

**HERMISTON**



Staff photo E.J. Harris

A rainwater collection basin was created in the softball field of Newport Park to stop flooding in neighborhood houses around the park in Hermiston.

# Newport Park's new drainage basin collecting stormwater

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

After turning into a pond for parts of the winter, Newport Park in Hermiston is expected to be back in business as a softball field before the end of June.

In the fall the city removed elements of the park's softball field, including the dugouts, and lowered the field 18 inches so that it would act as a drainage basin during storms.

Right now the field doesn't have any grass on it, but Parks and Recreation director Larry Fetter said the city will hydroseed the

playing field in the next week or so, and it will take four to six weeks after that for the grass to be ready for use.

"It'll come up pretty quickly," he said.

The project was controversial for community members with fond memories of playing Little League baseball and softball at Newport Park. But the city council greenlighted the project after hearing the city kept having to pay insurance claims to neighbors whose homes sustained substantial water damage when it rained enough to overwhelm a nearby city pump system.

Fetter said after the

softball field's elevation was lowered there were two storms that would have flooded the neighbors' homes in the past, but the water was diverted to the park instead. Both times the fine silt in the soil kept the park looking like a lake for days afterward, but Fetter said a series of gravel "dry wells" the city has since installed under the surface of the field should make the water drain much more quickly in the future.

"It did a great job of collecting water, we just want it to drain out of there," he said.

The city doesn't schedule Newport Park for regular use

by any teams, but there are some groups that use it unofficially for extra practices. Fetter said once everything is put back together they should be able to still use the field for batting practice or pick-up games unless there was a recent storm.

"We appreciate the neighborhood being patient," he said.

He said the city is incorporating a similar but much smaller drainage basin into its expansion of Sunset Park on Fourth Street to combat flooding there.

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# Senators Wyden, Merkley working on fish screens bill

Legislation would reauthorize cost-share program

East Oregonian

Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley are pushing to reauthorize a voluntary, cost-share program with the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife that pays for installing fish screens and passage devices in four Northwest states.

The Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act was initially passed in 2000 before expiring last year. Over the years, it has funded 127 projects that have reopened more than 1,130 miles of habitat to fish passage in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and western Montana.

Wyden and Merkley, the Democratic duo, want to extend FRIMA for \$25 million from 2017 to 2024. The program not only protects native fish runs, but helps farmers by maintaining their irrigation canals.

"This bill allows continued collaboration

among water users, farmers, fishery managers and conservationists so that protected salmon runs and irrigation can sustainably coexist side by side," Wyden said.

The bill has the support of the Oregon Water Resources Congress, which represents the state's agricultural water providers including irrigation districts, water control districts, drainage districts and water improvement districts. Since it was established, FRIMA has paid for removing 56 barriers to fish passage and installing screens on 130 irrigation channels.

April Snell, OWRC director, said the program catalyzes partnerships between agencies to benefit both conservation and agriculture. Fish screens and passage help keep protected species like salmon and steelhead out of water canals, and allow fish to safely bypass dams and reservoirs.

Merkley reiterated the program is a critical piece to protecting fish while safeguarding farms and ranches. The senators introduced their reauthorization bill on April 28.



Photo contributed by Oregon State Police

A third bighorn ram was shot and left to waste along Interstate 84 in Gilliam County.

# Additional rewards offered in bighorn poaching case

East Oregonian

Additional rewards have been offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the poachers who killed a bighorn ram along Interstate 84 last month in Gilliam County.

The Oregon Hunters Association was already providing \$500 through the Turn-In Poachers program with Oregon State Police. The OHA Clatsop County chapter is now chipping in another \$500, and the Oregon Foundation for North American Wild Sheep is offering \$1,000.

Anyone with information should contact OSP Senior Trooper Mark Jubitz at 541-705-5330.

State police found the ram on April 10 after receiving tips from passing motorists. The carcass was discovered along the highway at milepost 118, east of Rufus. The area is home to a herd of about 80-100 California bighorns, with no legal hunting season.

Two men are accused of poaching two bighorns from the same herd in almost the exact same spot a week earlier, though OSP states there is no indication the incidents are related.

Cody Plagmann, 37, and Justin Samora, 32, were arrested stemming from the investigation, and will be charged in court on Friday.

# Hermiston woman injured in Plymouth wreck

HERMISTON — A Hermiston woman was hospitalized after a rollover wreck near Plymouth, Wash., on Tuesday evening.

Angelica J. Avila, 22, of Hermiston, was driving a 2003 Honda Civic on Highway 14, two miles west of Plymouth. At 8:16 p.m., Avila over corrected and rolled the vehicle onto an embankment, according to a report from Washington State Patrol.

The vehicle was totaled, and Avila was taken by a private vehicle to Good Shepherd Medical Center.

Drugs and alcohol were not involved in the crash, and Avila was wearing a seat belt, according to WSP.

# Local man returning to take emergency manager post

PENDLETON — Umatilla County has hired a familiar face for its full-time emergency manager.

Tom Roberts, 42, of Irrigon, accepted the job. He is a graduate of Hermiston High School and has 20 years experience as a volunteer firefighter with Hermiston and Irrigon. He also built a career in the federal Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program.

He worked at the Umatilla Chemical Depot from 2007-2012, when the U.S. Army finished destroying chemical weapons there. He moved on to the Pueblo Chemical Depot in Pueblo, Colorado, and since November has been with the Blue Grass Chemical Activity at the Army's depot near Richmond, Kentucky.

Roberts said his daughter attends Hermiston High School and lives with family, so he has been looking for a job to bring him back home. He said his parents live near Hermiston and his brother is a sergeant with the Umatilla County

# BRIEFLY

Sheriff's Office, plus he has other strong ties to the local-first responder community.

Roberts has to wrap up his work with the Kentucky site and is aiming to start the county job in June. The position pays \$57,480 a year plus benefits.

# Free workshop to focus on lowering energy use

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County Climate Change Focus Group will host a free workshop Saturday, May 21 at Blue Mountain Community College to discuss ways the public can reduce energy consumption and conserve resources.

It is the second in a series of meetings from the focus group concentrated on various impacts of climate change. Participants will learn about options to make energy efficiency upgrades at their homes or businesses, and assistance programs that can help them cover the cost. Representatives also will be available to provide information on solar energy, weatherization and xeriscaping to cut back on water consumption.

Sponsors include Oregon

State University Extension Service, the Energy Trust of Oregon, Umatilla Electric Cooperative, the city of Pendleton, city of Hermiston, Umatilla County and the East Oregonian. The workshop will run from 1-4 p.m. at Umatilla Hall on the BMCC campus.

# Salvation Army offers estate planning resource

In celebration of National Salvation Army Month, the organization has produced an estate planning resource booklet.

"Our Legacy is Hope" is available to seniors ages 65 and over who are interested in learning more about the importance of having a current will. The booklet includes information on how to protect one's inheritance and legacy they wish to leave to loved ones and the communities they care for.

Bill Olson, director of gift planning for The Salvation Army in Oregon and Idaho, said some of the concepts for bequest gifting to loved ones and charities are very simple. However, he said it's recommended that everyone have a valid will and trust,

when appropriate, which do require the assistance of legal and tax advisors.

Most Americans, Olson said, do not have a current will. This can cause problems with inheritance and extra costs when probate courts sort through the property and assets of individuals who die without a will.

"We underestimate how much good and relief of stress to others we can do with a little advance planning," Olson said.

"The legacy booklet will help people get started in considering their many options and opportunities to bless family, friends and communities they care for."

For a free copy of the booklet, call 800-481-3280 or write to The Salvation Army, Office of Gift Planning, 8495 S.E. Monterey Ave., Happy Valley, OR 97086.

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