BRIEFLY

Photo contributed by Oregon State Police

OSP is seeking help identifying two individuals caught on private property in Morrow County, who may be involved in poaching at least three elk.

OSP seeks help in Morrow County poaching case

The Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division is asking for help identifying two individuals who may have been involved in poaching elk between Sept. 16-23 in Morrow County.

The suspects were initially caught on camera on private property. After the photo was taken, at least three elk were illegally killed and much of the meat left to waste. Troopers believe the two subjects were involved in the crime.

A third person may also have been with the subjects, who were camped near Martin Prairie off Forest Service Road 21 in the Heppner Unit.

Anyone with information is asked to contact OSP Senior Trooper Michael Mayer at 541-561-7581, or to call the Turn-In-Poachers hotline at 1-800-452-7888. Rewards may be offered through TIP for information leading to an arrest and conviction.

Rural fire agencies quench blaze near Helix

HELIX — Sparks from a burn barrel ignited a brush fire Sunday near Helix. The Helix Rural Fire Protection District in a written statement also reported the fire consumed 25 acres.

The district sent a brush truck, water tender and two firefighters at 1:32 p.m. to the blaze near milepost 5 on Holdman Road. The Umatilla County Rural Fire Protection District assisted with another water tender, its chief and three firefighters. Helix reported crews extinguished the burn after about two hours.

The fire did not threaten structures, no one was injured and the fire remains under investigation, according to the release.

BMCC to celebrate FARM grand opening Thursday

PENDLETON — Blue Mountain Community College will celebrate the grand opening of its new agricultural complex — named the Facility for Agricultural Resource Management, or FARM — during a ceremony Thursday from 4:30-6:30 p.m. at the school's Pendleton campus.

FARM is the last of three projects to be completed after voters approved a $23 million capital construction bond in 2015.

The bond also paid for BMCC's new Workforce Training Center in Boardman, which opened in April, and the Precision Irrigated Agriculture Center in Hermiston, which opened in July.

BMCC operates its own working farm on campus in Pendleton, and the new FARM building will house classrooms, offices, shops and lab space all in one location. Thursday's grand opening will include a ribbon cutting ceremony, along with public tours and speeches by BMCC President Cam Preus, Board of Education Chairman Chris Brown and other school faculty.

The ceremony also coincides with the opening reception for Oregon State University's Art About Ag: "Places to Thrive" exhibit at the Betty Feves Memorial Art Gallery, featuring artwork inspired by agriculture. Attendees are encouraged to stop by the gallery following the FARM grand opening.

The BMCC Pendleton campus is located at 411 N.W. Carden Ave.

Members needed for Ag Heritage Commission

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is accepting applications to serve on the newly formed Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission, established by the Legislature to provide incentives for farmers to voluntarily adopt practices that preserve both natural resources and agriculture.

The 12-member board will oversee the program and make funding and policy recommendations to OWEB. Applications are due Oct. 25.

Members are needed to represent a range of interests, including:

- Four members recommended by the state Board of Agriculture who are actively engaged in farming or ranching.
- One member recommended by the director of the Oregon State University Extension Service.
- Two members recommended by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission with expertise on fish and wildlife habitat.
- One member recommended by the Board of Agriculture with expertise in agricultural water quality.
- One member recommended by the Land Conservation and Development Commission with expertise in conservation easements and land transfers.
- One member selected by OWEB representing natural resource interests.
- One member selected by OWEB representing tribal interests.
- One non-voting member, who is also a member of OWEB.

Terms will initially vary in length in order to stagger membership, after which commissioners will serve four-year terms. Commissioners cannot serve more than two consecutive terms.

For more information or to obtain an application, contact Nellie McAdams at 503-986-0061 or email nellie.mcadams@oregon.gov.

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

HERMISTON

Buses switch to new route on Monday

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Hermiston's free public bus system will change its route Monday.

The system, known as HART, will now make six circuits through town each day instead of four, and the route has been rearranged with the goal of riders spending less time on the bus during a round trip.

During a Public Transit Advisory Committee meeting Monday, assistant city manager Mark Morgan said ridership has not increased as was expected, and Kayak Public Transit and the city have received feedback that the system isn't well suited for round-trip travel. The new route designed by Kayak reduces the number of stops the bus makes and creates a system that rotates directions each trip instead of making a continuous loop in one direction around town. It also runs from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. instead of 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Starting Monday the number of stops will go from 30 to 20, eliminating several stops with low ridership, including Riverfront Park, the Aspens, Sunland Avenue and Moore Avenue. The trade-off is that the bus will now run six loops through town during the day, and loops will be under an hour instead of the previous hour and fifteen minutes. Fewer riders will have their ride interrupted by the bus driver stopping for their regularly scheduled breaks as well.

The bus will also change directions during the day, providing longer and shorter options for riders to choose from. One rider might stop by city hall to pay their bill at 8:48 a.m. and get back on the bus headed back toward their home at 9:01 a.m., while another rider may get off at the city hall stop to use the library across the street at 11:03 a.m. and then take the next ride home at 12:24 p.m.

"It's definitely an improvement," driver Ron Myers told the transit committee. "It may not be perfect, but it's better than it has been."

The new route can be found on the city of Hermiston's website, and the schedule will be updated on Kayak Public Transit's website at http://ctuir.org/tribal-services/planning/kayak-public-transit when it begins on Monday.

"Hopefully people will hear about it and give us another try, if they already gave us a try," Morgan said.

He said the city also purchased 12 Plexiglas bus shelters from a surplus auction for $1,500 and will look at which stops along the route could accommodate one.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

Social media helps crack elk head theft

East Oregonian

Social media helped return an elk hunter's stolen trophy animal.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said a hunter from Sweet Home bagged a large bull elk and spent Sunday night at the Pendleton Super 8, 601 S.E. Nye Ave., with the head and antlers of the elk outside in his trailer.

The last time he saw the kill was at about 10 p.m., Roberts said. He called police Monday at 6:40 a.m. to report the head was gone.

Pendleton police took to Facebook and posted basic information about the case along with the hunter's photos of the elk. Since then, Facebook users shared the images and story 3,929 times, reaching more than 355,000 people.

Roberts said Pendleton police on Tuesday received a telephone call and an image from a citizen in Elgin in response to the Facebook post. Based on that, Roberts said, Pendleton coordinated with Oregon State Police fish and game troopers in La Grande, who went to Elgin and seized the head, which was in a shed on vacant property.

Photo contributed by Pendleton Police Department

Oregon State Police worked with Pendleton police to retrieve this elk head Monday in Elgin after someone stole it from a hunter in Pendleton.

Roberts said police were working out the logistics of getting the head back to the hunter, who plans to secure it this weekend.

Roberts also said the investigation is ongoing and there have been no arrests. He said theft is the most applicable charge, but wildlife violations could come into play. He also said this is a case of social media coming through and showing its value.

HERMISTON

High school looks at grad venue survey results

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The Hermiston School Board heard this week from the people whom the graduation venue change will affect most — senior class students and parents.

Interim Superintendent Tricia Mooney read board members the results of a survey conducted in the last few weeks, asking people whether they would rather see graduation remain in the Hermiston High School gymnasium or be moved to the Toyota Center in Kennewick.

Of the 834 people that responded to the survey, nine percent were senior students, 21 percent were senior parents, eight percent were Hermiston School District staff members and 62 percent were other community members.

The level of support varied among each subgroup, but overall, 24.8 percent of participants felt strongly that graduation should continue to be held at HHS, and 49.3 percent very strongly agreed that it should be moved to the Toyota Center.

Among high school seniors, continuing graduation at HHS garnered little support. Only 21 percent of participating seniors voting for keep graduation as is, while 69 percent agreed strongly with moving graduation to the Toyota Center. Senior parents voted similarly, with 57 percent supporting a move to the Toyota Center. Eight percent of the staff members that voted agreed with keeping graduation at the high school, and 65 percent said it should be moved to the Toyota Center. Among community members, 28 percent agreed with keeping the ceremony in town, and 42 percent said it should be moved to the Toyota Center.

Hermiston High School leadership teacher Dave Rohrman also collected answers from 242 high school seniors, about 60 percent of this year's graduating class. Board members were able to see their votes, as well as anonymous comments.

In that survey, 9.5 percent of students strongly agreed with keeping graduation at Hermiston High School, and 71 percent said they'd like to see it move to the Toyota Center.

Most of the comments centered on students' concerns with being able to accommodate all their family members.

"I have five other people in my family, and I can't just say that one of them can't go," said one of the commenters.

But some said they couldn't agree with graduating anywhere other than the community where they grew up.

And some said even though they liked the idea of a cheaper venue with more space, the date would be a concern.

"It will be hard for working family members to travel over here and get back in time for work, especially if they can't get work off," said another commenter.

Still others said they didn't understand why the event couldn't be held at Kennison Field or the EOTEC rodeo grounds.

Rohrman also spoke at the meeting, saying while he is a Hermiston native, the Toyota Center made the most sense this year.

He said he has students every year that come to him asking how they can get more tickets, even offering to work for them.

"I was born and raised in Hermiston. I get that, but there are times when money has to go out of the district," he said.

"EOTEC says they want to do it. They've got a year and a half to figure it out," he said.

The board will make a decision at its meeting October 2.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4534

Submit community news information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

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