

FOREST: Deputies and sheriff have close ties with Citizens for Public Access

Continued from 1A

Commissioner Chris Labhart said they are seeking an opinion from their attorney, and criticized Palmer for a lack of transparency. “No other citizen of Grant County has seen this document at all,” Labhart said. “Those (deputies) are the only people who had access to this before it was presented to the court, out of the blue.” Palmer declined to comment to the *East Oregonian* on the plan, saying he would have to confer with his appointed deputies before speaking about its purpose and scope.

Coordination is a law that requires the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to work together with local governments on how their public lands are managed. Cities, counties and tribes can all coordinate, but the question is whether the sheriff has the same authority.

The Forest Service has no regulatory definition for local governments, though the state of Oregon defines them as “... all cities, counties and local service districts located in this state, and all administrative subdivisions of those cities, counties and local service districts.”

As a rural sheriff and the head of search and rescue, Palmer told the commissioners in a public meeting that his job depends on active forest management — which his resources plan emphasizes as a way to reduce fire fuels.

As an example, he pointed to the Canyon Creek Complex, which burned 110,000-plus acres and destroyed more than 40 homes south of John Day.

“I want a seat at the table,” Palmer told commissioners. “The people I represent are not getting heard. I’m not getting heard.”

To do that, Palmer deputized 11 people to write the Grant County Public Lands Natural Resources Plan, modeled after the same plan in neighboring Baker County. The deputies appointed were: Todd Smith, Elaine Smith, Mike Smith, Brooks Smith, Judy Kerr, Billie Jo George, Terry George, Dave Traylor, Roger McKinley, Jim Sproul and Frances Preston.

Many of the members are associated with the special interest group Citizens for Public Access, which according to the group’s Facebook page is “dedicated to the retention of all forms of public access in Grant County and Eastern Oregon.” Also, six of the deputies are members of two families — Mike and Elaine Smith are the parents of Todd Smith, and Frances Preston is the sister of Billie Jo George, who is married to Terry George.

The plan the group crafted out of the existing Baker County plan identifies management policies for things like cattle grazing, public access, logging, mining and recreation. “Grant County will not support federal and state agencies on land manage-

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— Mark Webb, former county judge

ment decisions when the social and economic impact is not carefully considered,” it reads.

But others argue the plan doesn’t represent the county at all. Former county judge Mark Webb said it appears Palmer didn’t follow the county’s procedures for appointing an advisory committee, nor did the committee follow Oregon’s public meeting laws.

“While I appreciate the sheriff’s desire to invoke coordination status and would encourage the county court to exercise its right to coordination status, the fact remains the sheriff does not have that right,” Webb said.

Commissioner Boyd Britton said he doesn’t know how the committee can claim to represent all of Grant County, and despite asking several times, nobody can tell him what exactly coordination looks like. He complimented the existing Blue Mountains Forest Partners, a collaborative working group that he said has accomplished a lot of active management on the forest.

“Other communities are jealous of what we’re doing,” Britton said. “By golly, we’re treating more acres and we’re moving forward.”

While the county court is hesitant, the Grant County

Public Forest Commission did approve support for the sheriff at a meeting Wednesday night.

The public forest commission is an elected body that provides input on management issues. Four of the sheriff’s appointed deputies — Roger McKinley, Dave Traylor, Brooke Smith and Mike Smith — also serve on the commission, and took part in the vote.

The decision wasn’t unanimous. Larry Blasing voted against it, admitting he was kind of in the dark about the process.

“There were a couple of us that were blind,” Blasing said. “My thought was before we jump into this, let’s make sure everything is correct.”

At the meeting Commissioner Labhart questioned why Palmer’s plan claims to speak for the people of Grant County, but wasn’t presented as an agenda item or open to public comment.

Palmer was not at the meeting, but Preston, one of the 11 appointed deputies, responded, “Because you don’t have to. To invoke coordination you do not have to be transparent, you have to be an elected official that wants to invoke coordination.”

Traylor, a longtime resident of the county, said

the committee of sheriff’s deputies will bring their plan forward to the county for a vote next spring as an initiative. He is confident it will pass by a wide majority.

“I’ll gladly debate anyone who wants to come in and say coordination isn’t good,” Traylor said. “It’s what we should have been doing all along.”

Gil Riddell, policy director for the Association of Oregon Counties, said he is not sure if the sheriff needs approval from the county court to invoke coordination. However, he said the association already has agreements with the Forest Service and BLM to coordinate for counties.

“It’s early sharing of information,” Riddell said. “It’s happened historically in many of our counties

already.” Steve Beverlin, forest supervisor on the Malheur National Forest headquartered in John Day, said the agency will discuss Palmer’s request. The forest works closely with the Grant County Court, he said, and believes they have a solid process of engagement.

Beverlin said he wants to establish relationship with Palmer, and has tried diligently to communicate with him through letters, emails and phone calls.

“He’s declined to engage with me at all,” Beverlin said.

Beverlin said he’d love to have a coordinated search and rescue plan throughout the forest, and said a partnership with the sheriff’s office is extremely important for the health and safety of residents.

“We’re trying very hard to engage proactively, and have an open dialogue about how lands are managed in the county,” he said.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Trio used stolen gun to rob, kill two in California

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Three young transients used a handgun that was stolen from an unlocked car to rob and kill a backpacking Canadian tourist in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and then a yoga instructor two days later on a hiking trail north of the city, authorities said.

The handgun was reported stolen on Oct. 1 from the Fisherman’s Wharf neighborhood in San Francisco, police commander Toney Chaplin said on Friday.

“We believe the same weapon was used in both crimes,” Chaplin said, adding that it appears robbery was the motive in the two killings.

The body of Audrey

Carey, 23, was found Oct. 3 in Golden Gate Park. She had been shot in the head.

Yoga instructor Steve Carter, 67, was discovered dead on Monday near a popular hiking trail in Marin County across the Golden Gate Bridge. He had been shot multiple times while walking his dog.

Authorities identified the suspects as Morrison Haze Lampley, 23; Sean Michael Angold, 24; and Lila Scott Alligood, 18. They were being held without bail in Oregon, and it was unclear if any of them are represented by a lawyer.

They were arrested Wednesday at a soup kitchen in Portland, Oregon. San

Francisco police say the stolen gun was recovered during the arrest, and they believe it’s the weapon used to fatally shoot Carey and Carter.

San Francisco police also said the suspects were in possession of Carter’s car and some of Carey’s camping gear was found inside it.

Valerie Chapman, administrator of St. Francis Church in Portland, said she had to admonish the three for smoking in a no-smoking area just outside the dining hall. Some of the regular diners told her the three suspects were asking if anyone wanted to buy a Volkswagen Jetta station wagon, Chapman said.



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