

County renews contract for inmate services at jail

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IVN copy editor

The Josephine County Board of Commissioners was joined by Lieutenant Ed Vincent of JoCo Corrections Division to detail a contract renewal with TurnKey Corrections to provide inmate commissary services at Josephine County Jail.

"We've been with TurnKey since 2011," Vincent said. "Initially the contract was a three-year contract that we'd agreed to and then after 2014 we were doing yearly renewals with them. They have come to the table with a gracious offer, I believe. They raised their commission rate from 23% to 35%, and for their communications side they raised it from 23% to 30%, which is a

pretty good deal." Vincent continued, "We've had a really good relationship with them. I like to say they've been with us through thick and thin, and this is a five-year contract with them to continue our business agreement, which looks like it's going to raise our inmate fund approximately \$20,000 annually from about 165 or 166,000 to about 196,000. They've been a really good company to work with in any issues we've had. Unfortunately enough they had an issue with distribution with a distribution center here last year and they fixed that and unfortunately enough during that process they lost one of their lead individuals passed away. He was a really good guy to work with. And they overcame that

challenge." Later in the meeting, the board reviewed the annual CAFFA (County Assessment Function Funding Assessment) grant agreement. Board Chairperson Dan DeYoung said, "The money is raised by fees placed on most documents recorded in the county clerk's office and a percentage of the interest collected on delinquent property tax accounts." DeYoung added that assessment administration, valuation, appeals, cartography, tax collection and distribution, and GIS and IT functions are the areas of county operation that the CAFFA grant can be used for.

"The estimated revenue to the county is approximately \$423,000," DeYoung added.

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"We are going to, basically when they need environmental services, what that amounts to is like septic services and so on and so forth; they are going to pay us to go over and take those permits," Board Chairperson Dan DeYoung explained.

Josephine County's helping hand extends not only to Curry's environmental health program, but also to the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program, which entails providing food supplementation to families with young children.

"We do have assurances that there will be no expense to Josephine County," Weber chimed in to note. "They'll cover all the expenses. We're just going to help them provide for essentially the minimum level of service that they need to get them to the end of the

fiscal year, and then we'll look at some longer term solutions."

Responding to questions from the board, Weber detailed the nature of JoCo's assistance to Curry County. For environmental health, JoCo staff will mostly be conducting restaurant inspections. If restaurants are not inspected at least twice per year, once in the first six months and once in the second six, it can impact the restaurants' ability to stay open, Weber explained. The health director also noted that Curry has hired an employee to oversee the WIC program, but they have not yet received the adequate training so a JoCo employee with the necessary prerequisites will oversee WIC in their stead until training is complete.

Vice Chairperson Herman Baertschiger asked Weber how

helping Curry will impact the involved staff's workload, and if overtime will become a factor. Weber responded, "We may see a little bit of overtime. If we do, Curry County will cover the expense. We have a little bit of bandwidth and there's some of our projects that we can push out into the next fiscal year. That won't have too much of an effect on us operationally. It's just going to delay some things that we're working on."

"This is a great chance to be a good neighbor," Commissioner Darin Fowler commented. "We've done it in the past and we do it with building services sometimes too, and we now have DEQ inspections of theirs, so this is a good way to strengthen our bond down here because I think that southwest Oregon kinda has noticed our commonality during this pandemic and during economic rough times."

SEASON...

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Medford National Weather Service meteorologist Brett Lutz said current conditions in the Illinois Valley are classified as "moderate drought." While over the course of the winter season this area saw "some improvement" as far as drought goes, he noted that "it's a bigger issue the farther east you go, because there's been less rain. There's still drought stressed vegetation out there. Fuels are already approaching record dry for this time of year - which is certainly concerning."

Trying to find an optimistic spin, Lutz also pointed out that last year's situation was similar, but then "May was unusually wet. Obviously, that's not a forecast, but there certainly is a possibility that May could turn around. That's what we're hoping for, because if it doesn't, we'll be marching into fire season promptly."

Lutz explained how the three-month outlook for April, May and June indicates "increased probability for warmer and dryer than normal. The caveat being that either May or June could still end up being cooler and wetter... In other words, we could have two months that are warmer and dryer - and one month that is cooler and wetter, which could improve our situation."

The shorter-term question is: When will it rain again?

"There are some indications the week of April 19 through the 26 could bring some precipitation," he said.

"This past winter we've been in a moderate La Nina weather pattern, which typically brings cooler temps, which can result in a near- to above-normal snow pack. This year that snowpack peaked in March, which is not unusual. But what is unusual is that the snowpack is rapidly dwindling due to the warmer temps and lack of spring precipitation. That's concerning - because the fuels up there can cure faster and become more flammable."

Whether any particular year is classified as El Niño or La Nina refers to equatorial Pacific oceanic temperatures in a region generally south of the Hawaiian Islands. Impacts to the Pacific Northwest can vary greatly.

"In the simplest terms, it's all about the strength of the systems," Lutz explained. "La Nina typically results in near-to-cooler temps in winter months, while an El Niño year can mean warmer weather. If either of these systems are strong enough, they can result in wetter weather, but, if the signals are weaker, then it can stay dryer."

Regarding this spring he said, "A lot remains to be seen - and keep in mind that long-range precipitation forecasts tend to be less accurate - though these days a forecast that calls for warmer than normal weather is often right, due to the general climatic trend toward hotter drier weather."

SPACE...

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Experts say to start with the house and work outward. Be sure to remove fuel sources close to the house, including gas cans, chemicals, organic mulch, juniper bushes or any other flammable plants. Wind-cast embers or creeping ground fires can ignite fuels in this zone and carry flames to the structure.

Plants within 100 feet of homes should be low-growing and well-irrigated. Adequate spacing between trees and shrubs is also important; trees should be pruned six to ten feet up from the ground. Also, create fuel breaks, such as driveways, gravel walkways and green lawns - as a fuel break can stop the advance of a fire by starving it of flammable vegetation.

Fire officials also want the public to pay attention to their driveways. Trees should be limbed or pruned and shrubs trimmed back from the driveway and brush

cleared away, to provide safe access to firefighters. Fire engines must be able to enter and exit properties without running a gauntlet of flame.

Even after the burn ban is declared, people should keep working on these projects - chipping the brush, sticks and limbs, or if that's not possible, creating brush piles well away from the home, preferably in an open field away from trees or other live brush. Also, move firewood away from structures.

For more information about the ODF's fire season regulations or to get more fire safety tips, call 541- 474-3152 or the Illinois Valley Fire District at 541-592-2225.

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Firewise.org also provides great safety tips to help folks keep their homes and lands in the best condition to withstand wildfires.



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