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WINNER OF THE 2016 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Bill and Michele Grable's dog, Duchess, checks out her flooded backyard Wednesday. The tree to the dog's left normally marks the edge of the creek, but water released from McKay Dam at a rate of 1,160 cubic feet per second has flooded the yard.

PENDLETON

School board to talk layoffs

East Oregonian

A significant round of layoffs could be coming to the Pendleton School District for the first time since the recession.

The Pendleton School Board will be holding a special meeting Thursday to consider a "reduction of force," which would lay off an undefined number of district staff members.

Human resources director Brad Bixler said the district is still finalizing the list of positions that would be eliminated under the reduction and it won't be available until the board meeting.

The school board has discussed looming budget cuts for months and the facts surrounding it remain the same.

As the Oregon Legislature struggles to find a way to close a \$1.6 billion budget gap, the state department of education is projecting that it will give less money to local districts.

Pairing that with Pendleton's declining student enrollment paints a stark picture for the district.

Gary Humphries, a Sunridge Middle School teacher and the president of the Pendleton Teachers Association, said he doesn't envy the school board's position.

"I don't think they have much of a choice," he said.

Humphries said the district can't shut down a school or cancel busing services to balance the budget, leaving layoffs as the only feasible option.

The district last made significant layoffs in 2011, when it eliminated nine classified positions, which encompass jobs like assistants, custodians and secretaries.

Prior to that, the district laid off 19 people in 2009, including six teachers and 10 instructional assistants.

These figures don't include positions that went unfilled after an employee retired or resigned from the district.

The school board will meet Thursday at 6 p.m. at the district office at 107 N.W. 10th Street.

Reservoir logged

McKay Reservoir filled to capacity

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

Bill Grable watched nervously Wednesday as flood waters from McKay Creek rose into his backyard on Haney Lane in Pendleton.

"It's just roaring," Grable said. "This is kind of a perfect storm year, with the snowpack and all the rain we've had this spring."

All that water has filled nearby McKay Reservoir to capacity, prompting the Bureau of Reclamation to ramp up discharge from the dam and leaving the creek swollen in some low-lying areas downstream — including along the Grables' home.

Grable figures the stream has crept up 20 feet into his yard, and has also noticed large tree stumps washed away in the strong current.

"It makes me nervous," he said.

Chet Sater, natural resource specialist for the Bureau of Reclamation in Hermiston, said they began releasing 1,160 cubic feet per second of water from McKay Dam on Tuesday to absorb the roughly 2,000 cubic feet per second coming into the reservoir, with one



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Water pours through a spillway on the backside of McKay Dam on Wednesday at a rate of 1,160 cubic feet per second. The Bureau of Reclamation may start tapering off by Friday.

cubic foot being equal to about 7.5 gallons.

The bureau was releasing 500 cubic feet per second of water at McKay Reservoir, Sater said, though the latest rainstorm triggered an increase in outflow.

"We have to do what we have to do, based on current projections," Sater said.

Weather forecasts indicate the rain should let up by Friday and into the weekend. If that holds true, Sater said they will begin tapering releases from the dam.

"We are a little leery, because it is still raining," he said.

If outflows exceed 1,200 cubic feet per second, which

the bureau defines as "safe channel capacity," then Sater said they will notify residents downstream.

Dennis Hull, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton, said this has been the wettest year dating back to October in Pendleton since 1973-74, with 13.55 total inches of precipitation. Average precipitation to date usually hovers around 8.85 inches.

Snowpack also remains well ahead of normal for the region, as it has all winter. As of Wednesday, the Natural Resource Conservation Service measured snow-water equivalent at 151 percent of normal for

the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow Creek basins.

With plenty of snow to melt and rain falling steady, McKay Reservoir is now 100 percent full for the first time since 2014. A year ago, the reservoir peaked at just 83 percent full.

"Basically, we hope to keep where we're at now with the releases," Sater said.

The plethora of stored water should bode well for farmers that depend on McKay Reservoir for irrigation water. Mike Wick, manager of the

Westland Irrigation District in Echo, said he anticipates having a full irrigation season for patrons throughout the summer.

"I would be terribly disappointed if we did not, the way things are looking right now," Wick said.

During the past couple of drought years, Westland has been forced to shut off irrigation early as storage failed to hold up during the season.

"It's a much different scenario from last year," Wick said.

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Environmental panel filled after split vote

By **PETER WONG**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown's three nominees for a new majority on the Environmental Quality Commission have advanced to a vote of the full Oregon Senate.

But in a 3-2 vote Wednesday by the Senate Rules Committee, minority Republicans served notice they want the Legislature to weigh in on a pending plan for how the commission regulates toxic air pollution from industrial sources.

The shift that a Brown-appointed advisory panel recommends would focus state efforts on cumulative effects of pollutants on public health, rather than the amounts generated by individual plants.

See **PANEL/8A**

HERMISTON

Harkenrider Center to bring seniors downtown

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The rain let up on Wednesday afternoon in time for Hermiston's senior citizens and community leaders to celebrate breaking ground on the Harkenrider Center.

The Hermiston Senior Center board and city haven't always seen eye to eye on design and future use of the building, which will be the exclusive home of the senior center for its first five years, followed by some additional community use in the evenings. But Kathy English, a prep cook for the center's twice-a-week meals for seniors, said there was a lot to look forward to about the new building.

"I actually think it's going to be wonderful," she said. "It's going

to be bigger and better for us."

Mayor David Drotzmann called the groundbreaking a "historic event" taking place amid major changes to Hermiston. Those changes include a new trade and event center being built south of town and sale of the former Umatilla County Fairgrounds, where the current senior center sits, to Hermiston School District.

"There is a lot of change going on, but this community does as it always does and rallies around a cause," he said.

Drotzmann said the Harkenrider Center wouldn't be possible without collaboration from a number of entities, including the "guidance and leadership"

See **SENIORS/8A**



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann speaks to a crowd gathered at the site of the future Harkenrider Center on Wednesday at the official groundbreaking. Frank Harkenrider, for whom the center is named, listens on.

