

**HERMISTON**

# Union Pacific replacing 10,000 railroad ties

Part of \$77.1M statewide infrastructure investment

East Oregonian

Union Pacific is in the process of replacing roughly 10,000 railroad ties in Hermiston as part of a \$77.1 million investment in rail infrastructure across Oregon.

Spokesman Justin Jacobs said the project began April 24 and should finish by mid-May. The goal, Jacobs said, is to give the tracks in Hermiston a face lift and improve safety.

UP has set aside \$44.7 million to maintain railroad tracks and \$3.2 million to maintain bridges statewide. The railroad has already invested more than \$300 million in Oregon rail infrastructure between 2012 and 2016, according to company figures.

“Union Pacific’s targeted investments fund projects that strengthen our railroad tracks, increase safety and minimize delays as trains travel through communities across Oregon,” said Wes Lujan, vice presi-



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

**A Union Pacific construction vehicle uses a mechanical arm to place new railroad ties alongside the railroad spur Wednesday off Umatilla River Road north of Hermiston.**

dent of public affairs for the railroad’s Western Region in a previous statement. “Maintaining a healthy railroad is the foundation of our ability to serve customers and communities across the state.”

Other projects slated for Oregon tracks include:

- \$9.3 million to replace 21 miles of rail between Klamath Falls and Chemult.

- \$12.1 million to replace 87,978 railroad ties between Huntington, Oregon, and

Caldwell, Idaho.

- \$14.3 million to replace 102,683 railroad ties between Portland and Oakridge.

UP plans to spend \$3.1 billion across its entire rail network in 2017. Since 2000, the railroad has spent \$51 billion and decreased derailments by 40 percent, though last year’s high-profile oil train derailment near Mosier has spurred concerns about rail safety across the Northwest.

**BRIEFLY**

## Hermiston man arrested on rape charges

HERMISTON — A Hermiston man was arrested Tuesday on rape charges.

Elias Nava Flores, 24, allegedly had sexual contact with a child younger than 12 at a residence in Hermiston in April, according to a news release from the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office.

He is charged with rape in the first degree, sodomy in the first degree and unlawful possession of methamphetamine.

According to the sheriff’s office, Flores was arrested Tuesday after detectives met with the victim’s relative about the alleged sexual contact between Flores and the victim.

Flores was taken into custody after being interviewed about the allegations, and according to the sheriff’s office had a substance suspected to be methamphetamine in his possession at the time of arrest.

He was lodged in the Umatilla County Jail. Additional charges may be pending.



Flores

## Man remains in critical condition after ATV rollover

PENDLETON — Chase Ammons of Pendleton is still in critical condition at Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland after an all-terrain vehicle crash almost two weeks ago. Family members started an online account to raise money for his medical bills.

Pendleton fire chief Mike Ciraulo said the department around 12:30 a.m. on April 20 responded to a report of a possible crash on Highway 11. The ambulance crew found a 30-year-old man in need of emergency medical help.

“We had to intubate him all the way to his lungs,” Ciraulo said. “He was in serious condition.”

He appeared to be the victim of an ATV rollover, the fire chief said, and was not wearing a helmet when the ambulance arrived.

The first plan was to fly him in an air ambulance, but Ciraulo said LifeFlight was not able to take off. Pendleton rushed him to Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, due to the extent of his injuries.

Chase and his wife, Stefanie, married in 2015, according to *East Oregonian* records. A neighbor of the Chase family on Tuesday alerted the *EO* to the crash and a GoFundMe webpage, which has raised more than \$7,200 toward a \$15,000 goal.

Lacey Ammons-Slater set up the page but did not respond to a message before deadline.

According to the webpage, the couple have two boys, one 3 years and the other 8 months.

## Council hands city manager more spending authority

PENDLETON — At a meeting Tuesday, the Pendleton City Council unanimously approved an ordinance that gives city manager Robb Corbett and department heads more spending authority.

Corbett can now spend up to \$50,000 and department heads can spend up to \$5,000 without council authorization.

When he was president of Blue Mountain Community College, Mayor John Turner said he could spend up to \$75,000 without board approval, so the increases were in line with other government agencies.

Councilor Neil Brown said this ordinance wouldn’t hand city staff a blank check, but would instead allow them to move faster on projects already approved in the budget.

The council also unanimously approved an ordinance that expands how city staff sell, donate or dispose of surplus property.

Lastly, the council approved a \$126,476 bid to VSS International of West Sacramento, California, for slurry and crack seal work on city roads.

## West Umatilla Mosquito Control to begin spraying

Spraying for mosquitoes has begun in west Umatilla County.

The West Umatilla Mosquito Control District reports large bodies of water will be sprayed using a helicopter while smaller areas will be treated by hand. The district will also use “ultra low volume foggers” mounted on trucks to spray for adult mosquitoes in problem areas during early evening hours just after sunset.

If you do not wish to have your property sprayed, call the district at 541-567-5201 and ask to be placed on a no-spray list.

The district — which covers about 525 square miles encompassing Hermiston, Umatilla, Stanfield and Echo — has 12 species of mosquitoes including two that have been named possible carriers of West Nile virus.

Property owners can do their part to cut down on the mosquito population by eliminating standing water where mosquitoes breed. They can keep gutters and ditches clear, remove junk from yards, change birdbath and pet water frequently, fill in holes, screen rain barrels, cover trash containers and stock ornamental ponds with mosquito-eating fish.

**LA GRANDE**

## Mendoza is board’s choice for superintendent

By DICK MASON

The La Grande Observer

George Mendoza, the assistant superintendent of the Morrow County School District, may soon become the next superintendent of the La Grande School District.

The La Grande School Board reached consensus last week night to have contract negotiations begin between Mendoza and the school district’s legal counsel. If a contractual agreement is reached and Mendoza is formally named superintendent, he will succeed Larry

Glaze, who will retire at the end of June.

Mendoza and Mike Kay, the Hermiston School District’s executive director of operations, were the two finalists for La Grande’s superintendent position.

The school board came to a consensus on the selection of Mendoza while meeting in executive session. Following the executive session the board came into open session and chair Merle Comfort announced that Mendoza was who the board wanted. Comfort said the board hopes to formally name Mendoza

as superintendent at its May 10 meeting.

“I think George will be an outstanding superintendent for La Grande,” said La Grande School Board member Joe Justice.

Mendoza has been the Morrow County School District assistant superintendent since 2011, according to Mendoza’s LinkedIn profile. He has 20 years of experience as an educator, 16 as an administrator. He graduated from Eastern Oregon University in 1997 and is a member of EOU’s board of trustees.

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