

Merkley proposes 58,000 acre Painted Hills wilderness area

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

One of the “Seven Wonders of Oregon” could soon be surrounded by 58,000 acres of newly designated wilderness under a bill proposed by Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley. The legislation, introduced May 7, would create wilderness areas on four separate tracts around Sutton Mountain and the famous Painted Hills in Wheeler County. It would also transfer 2,000 acres of land to Wheeler County from the Bureau of Land Management to pursue economic development projects. “With this legislation, we have an opportunity to make sure that future generations will be able to experience these incredible Oregon landmarks unspoiled, and to create jobs and economic opportunity at the same time,” Merkley said in a statement. A spokeswoman for Merkley said their goal is to include the bill — named the Sutton Mountain and Painted Hills Area Preservation and Economic Enhancement Act — in the next major package of wilderness bills



Photo contributed by Travel Oregon

Sen. Jeff Merkley proposed a bill that would create wilderness areas on four separate tracts around Sutton Mountain and the Painted Hills in Wheeler County.

that Congress passes. The bill is supported by both Wheeler County and the city of Mitchell. “As home to the Painted Hills Unit of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, we know that tourism and recreation can help support businesses,” said Wheeler County Judge Chris Perry. “These businesses will also benefit from those who come to appreciate Sutton Mountain.” According to a release from Merkley’s office, the county is considering projects such as an RV park,

search and rescue training facility or an air strip that will make the region more attractive and accommodating for travelers. Wilderness areas are proposed in a variety of environments, including grasslands, riparian areas, shrub-steppe, woodlands and forest. In addition, the lands would provide access into the national monument and connect to the John Day Wild and Scenic River. The Painted Hills are named for their colorful layers that correspond to different geological eras,

and were formed when the area was an ancient river floodplain. Fossils in the monument date back to tens of millions of years ago. As a wilderness area, the public would be allowed to recreate on the land, though travel is restricted by foot or on horseback. “Working together to preserve Oregon’s unique places and grow jobs and our economy at the same time is a win-win,” Merkley said.

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Alzheimer’s facility breaks ground in Hermiston

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County is about to get its first state-endorsed memory care facility after Guardian Angel Homes Assisted Living broke ground on two new homes Thursday. The 16-unit homes will provide specialized care for individuals with Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. “We’re so excited to roll forward with this,” Jennifer Baus said at the groundbreaking ceremony.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Lauryn Frantz, center, turns over a shovel of dirt while her family and Guardian Angel Homes staff look on at the groundbreaking ceremony for a new Alzheimer’s facility in Hermiston Thursday.

around-the-clock by nurses specially trained in Alzheimer’s and dementia care. The project is slated to begin serving residents sometime during the fall. Matthew Frantz said his family knows the importance of a simple, familiar layout for residents with deteriorating memories. “The goal of these homes

is to look and feel like a home,” he said. His father built the family’s first care facility in 2000 for his own father. “Grandpa passed away two months before it opened,” Matthew said. That didn’t stop the Frantz family to continue to build facilities in under-served communities, however.

Matthew said based on the interest in Guardian Angel Homes’ current arrangement there is “absolutely” a demand for more care facilities in Hermiston, especially focused on people with Alzheimer’s. “That’s what really captures us and what we really love to do is the memory care, because we experienced that need in our own family,” he said. The new homes are designed to meet the standards to receive a memory care endorsement from the state of Oregon, a first in Umatilla County. Tyson Frantz told the community members gathered to watch the groundbreaking that the family put a lot of thought and care into designing their facilities and they were excited about the upcoming project. “I think we’re building the very best in Hermiston,” he said.

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Spring chinook fishery opens on Powder River

LA GRANDE — Spring chinook fishing is expected to open Tuesday on the Powder River in Baker County, when the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife releases approximately 200 salmon into the tributary. The release will take place immediately below Mason Dam, using fish trapped at Hells Canyon Dam. The fishery will run through Sept. 1 on the river between Mason Dam and Hughes Lane Bridge near Baker City. The daily bag limit is four spring chinook per day. Fish released into the Powder River are based off anticipated strong returns to Hells Canyon Dam on the Snake River. When more fish return to the dam than are needed for broodstock,

BRIEFLY
excess fish can be taken to tributaries to provide additional fishing. Anglers should contact the ODFW Northeast Region Office at 541-963-2138 to confirm the release date. **Fish removal meeting is Monday**
PENDLETON — The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife wants to remove unwanted fish from eight lakes and ponds in Umatilla, Union, Baker and Wallowa counties in order to improve rainbow trout fisheries. ODFW staff will hold a public meeting Monday at the Pendleton Convention Center, room West 1, to discuss treatments on ponds in the Umatilla National Forest. Biologists plan to use rotenone, a plant-based toxicant, to eradicate species that were introduced and now compete with rainbow trout, including brown

bullhead catfish, largemouth bass, black crappie and goldfish. Water bodies to be treated in Umatilla County are Keyhole, Granite Meadows, Goldfish and Yellowjacket ponds. “We think we can have some real positive effects on these fisheries and improve the experience for anglers,” said Kyle Bratcher, assistant fish biologist in Enterprise. Bratcher said the department has had recent success with similar projects across the state, including at Mann Lake in Harney County, where they used rotenone to kill unwanted goldfish and fathead minnows. Rotenone is approved as a fish toxicant by the Environmental Protection Agency, and is not toxic to humans, mammals or birds at the concentrations used to kill fish. The public meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m.

PENDLETON

Marijuana business license not ready for council consideration

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The Pendleton City Council will discuss a marijuana-related issue at its meeting Tuesday, but not the one that would allow medical marijuana dispensaries in city limits. The council will consider amending the city’s nuisance ordinance that would prohibit marijuana odors from leaving private property. A law that would create a special business license for dispensaries isn’t on the agenda. Although a moratorium banning medical marijuana dispensaries expired May 1, city officials have said Pendleton’s licensing laws prohibit any business from opening that is in violation of federal law, which effectively keeps the ban in place.

City Planner Evan MacKenzie presented a model ordinance written by the League of Oregon Cities at the council meeting that grants a special business license to dispensaries. He said the model was for discussion purposes and city staff would use the council’s feedback to craft a more customized law. Councilors suggested city staff look into stricter signage requirements, background checks into all employees working at dispensaries and a THC level test for product being sold. City Manager Robb Corbett said staff are still working toward incorporating the council’s suggestion into a more comprehensive ordinance and expects a draft to be ready by the council’s June 2 meeting. In the meantime, the council will render a decision about a city law that would ban marijuana odor from emanating beyond a person’s property. In a report to the city council, City Attorney Nancy Kerns wrote the amendment is coming at the request of the Pendleton Police Department, which has received complaints from residents about the smell of drying marijuana. Another provision that could be added to the nuisance ordinance is one requiring all marijuana be kept out of public view.

“For purposes of public safety it is recommended that a screening provision also be approved,” Kerns wrote. “Being able to see growing marijuana from a public place or from neighboring properties invites offense to some, vandalism, trespassing and the like.” After a year of inaction, marijuana issues have become a regular item on the agenda. Last month the council amended the city’s development code to allow dispensaries in service commercial and central mixed use zones, as long as they are not within 1,000 feet of a school, park or another dispensary. Outside of marijuana discussion, the meeting will mark the first reading for the adoption of master plans for water, sewer and storm water drainage utility systems.

Over the next 10 years, a city consultant estimated Pendleton would need to spend \$56.9 million to replace, maintain and add to the town’s water and sewer infrastructure. In order to pay for the improvements, the firm suggested doubling water rates, raising sewer rates by 57 percent and creating a systems development cost — a fee assessed to new developments. The stormwater utility, a first for Pendleton, would cover the costs of improving, operating and maintaining the city-owned levees and the city’s stormwater drainage system. For the first five years, the firm suggested charging a flat rate of \$7.25 to help cover the \$7.5 million cost of improving the stormwater system. The consultants recommended a portion of these new revenue streams be used to hire 11.5 new utility workers. Although the city plans to adopt the utility master plans at the June 2 council meeting, officials have said any rate hikes or charges would be decided upon at a later date. The Pendleton City Council will meet at 7 p.m. at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Ave.

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