

AIRPORT: Plans to begin \$3.3M new taxiway project in September

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employees, but a 2014 report from the Oregon Department of Aviation stated the airport supported 80 local jobs and 26 elsewhere in the state, combining for a total of \$2 million a year in wages. It also stated that aviation-dependent commercial activity in the vicinity of the airport generated \$205 million in sales statewide.

That type of economic impact is why the state and federal governments are willing to continue investing grant money into the airport when there are larger airports with more infrastructure just a brief flight away in Pendleton and the Tri-Cities.

In September the city plans to begin a \$3.3 million project, paid for almost entirely with grant money, to build a new taxiway at the airport.

The current taxiway is out of compliance with Federal Aviation Administration standards, which state that the center of the runway and the center of the parallel taxiway must be at least 240 feet apart.

The project also will include pavement upgrades, moving the fuel station and installing larger fuel tanks. It will cost the city about \$42,000 out of its general fund.

Morgan said the city usually puts about \$40,000 a year toward the airport. The airport also gets revenue from the federal and state government, fuel sales and hangar leases. About 40 airplanes are housed at the airport, all indoors.

Susie Rawe, manager of the Hermiston Municipal Airport, said air travel has changed quite a bit since Hermiston Aviation took over the airport management 31 years ago. Hermiston has grown much larger, but at the airport some of that growth has been balanced out by other developments. Rising fuel and insurance costs have decreased private plane use and technological advances mean corporate managers don't have to fly out on location as often to sign documents or examine a piece of property.

Technology has changed the way pilots do business, too. Gone are the days when pilots used the airport lounge to spread out paper charts and plot their course.

Navigation information, fuel prices at nearby airports, hotel and restaurant booking, weather conditions and other information is now at pilots' fingertips. The Hermiston airport even has an Automated Weather Observing System that gives

pilots up-to-the-minute crucial information on wind speed and direction via phone.

"Pilots are so much more independent these days," Rawe said. "Smartphones have changed everything."

As for the airport's future, the taxi realignment project could help pave the way for an expansion sometime in the future. Morgan said there are a number of hurdles, however, to extending the runway to 5,000 feet, starting with the fact that Ott Road would have to be moved to comply with FAA standards.

"Even if the stars aligned perfectly it would be at least eight years out," he said.

One upgrade that has been on the city's capital improvement list for years that will be started at the airport this year is an Airport Geographic Information System mapping project, which will help pilots land in poor weather conditions. Morgan said the FAA offered the city discretionary grant funds to complete the system two years ahead of schedule, freeing up funds for some other airport upgrade in 2017.

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Staff photo by Tim Trainor

Oregon National Guard troops help mop up the Canyon Creek Complex fire line Thursday.

FIRE: High winds made the fire grow 15 percent in a few hours Wednesday

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already been burned by large fires in previous years, thus reducing the amount of fuel there now.

Great Basin incident management team operations chief Jeff Surber said his crews are looking to create a pinch point near Road's End, where they are attempting to turn the fire and stop its eastward advance out of the wilderness area and into more populated country.

Crews backburned the forest there earlier in the week to try to remove fuels and stop the fire's progress. But unfavorable conditions forced them to halt that work over the last two days.

"The Catch-22 is that we have green vegetation between us and the fire," said Surber. "But, because of weather, we're concerned about lighting it now and having the wind catch it. We're also concerned the wind will catch the main fire and do it anyway."

Oregon Fire Marshal engines are working to protect structures west of Prairie City and on the eastern edge of the fire complex. About 60 residents have been evacuated

from their homes in the area since Wednesday, said Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer. Palmer also said 11 structures were burned and destroyed there, mostly hunting cabins and outbuildings. None were permanent residences.

The fire marshal crews had left the area Wednesday morning, thinking the Canyon Creek Complex would stay confined to the wilderness and continue to smolder, but not grow. However, high winds arrived Wednesday afternoon and the fire erupted, growing by 15 percent in just a few hours.

The fire is now about seven miles from downtown Prairie City, a city of about 900 located west of John Day. Citizens at a public meeting Friday night at the Prairie City Grange worried about the projected winds pushing the fire over bulldozer lines and onto the prairie and grazing land that sits between their city and the fire currently blazing through the forest.

"I just don't know how you are going to stay in front of it (if that happens)," one woman said at the packed house meeting, with more than 100 people in

attendance. Fire crews made no promises, but emphasized that they are doing everything they can. Firefighters are working 16 hour shifts, said Surber, and some are working more than that.

It's not just the cities that are in danger. The outdoor mecca that is the Strawberry Mountains are being ravaged. The area is a favorite recreation place for hunters, anglers, and backpackers.

Spot fires have been spotted and are being fought in the Strawberry basin, including the well-traveled wilderness lakes of Strawberry, High and Slide. The fire has breached the ridgeline directly above High Lake, but crews have continued to attack it.

"We're hopeful, but its got a lot of fire in it," said Surber of protecting the Strawberry basin.

Level 2 evacuation orders were given for the first time Friday to residents of Strawberry Road from the forest boundary to Oxbow Ranch Headquarters.

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CIDER: Blue Mountain is distributed in 30 states

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More cider has meant more storage tanks and better equipment at the company's facility, although there are some downsides to growing.

Assistant cidemaker Abe Currin said he's increased his focus on quality control, which can be harder when tracking a higher volume of cider.

In addition to the health concerns that come with contamination, cider that has been re-fermented could be explosive.

The Cincinnati-based Angry Orchard Cider Company recently recalled some of its cider after a re-fermented batch caused some bottles to crack or overflow when opened because of increased carbonation.

Brown said Blue Mountain Cider is distributed in 30 states, although locals can find it on-tap in nearby restaurants like Prodigal Son Brewery & Pub.

Prodigal Son owner Tim Guenther said he doesn't have the same level of ambition as Blue Mountain Cider for his own brand of beer.

He enjoys the social aspect of delivering beer to smaller Eastern Oregon communities like John Day, Helix and Umapiine, and he personally distributes Prodigal Son beer when he ventures into the population centers of the Willamette

Valley. Since it opened in 2010, Prodigal Son has averaged 438 barrels of beer a year, which used to be good for 68th in the state but now dropped them into the 100s.

Guenther said Prodigal Son's 10 barrel brewery isn't enough to meet demand, forcing him to limit the vendors and events that he supplies.

Although he's tepid to the idea of bottling Prodigal Son beer or selling it across state lines, Guenther said he'd like to solidify the brewery's presence regionally.

He's currently looking into the economic feasibility of expanding the brewery operation to the building's vacant basement or second floor, which could significantly add to the Prodigal Son's storage capacity.

In the meantime, Guenther said his first priority is supplying beer to his popular restaurant.

"People wouldn't like it if we ran out of beer," he said.

Hermiston Brewing Co. recently ran into that problem when it ran out of beer for the restaurant it's attached to — Nookie's.

Hermiston Brewing owner Mitch Myers said the company spent its first year of existence strictly supplying Nookie's.

Myers said keeping the beer in-house made business sense — whereas delivering a keg might only

yield a net profit of \$30 to \$40, the Nookie's taps could generate \$250 for the same keg of beer.

Myers eventually began to expand Hermiston Brewing's reach, registering vans in Washington to distribute the beer in the Tri-Cities.

The beer's success stretched Hermiston Brewing's supply, actually causing Nookie's to run out of beer.

"We just couldn't keep up," he said.

To meet demand, Myers plans on opening a new 6,000-square-foot square foot brewery and tap room in addition to a distribution center, all at the service of Hermiston Brewing.

Myers said this will allow Hermiston Brewing's current brewery to provide beer solely for Nookie's.

While Myers has big plans for Hermiston Brewing, Brown also plans to continue to expand Blue Mountain Cider.

Blue Mountain Cider is branching out to canned cider and has updated its logo.

Brown's goal for the near future is 500,000 gallons per year, and his "pie in the sky" goal is 1.5 million gallons.

If realized, that would put Blue Mountain Cider in striking distance of the number one spot.

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