

PENDLETON

Groundwater dominates resource discussion

OWRD working toward five-year update of plan

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

The Oregon Water Resources Department kicked off a series of public meetings on the state's water strategy Monday in Pendleton, with questions mostly centered on how drought has affected the community.

If the conversation was any indication, drought isn't the only reason to be concerned about water shortages.

Groundwater in particular dominated the discussion during Monday's open house at the Pendleton Convention Center, where about 40 people gathered to provide feedback on future water needs for farms and cities.

The Integrated Water Resources Strategy, or IWRS, is essentially the road map that identifies goals, objectives and solutions for in-stream and out-of-stream water use statewide.

It was created by the legislature in 2009, adopted in 2012 and is due for a five-year update by late summer or fall of 2017.

While the IWRS is adopted by the Oregon Water Resources Commission, it is done in collaboration with the state Department of Fish & Wildlife, Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Agriculture. All four agencies are represented at the open house meetings, which will run through the end of the month.

By an executive order from Gov. Kate Brown, the 2017 IWRS update will need to address drought resiliency. In 2015, the governor declared a drought emergency in 25 of 36 counties, which was the most ever for a single summer.

Alyssa Mucken, program coordinator with the Water Resources Department, said last year's historically low snowpack resulted in

stream flows at half or less than half of average.

"We're very concerned with how we prepare for future droughts," Mucken said.

But once the floor was opened for Q-and-A, talks began to shift. Gary Rhinhart, vice chairman of the Umatilla County Planning Commission, said the overall allocation of groundwater in the lower Birch Creek drainage has caused some surface springs to disappear.

In 2014 and 2015, Rhinhart said Birch Creek dried up completely through his property for the first time.

"We cannot blame it on the drought," Rhinhart said. "Somebody is going to have to start keeping an eye on those springs."

Beverly Bridgewater, manager of the West Extension Irrigation District, said the state needs to take a more comprehensive approach to conserving water supplies, and that includes studying the connectivity

of ground and surface water.

"It's so much bigger than what we have in front of us," Bridgewater said.

Ray Kopacz, who manages the Stanfield Irrigation District, suggested replacing deep water wells with more surface water out of the Columbia River, which would give aquifers the chance to recharge. That's one component of a major proposal from the Northeast Oregon Water Association, which continues to make its way through negotiations in Salem.

Tom Byler, director of the Water Resources Department, said bucket-for-bucket mitigation is still required on the Columbia to account for endangered salmon and steelhead, which is a federal issue. But he agreed that the state's water issues go beyond drought.

"We're all trying to make use of this resource," Byler said. "For the greater good, we need to look at how to make this resource stretch as far

as we can."

Mucken did point to strides made under the current IWRS, including a new Water Resources Development Program funded by the legislature to provide grants and loans for water projects. Two Eastern Oregon projects, including fish passage at Beaver Creek Dam and conservation work along the Lostine River, have received funding from the program.

"This (IWRS) adoption in 2012 really led to some key successes at the legislative level," Mucken said.

There are 40 recommended actions within the IWRS and Mucken said they are taking a phased-in approach to implementation. The 2017 update will build upon the same basic framework, while integrating drought resiliency into long-term planning.

Byler said people in the past used water like it was an endless resource.

"It's tough to untangle things and start over," he said. "We need to be looking at holistic solutions."

Umatilla County puts state water department on notice to shape up

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners threatened to pull county funds for state water regulators unless the Oregon Department of Water Resources improves its communications and attitude.

The board met Wednesday at the county courthouse, Pendleton, to address several matters, including passing the county's 2016-17 budget. But the first action item was to change the dynamics of the relationship between the county and the state water department.

The Oregon Water Resources Department oversees water law, among other functions, and uses assistant watermasters in local field offices to enforce that law and oversee water use.

Umatilla County hires and pays for assistant watermasters, but those county employees answer to the state. The county proposed to put an end to that practice, and push those employees onto the state payroll.

The county for fiscal year 2016-17 will contribute \$210,000 for the equivalent of 2.9 full-time employees for the state watermaster office in Pendleton, and after that only will provide funds to support the program. The county board will set the amount of that support based on a recommendation from the budget committee.

The plan allows enough time for the state to become the formal employer of the watermasters.

The proposal also emphasized that district leadership in the water resources department has done a poor job of communicating with the board about water matters, and all the money

is contingent on three conditions: the commissioners receive assurance from the state watermaster "that the level of service and deployment of staff will remain consistent throughout the coming year"; the state notifies the county of meetings involving water users; and communication between the state's regional office and water users and local groups "be a matter of record" open for the commissioners to review. If the state does not live up to the county's conditions, the county can stop funding the local watermaster, which could have a damaging effect on local water users.

Milton-Freewater irrigator Ed Berlingame said watermasters do important work in Umatilla County and the state.

"You got a war over there without a watermaster," he said.

Brian Wolcott, executive director of the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council, said the Milton-Freewater/Walla Walla area has 20,000 irrigated acres and needs an assistant watermaster to make sure people follow water rights.

"There isn't enough water to go around for everybody," he said. "We got a lot of farms and ranches that fight over water on an annual basis."

Wolcott also said while the county is considering the work as seasonal, irrigators in the Walla Walla Valley draw water every month except February, and the situation is going to worsen as groundwater becomes more critical.

Larry Nye with the Milton-Freewater Tea Party Patriots told the board the debate is about sovereignty.

"Somewhere along the line, local governments should draw a line in the sand," he said. He also suggested a county group should advise the board on the issue and pleaded for the board

"There isn't enough water to go around for everybody. We got a lot of farms and ranches that fight over water on an annual basis."

— **Brian Wolcott**, executive director of the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council

to keep local control.

Commissioner Larry Givens said he was "a little irritated" that no one from the state was at the meeting, including watermaster Mike Ladd of the Pendleton office. Elfering said he worked on the proposal with water resources director Tom Byler, who was in Pendleton on Tuesday. Elfering said Byler offered to attend the commissioner's meeting, but after their discussions Elfering told Byler he did not need to come.

Commissioner George Murdock said he would echo the board's frustrations. During a budget meeting months ago, Murdock said the only county department that did not attend was the watermaster office. And no one from the state notified the county of a recent meeting in Milton-Freewater that involved 80 water users.

"We think those are gross inadequacies of communication," Murdock said.

The board passed the proposal with a vote of 3-0, and moments later unanimously approved the county's \$72.2 million budget.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

HERMISTON

Jake Bacon hired as Highland Hills principal

East Oregonian

Hermiston School District's administrative game of musical chairs continued Monday with the appointment of Jake Bacon as Highland Hills Elementary School principal.

Bacon served as assistant principal of Hermiston High School during the 2015-2016 school year. He will replace current Highland Hills principal Brad Bixler, who is taking a job as human resources director for Pendleton School District.

Before moving to Hermiston School District a year ago, Bacon served as Echo School principal. He started with the school district there in 2004 after being hired as athletic director.

On Monday night the school board also approved Michael Thomas to replace

Bacon as assistant principal at Hermiston High School and Stefani Wyant as assistant principal at Armand Larive Middle School.

Wyant, who previously served as a Rocky Heights Elementary teacher and district-wide instructional coach, is replacing Lori Mills, who is replacing Larry Usher as Sandstone Middle School principal.

Usher was appointed at an earlier board meeting as the district's new athletic director, replacing Blaine Ganvoa.

The board also recently appointed Tricia Mooney, former assistant superintendent at Pendleton School District, as assistant superintendent for Hermiston School District to replace Wade Smith, who will be Walla Walla School District's new superintendent next year.



Bacon

BMCC welcomes new M-F director

East Oregonian

The Blue Mountain Community College Milton-Freewater Center is holding an open house June 29 to mark a changing of the guard.

The open house will give the public a chance to speak with both incoming director Susan Kralman and outgoing director Debbie Lee, who will retire at the end of the month after leading the center for the past nine years.

Kralman, BMCC Milton-Freewater's student success coach for the past year, started her new role June 1 and has been "learning the ropes" under Lee before she retires, according to a BMCC

press release.

Kralman has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Portland State University and a master's degree in social work from Walla Walla University and has worked stints as the human services planner for the Walla Walla County Department of Human Services, the housing services manager and 10-year plan coordinator for the Blue Mountain Action Council, and the homeless coordinator for the Walla Walla County Department of Community Health.

The reception takes place on June 29, from 4-5:30 p.m. in room 110 at the BMCC Milton-Freewater Center, 311 N. Columbia.

BRIEFLY

Umatilla County enacts ban on open burning

PENDLETON — Umatilla County Board of Commissioners enacted a ban Wednesday morning on open burning effective immediately. The ban does not apply to agriculture burning.

Gina Miller, code enforcement coordinator for the county, asked the board at its morning meeting to implement the annual non-ag burn ban. She said the hot and dry season is here and large fires have already started to drain resources.

The board voted 3-0 for the ban. The county joins other local governments that have banned burning waste piles and in barrels and the like, including the city of Pendleton and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Sewer pipe to get emergency repair

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council approved a \$115,545 sewer repair at a council workshop Tuesday.

The council ordinarily doesn't take action during workshops, but Public Works Director Bob Patterson said it was a repair that required immediate attention.

In an emergency action, the council approved a bid to hire Pipeline Inspection Services of Nampa, Idaho,

to install a special lining into a sewer pipe beneath the Oxford Suites parking lot to seal a 200-foot-long crack that is causing leakage.

City work crews will also install a new manhole along the pipe to make it easier to maintain.

Historic Trails Advisory Council sets meeting

HERMISTON — The Oregon Trails Advisory Council holds its summer meeting Sunday, June 26 at the Knights Inn in Hermiston.

The meeting will begin at 8 a.m. and is open to the public. The council is made up of nine volunteers appointed by the governor to oversee Oregon's 16 designated historic trails. Sunday's meeting will include an update on a grant project for the Barlow Road, which was the last overland segment of the Oregon Trail.

For more information, contact Loren Irving at 541-480-4167.

Family looks for Elmer-Cazier descendants

ISLAND CITY — All descendants of Edcil Elmer and Rosannah Cazier are invited to the 66th Cazier Family Reunion to be held on June 24-25 in Island City.

Rosannah Cazier was the last child of William and

Pleasant Drake Cazier. She married Edcil Elmer May 19, 1857. They moved to Summerville in the 1880s, along with Edcil's brothers, Raymond and Henry Elmer. Some of their descendants that stayed in the area are: Cleon Elmer who is buried in Lostine, Margaret Elmer (married to Abisha Lanman of Wallowa/Lostine), Almira Elmer (married to James Wesley Bright of Wallowa/Lostine), Lott Elmer buried in Union, William Alva Elmer buried in Wallowa and Georgia Elmer (married to William Douglas Whitmore of La Grande).

If you have the last name of Elmer, Lanman, Bright or Whitmore, contact Claire Averett at claireaverett@gmail.com, 801-376-9606 or visit www.cazier.org for more information.

Cheese days coming to SAGE Center

BOARDMAN — Tillamook Cheese Days are coming to the SAGE Center June 24-25, showcasing Tillamook products made in Boardman.

Lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. both days, with macaroni and cheese, cheesy cornbread, a muffin, salad, dessert and drink. The cost is \$5, and includes admission to the SAGE Center, which is located at 101 Olson Road, Boardman.

The Store at SAGE Center will also have Tillamook Squeaky Cheese Curds available for

purchase. For more information, call 541-481-7243 or visit www.visitsage.com.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

FATHERS DAY SALE

Thursday - Friday - Saturday HERMISTON

The Devine Recline just for DAD...on SALE!

RECLINERS

Greg's **ASHLEY** \$
Starting at **399.**

Doors Open 9:30AM Thurs June 16th

Zeph **ASHLEY**
\$
299.

Ovation **Southern Motion**
\$
699.

SAVE BIG

Lift Chairs
\$
699.
Starting at

North Hwy 395 Cottage Plaza
24 Month Interest Free Financing
Min. Purchase of \$999 OAC
Greg's
Sleep Center
Sofas 'n More

Adjustable Beds
Twin XL
Starting at
\$ 999.

Weekdays 9:30-6
Open Sun. 12-4
541-567-1099