

# Port of Hood River welcomes new commissioners and hears updates on bridge

## New changes to Hood River-White Salmon Bridge infrastructure coming soon

By Noah Noteboom  
Columbia Gorge News

Heather Gehring, Mike Fox and Ben Sheppard were all sworn into their new positions on the Port of Hood River Commission on July 13. Gehring and Fox are serving their first term, and Sheppard was confirmed as the commission's new president. As they recited their oaths of office they were welcomed by existing commissioners and took their seats for one of the first meetings in-person since the COVID-19 pandemic began more than a year and a half ago.

Testimony from the public initiated the meeting. Written and verbal concerns about safety at the Marina and Waterfront areas along with the partnerships of the commission were spoken to. Port of Hood River Executive Director Michael McElwee wanted to bring attention to the standards of safety at the waterfront recreation areas of Hood River. After a 10-year old girl drowned in the Nichols Basin, McElwee and the rest of the commission decided that now is the time to act.

"Nothing should be out of the question," said Commissioner Mike Fox about what strategies should be considered. They discussed who should be

consulted and Commissioner Kristi Chapman suggested that locals would be the strongest option, as they know which areas need the most attention. Marina safety is a priority for the Port of Hood River, but so is the Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has been conducting studies on bridges all around the state called Weight Limit Evaluations. They found that the Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge should reduce the amount of weight allowed to cross. It was recommended to lower the limit from 80,000 pounds to 64,000 pounds, which will not affect most traffic, but some of the larger trucks will need closer inspection.

Paul Bandlow, one of the project's engineers, said their findings turned up some time-sensitive problems. The ropes that pull the lift span up and down are "overstressed and should be replaced," according to Bandlow. The commission asked him and his associates to form an initial plan to replace the ropes. Bandlow estimated replacement could take anywhere from six months to a year, but they will present their plan of action during the port's August 17 meeting.

Mark Libby of HDR Engineering also recommended that the port revisit weight limits imposed on certain vehicles — but mainly Specialized Hauling Vehicles (SHV) — crossing the bridge. The port staff has created a group email list and been in contact with businesses to express the concerns with large trucks hauling fruit,



The Port of Hood River Commissioners hold an in-person meeting for the first time since the pandemic began. The council listened to presentations and updates on the Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge during a meeting on July 13. Noah Noteboom Photo

lumber and other construction materials. When managing the load capacity of the bridge, ODOT uses a rating scale of 0 to 1. HDR's summary of ODOT's research found more than 50 locations where the rating falls below 1.0. Live load testing and Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) will answer whether or not many of the locations will need to be reinforced. HDR Engineers will estimate the time, materials and costs needed to complete the project and then the Port of Hood River commissioners will deliberate and finalize the plan. McElwee hopes to finalize all planning by this Fall.



Commissioners Heather Gehring, Mike Fox and Ben Sheppard are sworn into office during a July 13 meeting at the Port of Hood River. Noah Noteboom photos

# Drought emergency declared in Washington

By Jacob Bertram  
Columbia Gorge News

The Washington Department of Ecology declared a drought emergency for a large majority of the state on July 14, including the entirety of southern Washington and leaving out only Seattle, Everett, and Tacoma metropolitan areas.

State ecology officials cited a historically dry spring and summer, followed by a record-breaking heatwave that affected water supplies, as the prompt for the emergency declaration in a news release.

The drought emergency declaration means water supply is projected to be below 75 percent of average, and there is a risk of undue hardship to water users and uses, according to the announcement.

"Farmers' crops are failing and ranchers are losing livestock because of these dry conditions, extreme heat, and lack of water," Gov. Jay Inslee said in the July 14 announcement. "We're experiencing more droughts in our state as the climate warms. These dry conditions, combined with scorching heat, are putting our way of life at risk. We must continue to act on climate change to protect our state."

According to the announcement, a formal



Drought has been declared in all but a few portions of Washington, including in Klickitat County. Contributed graphic

drought declaration authorizes Department of Ecology to take certain measures for the purpose of providing emergency drought relief, including expediting processing for emergency drought permits, processing temporary transfers of water rights, providing funding assistance for public entities, and holding public education workshops.

A recent heat dome sent state thermometers skyrocketing, measuring record-high triple-digit temperatures, and according to Ecology, worsened drought conditions.

"We're now in the literal heat of summer and the driest time of year," said Department of Ecology Director Laura Watson. "As our climate warms, droughts will be more frequent. Focusing on additional water

storage, water efficiency and reuse, and changes in agriculture practices will help Washington be more resilient and protect water for communities, farms, and fish."

On July 15, the U.S. Drought Monitor put the eastern portion of Klickitat County, along with the rest of Eastern Washington, in extreme drought conditions, the second-most extreme drought measurements made by the U.S. Drought Monitor. Franklin County is in exceptional drought conditions, the most extreme drought measurement possible.

Inslee cited the drought conditions and record-breaking heat to declare a state-wide emergency on wildfires earlier this month.

# Council votes to transfer ownership of airport's services

By Alana Lackner  
Columbia Gorge News

THE DALLES — The Dalles City Council voted unanimously to transfer ownership of Aviation Management Services at the Columbia Gorge Regional Airport from Dave and Aryn Rasmussen to Jeff Renard.

The vote follows the Rasmussens' decision to leave Aviation Management after finding employment elsewhere and opting to move out of the area, according to the city council agenda.

The airport board recommended the city council approve the Rasmussens' transfer of Aviation Management to Renard. Renard is currently employed by TacAero, but will be leaving its employment once the transfer is finalized.

The decision will now go to Klickitat County to finalize the transfer.

In other business, the city council voted unanimously



Dave and Aryn Rasmussen stand on the balcony overlooking the Columbia Gorge Regional Airport in 2020. Current owners of Aviation Management Services, which operates the airport, they are leaving and ownership will be transferred to Jeff Renard if approved by Klickitat County commissioners in addition to The Dalles City Council, which approved the transfer last week. The Dalles Chronicle photo/file

to annex certain properties into the urban growth boundary, at the request of the owners. Additionally, the council updated a medium residential parcel of land to a general commercial, also at the request of the owner. The city also approved the

purchase of a new excavator for the Public Works Department's Wastewater Division. The excavator will be used for deeper projects, such as repairing or replacing sewer lines.

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