

MILTON-FREEWATER

# 'Hard choices' ahead as groundwater levels declining

## Agency recommends mandatory metering

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**  
East Oregonian

Faced with declining groundwater levels across the Walla Walla subbasin, the Oregon Water Resources Department is looking to convene a local Resource Advisory Committee to find solutions for stabilizing aquifers.

The department laid out a number of options during two public meetings Thursday and Friday in Milton-Freewater, ranging from mandatory water metering to designating a Critical Groundwater Area, specifying how much water can be used within the boundaries.

About 40 people attended Friday's meeting at the Milton-Freewater Community Building, where Ivan Gall, administrator of the

OWRD Field Services Division, called on a major groundswell of support and backing in order to make the groundwater system work.

"Folks have got to be willing to make some hard choices," Gall said.

Ideally, Gall said the committee would include representatives from a variety of backgrounds, including city officials, large farms, small farms, tribes and the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council. The goal is to have rule changes developed and ready to present to the state Water Resources Commission by May 2017.

"We want to get these rules prepared, and go through the process," Gall said.

Data from the Water Resources Department shows one sedimentary well in the Walla Walla subbasin has declined 15 feet over the past 80 years, and water levels are now declining basin-wide at rates

ranging from 2-4 feet per year.

Hydrogeologist Jen Woody spent the first half of the meeting explaining the basics of the region's basalt aquifers, and how groundwater levels can change over time.

"We know that use is exceeding recharge," Woody said.

To better quantify recharge, the department is proposing to establish what's known as a Serious Water Management Problem Area. That would put a halt to issuing new groundwater permits in the area, and require meters be installed with regular readings.

Gall said the designation wouldn't change how the subbasin is managed now, but would memorialize the current practices under law. The Water Resources Commission would first have to conduct a public hearing before declaring a Serious Water Management Problem Area.

"This whole thing is about data collection," Gall said. "We need

this data to manage the system."

State law also allows the Water Resources Commission to formally withdraw unappropriated waters from further development — as was done in the Pomona and Priest Rapids basalt aquifers near Mosier in 1988. And then, there is the designation of a critical groundwater area, such as the Ordnance Basalt, Ordnance Gravel, Butter Creek and Stage Gulch areas near Boardman and Hermiston.

Those areas have curtailed nearly two-thirds of their water rights, yet Gall said groundwater levels are still declining at a reduced rate.

"Those folks have been searching for 20 years for alternative water supplies," he said. "It was a significant impact."

What Gall said he would like to see is voluntary agreements come out of the Resource Advisory Committee that would empower local users to be part of the solu-

tion. Examples might include farms switching to less water-intensive crops, fallowing land or improving irrigation efficiency.

But, in order for that to happen, Gall said any agreements need to have broad backing and support. He said the department will continue to have a series of meetings with residents and water users in Milton-Freewater, including two more meetings at the Community Building scheduled for Oct. 24 and 25.

Tom Byler, director of the OWRD, said it is the department's ultimate responsibility to manage groundwater for the good of the overall public.

"We have a charge to help communities get on a more sustainable path with regards to groundwater," Byler said.

Contact *George Plagen* at [gplaven@eastoregonian.com](mailto:gplaven@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0825.

PENDLETON

## Council to consider fining old city hall owner for lack of repairs

East Oregonian

The Pendleton City Council will act as both judge and jury in the case of the old city hall.

City Manager Robb Corbett wrote a letter to old city hall owner Jose Quezada Sept. 23 informing him that his building was in violation of the nuisance ordinance because it had not been repaired within a year of it catching fire after a July explosion.

Quezada was given the option of either making the necessary repairs within five days or appealing the city's decision to the council.

Quezada and his family decided to file an appeal, which will be heard by the council at a meeting Tuesday.

The Quezadas could face stiff penalties if Corbett's decision stands — a fine of up to \$500 for every day old city hall isn't in compliance or an abatement initiated by the city that would charge the Quezadas for the cost of repairs plus a 10 percent administrative overhead fee.

Corbett said which route the city takes is based on the council's decision and whether their swayed by the Quezadas' arguments.

### City council gets another go at gravel path decision

Given more time to walk the area where a proposed gravel path that would replace the closed Southwest 13th Street stairs, the Pendleton City Council will take another crack at approving the idea at a meeting Tuesday.

The council tabled the proposal at their last meeting, where several residents who live in the area said the path would be too steep for children navigating the bluff as they go to and from the bus stop at the Pendleton Early Learning Center.

Under city staff's proposal, the path would be 335 feet long with a 16 percent slope.

There is no current cost estimate for the path, but the council is also considering adding a handrail, paving the path and demolishing the old staircase, which isn't structurally sound.

The council will meet Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Ave.

BRIEFLY

### Heppner man killed in crash on Highway 207

A 63-year-old Heppner man died in a head-on crash Friday morning after a potato truck crossed in front of his vehicle on Highway 207.

Mervin Grubaugh was driving north on the highway in a 1996 Subaru Legacy about nine miles south of Hermiston and Maria Bautista Lucas, 60, from Yakima was heading south in a 1996 Mack truck.

Lucas turned left at the Echo Highway turnoff, according to Oregon State Police, crashing nearly head-on into the Subaru at highway speeds. Grubaugh died at the scene and Lucas was taken to Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston where she was treated and released.

The crash took place near the intersection at mile marker 27B at about 7:45 a.m. and the highway was closed for about five hours while investigators reconstructed the crash scene.

OSP was assisted by Hermiston Fire and Ambulance, Echo Fire and Oregon Department of Transportation. The investigation is ongoing and more information will be released when available, according to OSP.

### FFA food drive runs through October

PENDLETON — Oregon FFA, Les Schwab Tires and the *Capital Press* are teaming up to help Drive Away Hunger with a statewide food drive through the

month of October.

According to a press release from the FFA, the Oregon Food Bank has seen demand for emergency food boxes increase by 40 percent since 2008.

To help keep the food bank full, brown paper bags are being distributed, including in today's *East Oregonian*, and can be dropped off at any Les Schwab Tire Center or FFA Center.

The 2015 initiative raised more than 633,000 pounds of food, according to the press release, enough to provide 528,227 meals. There are nearly 6,000 FFA members from 103 FFA chapters in the state.

### Fire detected near Olive Lake

A small wildfire is burning on the Umatilla National Forest several miles southwest of Olive Lake.

Andrew Stinchfield, fire management officer for the North Fork John Day Ranger District, said the 1-acre blaze is located in a remote area of the Vinegar Hill-Indian Rock Scenic Area. No structures or private land are threatened. The cause of the fire is unknown.

Due to the rugged terrain, predicted rainfall and cold weather in the forecast, firefighters will not attack the fire directly in order to keep them safe.

The fire will be visible from Forest Road 10 and other vantage points within the forest. No forest closures will be implemented, though hunters and hikers should be cautious when entering the area — particularly along the Blue Mountain Trail 6141.

## Sand Station Area closes to overnight camping Saturday

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

On Saturday, Sand Station Recreation Area will close to overnight camping until further notice.

Bruce Henrickson, public affairs specialist for the Army Corps of Engineers, said the recreation area off Highway 730 about 10 miles east of Umatilla will still be open to day use. Closure of the camping area is necessary, however, to redesign the RV camping area and restore or remove campsites that have eroded.

"It will remain closed until further notice because we don't know how long the work will take," he said.

Henrickson said waves from the river have severely eroded the camping spots closest to the beach in recent years. Staff will try to restore as many as possible but may have to remove some.

He said Corps staff will perform the work themselves because of reduced federal recreation budgets, which have forced the Corps to shorten recreation seasons and cut services. He said they saved the work for the off-season to minimize the impact on the public.

Michael Nathan said he and his family have been living at Sand Station, along with four other homeless families. He said notices about the Oct. 1 closure had been posted at his campground and on Friday someone came to speak to them in person.

He said the closure essentially puts those families out of a home, forcing them to find somewhere else to park the vehicle they live in during the winter months. Two families have already left, he said, and he and his wife are assisting the other two in moving their belongings to a new location since they do not have a car.

"We all go through the same thing together," he said.

Henrickson said the Corps was aware that there were homeless families that frequently camped at Sand Station, and they would be able to do so again once the work was complete. Camping is allowed at the site for up to seven days at a time.

But he said for safety reasons the Corps could not allow overnight camping there during the construction period.

Contact *Jade McDowell* at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.

## Williams to lead EO advertising department

East Oregonian

Marissa Williams has been named Regional Advertising Director for EO Media Group's publications in Eastern Oregon.

Williams will manage advertising for the *East Oregonian*, *Hermiston Herald*, Eastern Oregon Real Estate & Homebuilders Guide, Eastern Oregon Marketplace and Eastern Oregon Parent publications. She will continue as publisher of the *Blue Mountain Eagle* in John Day and *Wallowa County Chieftain* in Enterprise. She will divide her time between these locations.

She was born and raised in Grant County and her family owns the Broken Leg Ranch near Monument, where she learned to ride horses. At Grant Union High School she qualified for the National High School Rodeo finals in team roping.

She and her husband, Zach, have three children and spend much of their free time coaching youth softball and volleyball.

Williams has worked in Eastern Oregon



Williams

for the EO Media Group since 2004, and has been a publisher since 2009. She is currently the treasurer of Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association.

Editor & Publisher, a monthly magazine covering the news industry, picked Williams as one of its "25 under 35" in 2011, an annual feature that highlights the best young innovators in the business. That was the same year the *Blue Mountain Eagle* under Williams' leadership was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the Aryan Nation white supremacist group planning to move its headquarters to John Day.

Williams and her husband, Zach, coach youth sports including softball and volleyball.

"I'm looking forward to working with the staff at the *East Oregonian* and *Hermiston Herald*, the community and businesses," Marissa said. "I am honored to be a part of a team that strives every day to help meet the needs of our customers through effective advertising plans in our many products."

## FALL DISNEY DAYS AT AAA



OCTOBER 3-14, 2016

AAA Pendleton

1729 SW Court Ave  
541.276.2243

Enjoy special AAA booking incentives October 3-14 on Disney vacations, compliments of AAA Travel!

Visit or call your local AAA and let us customize a Disney vacation that's just right for you and your family.



## PLEASE SAVE THE DATE!

# Free Adult Flu Shots

Pendleton Convention Center  
Parking Lot  
Drive Through Clinic

Monday, October 3rd

11am - 6pm

Tuesday, October 4th

7am - 2pm

For more information, contact Tracy

541-278-3262



2801 St. Anthony Way  
Pendleton, OR 97801  
[www.sahpendleton.org](http://www.sahpendleton.org)

Imagine better health.™