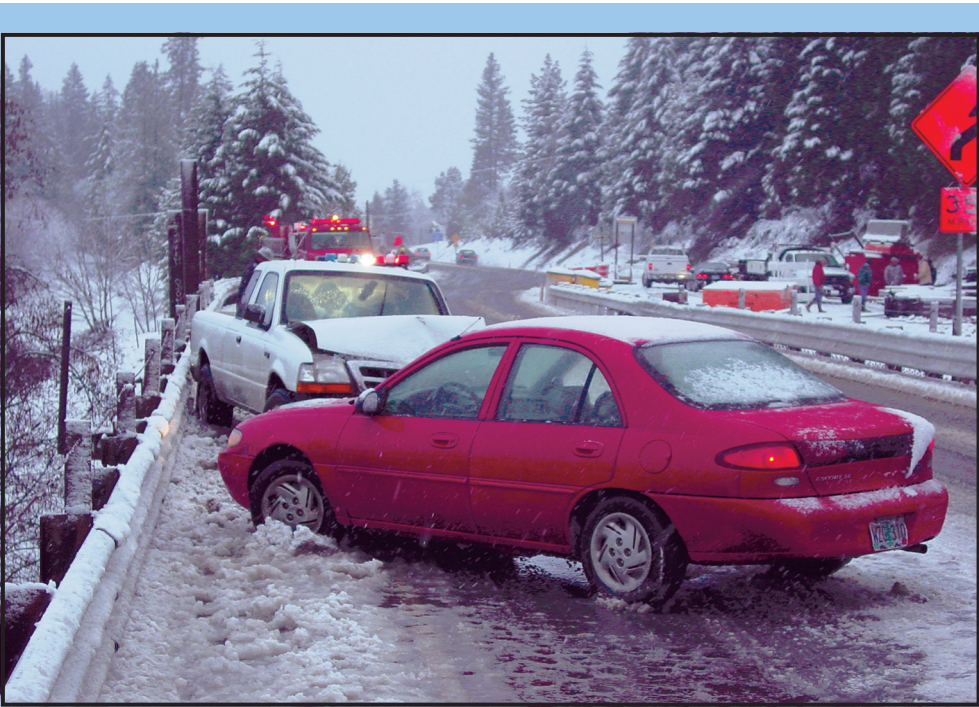
"On my watch, we're not going to lose the rural counties in this state," Wyden said.

Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho), who co-sponsored the original Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act, has indicated that he wants to change the funding formula in order to attract broader legislative support.

According to a Feb. 16 press release from Craig's office, the Idaho senator said that the 2000 law was "designed to be transitional." Wyden said he did not agree with Craig's public statements on the matter.

"I never indicated in

offset"



A snow-stopper!

Snowfall that began Wednesday, Feb. 21 has continued this week, causing traffic accidents and power outages. Emergency personnel are dealing with the situations as they arise. Numerous crashes have occurred on many area roadways. (Photos by Dale & Elaine Sandberg/I.V. Fire District Media Dept.)



Some 50,000 Caves visitors leave behind much lint

Small-scale cleanup by volunteers from two grotto groups spruce up attraction, locate 1880s names

A volunteer group from Seattle spent the weekend of Feb. 24 and 25 at Oregon Caves National Monument conducting restoration work, and their efforts did more than make the cave cleaner.

Their work is essential for obtaining funding for improving and protecting the cave environment.

"Without groups like this coming to the monument and donating time, we may not be able to qualify for funding we need to get projects done," said John Roth, resource specialist at the monument for nearly 18 years.

He was referring to the requirements for "challenge cost-share" grants, which stipulate that applicants are obliged to contribute a share of the cost to qualify for receiving money for a project. Volunteer work counts toward this contribution.

Groups like this are also considered to be partners in the project, and this leverages additional strength when applying for grants.

"The more partners you can show are working with you the more likely you will get the grant," Roth added.

Eleven of the 15-member work crew came from the Cascade Grotto, a Washington state branch of the National Speleological

Society (NSS). Four other members came from the Oregon Grotto based near Portland.

The group was coordinated by Hester Mallonée, the conservation chairman of the Seattle-based grotto club. She has been organizing volunteer groups to come to Oregon Caves for

who has been overseeing educational programming and cave tours at the monument for 10 years.

"You can demonstrate this for yourself," he said, "by standing near a bright light with a dark background, and brush back and forth on the shoulder of your shirt or jacket for a couple of

ing that the cleaning has led to a real sense of discovery.

"When we cleaned a thick layer of dirt and lint off one formation, we found some signatures with dates," she said. "The dates were from the late 1800s, and I wonder if anyone even knew they were there."

The group spent the weekend in the upper two floors of historic Oregon Caves Chalet, the building used for housing seasonal staff. Staff live in the upper two floors and the visitor center is on the first floor.

The group departed on Sunday for home, but Mallonée and her daughter stayed for another two days to continue work. Their stay was extended unexpectedly when snowfall made it dangerous for them to drive down the narrow, curved road from the monument to Cave Junction.

"Staying in the historic building is extremely cool," said Hester, who appeared to be energized by the scenic landscape of snow covered historic buildings and trees near the cave entrance. "We'll be back again next year," she promised.

Mallonée first became interested in Oregon Caves in 2002 when she painted an illustration of a formation called Paradise Lost. Her painting won the Blue Ribbon Award from the National Speleological Society in 2005. More of her art was

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Hester Mallonée and Rosemary Mallonée (Photo by Roger Brandt)

the past four years.

"Most of our work involves small-scale cleaning such as cleaning lint left on formations," said Mallonée. The group focused on cleaning two sections of the cave, which will be used as part of a study on cave-adapted life later this year.

Lint removal is no small task.

"Each year, about 50,000 visitors take a tour through Oregon Caves, and each of these people leave behind an assortment of things to include lint and hair," said Roger Brandt,

CJ cable TV situation examined. See page 5.

Plans office cuts its hours temporarily

Because of reductions in staff, Josephine County Planning Office has temporarily reduced its operating hours.

Business now can be conducted Mondays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to noon, and 1 to 3 p.m.; and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to noon.

The reduced staff is due to one retirement, two resignations and one maternity leave, said Michael Snider, planning office director. Yet the workload has increased, especially with Measure 37 filings by property owners seeking relief.

Steps are being taken to fill at least one of the vacancies. The new hours will be in effect only until replacements are hired and trained, said Snider.

Apparently because of the county's financial situation, experienced planners are not applying, Snider indicated.

Ore. budget, taxing ideas draw salvos

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Prior to the start of the 2007 legislative session, Oregon Gov. Kulongoski submitted his recommended budget for the 2007-'09 biennium.

However, Kulongoski's \$49 billion all-funds budget proposal contains a series of tax increases, some of which may not pass through the Legislature. As such, lawmakers must reconcile the difference between the governor's proposal and what is fiscally feasible.

Rep. Bruce Hanna (R-Roseburg) sits on the budget-writing Joint Ways & Means Committee. He said that the governor's budget request is simply unrealistic.

"We all know that the governor's budget set the bar so high that the Democratic leadership is going to struggle to meet all the spending lines," Hanna said.

The governor's budget represents a 20 percent increase from the '05-'07 biennium. But even though the state's revenue forecast has improved drastically since then, Hanna said that Kulongoski's budget would be impossible to achieve without raising taxes.

"We have close to \$2 billion in new revenue, and they're still asking people for new tax revenues," Hanna said.

Sen. Alan Bates (D-Ashland), who also sits on Ways & Means, said that most state agencies are anticipating a 20 percent budget increase. But despite an improved economy, the

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A mixer for Illinois Valley Chamber of Commerce members and guests will be held Friday, March 2 at the 'Illinois Valley News' office from 5 to 7 p.m.