

Eastern Oregon commissioners to weigh in on forest plan in D.C.

By KATY NESBITT
For the EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — Eastern Oregon county commissioners will make their voice heard Dec. 12-14 when Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Jim Peña presents the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision in Washington, D.C.

The Blue Mountains Forest Plan has been under revision since 2003 and is a guiding document for the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests. Susan Roberts, chairman of the Eastern Oregon Counties Association, said a draft of the plan released in June had significant changes in grazing requirements from a draft released in January.

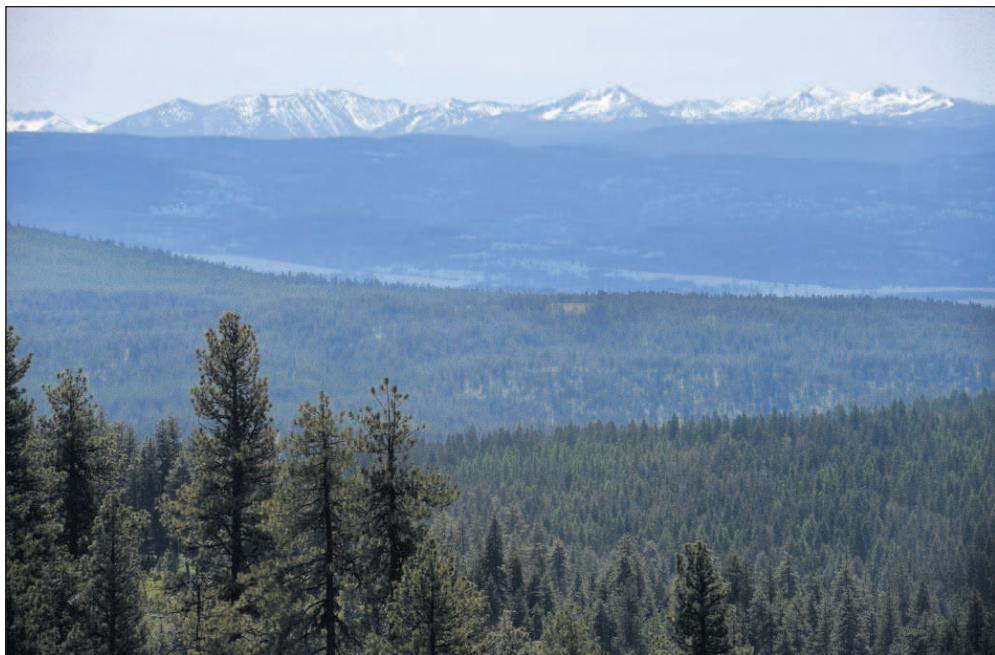
“We were concerned that those changes would have an economic impact on our local communities,” Roberts said.

Fearing increased stubble height along endangered species-bearing streams in public grazing allotments would reduce grazing and harm local economies, Harney County Commissioner Mark Owens and other members of the association asked Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, to intervene on their behalf with the federal agencies.

“We want to make sure they are addressing economic conditions as well as ecological in the plan’s revision,” Owens said.

Roberts said the association members wanted an opportunity to speak directly to federal fisheries staff face-to-face instead of communicating through the Forest Service, a request that was somewhat out of the ordinary.

“The plan had not gone to



Representative of counties will accompany Forest Service official presenting plan revision in Washington.

formal consultation with the regulatory agencies and we wanted to get some things ironed out before that,” Roberts said.

Justin Discigil, Walden’s communications director, said the congressman has worked closely with Eastern Oregon counties throughout the 14 years the Blue Mountains Plan has been under revision.

Discigil said Walden, at the association’s behest, raised the counties’ concerns with the Blue Mountains Plan with the new chief of the Forest Service, Tony Tooke, shortly after he was appointed this fall.

“Congressman Walden wants to make sure the voices of the people on the ground are heard in this process,” Discigil said.

Seeing significant headway in meetings with the federal agencies, Wallowa County Commissioner Todd Nash said he asked if Eastern Oregon

could send a representative to meet with Forest Service officials when Peña presents the plan to Forest Service leaders in Washington, D.C.

“When we started to see effective changes with all of the agencies in the room I thought it was of value, as cooperating agents, for someone from one of the counties to be in that presentation,” Nash said.

In a rare move, Peña extended an invitation for one commissioner to join him in Washington.

“It’s important for our agency to be transparent about this process and everything it entails, so I was happy to extend this invitation,” Peña said. “Many of these counties have signed a memorandum of understanding to formalize their role as a cooperating agency with the Forest Service as part of this forest plan revision, and all of them are important partners in this effort.”

Owens, who will represent Eastern Oregon counties, said having cooperating agency status means more than having an opportunity to review an agency’s plan and submitting comments.

“The biggest challenge with any federal management plan is not being at the table during consultation,” Owens said. “Cooperating status doesn’t do any good if we can’t drive the direction of an alternative.”

Along with Peña, Owens said he will attend a Forest Service director staff briefing, a deputy chief briefing and a briefing with Chief Tony Tooke. Nash and Owen will both meet with Dan Jiorn, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment.

“We will meet with him to talk about grazing the areas we did not have success like pace and scale of timber harvest, transportation and elk corridors,” Owens said.

HERMISTON

Man arrested in drug bust has extensive criminal history

East Oregonian

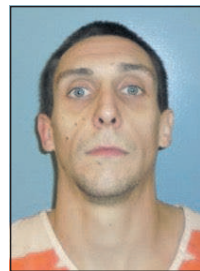
The Hermiston man who was arrested Wednesday for possessing 75 pounds of marijuana has been charged with drug-related offenses before, according to state court records.

William Richard Rhoades, 27, was charged in June 2016 with possession of methamphetamine. He has a hearing for that charge on Dec. 21. He also has several criminal charges in Multnomah County, including possession of tobacco by a minor, burglary, theft, possession of marijuana, and assault in the third and fourth degree.

Rhoades was arrested after a failed traffic stop in Hermiston Wednesday morning. According to a Hermiston Police Department press release, officers attempted to stop a car around 1 a.m. near the intersection of West

Highland Avenue and South First Street for a traffic violation. The driver did not stop and, after a short pursuit, the officer lost sight of the vehicle.

Hermiston and Oregon State Police officers eventually found Rhoades inside an apartment on West Sunland Avenue. Inside the apartment, they found more than 75 pounds of marijuana, as well as items



Rhoades

related to illegal marijuana sales. These included packaging materials, scales, and items used to make butane honey oil, a product made from marijuana extracts. The process for making the oil is highly volatile, and can cause explosions.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said there were no other arrests so far related to the bust. He said the identification found in the vehicle belonged to Rhoades’ girlfriend.

BRIEFLY

Minam River Lodge adds CEO

Patricia Lee has been named CEO of the Minam River Lodge, as the revamped wilderness lodge readies for its second season.

Lee is the former manager and partner of the Steamboat Inn on the North Umpqua River, where she worked for more than 30 years.

She will now oversee strategic and business operations of the Minam River Lodge, which is located in the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

“Pat has a wonderful history of accomplishment, not just in hospitality management but also in creating very special places that help people experience Oregon’s natural treasures,” said Barnes Ellis, owner of Minam River Lodge.

The lodge reopened in May 2017 after a six year restoration project. It is accessible only by 8.5-mile hike, horseback ride or charter flight to its private grass airstrip.



Patricia Lee

ODOT requests 153 positions for transportation projects

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Transportation plans to request 153 new positions in February to help deliver \$5.3 billion in transportation projects lawmakers agreed to fund earlier this year.

It was unclear Friday how much the new positions will cost, but they equate to nearly 78 full-time employees, said Leah Horner, ODOT government relations manager.

The 153 jobs would start in the next two years and would augment 35 new full-time-equivalent positions the state Legislature already approved in July. ODOT is in the midst of hiring for those positions.

The agency estimates it could ask for another 113 positions for 2020 and 2021.

The request comes as ODOT is gearing up to boost outsourcing to deliver road and bridge projects in the transportation package.

Agency officials said Friday they plan to increase outsourcing, currently



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about 50 percent, to about 70 percent on preliminary engineering work.

The strategy — a national trend — is designed to hold down costs and circumvent a labor shortage in the engineering industry.

“We are relying on outsourcing to limit the number of positions in the agency,” said Paul Mather,

ODOT highway division administrator. “We also want to capture the innovation and expertise of the private sector.”

However, a preliminary report by ODOT and the Oregon Council of Engineering Companies indicates relying more heavily on outsourcing by transportation departments

in other states has produced some negative results. Those have included an increase in costs, recruitment of agency employees to private consulting firms, less oversight, increased risk of missing errors and potential conflicts of interest in consultants’ work.

The negative effects “we found from other states is not consistent with our experience here in Oregon and thus will not be included in the final version,” Mather said of the preliminary report. The final version of the report, “Transportation Program Delivery Approach,” is scheduled to be released next month, he said.

Mather said ODOT can avoid the risks of outsourcing by clearly communicating expectations in contracts and putting the agency’s practices and procedures in contract language for which contractors can be held accountable.

A management review of ODOT earlier this year recommended that the agency clarify contract language to improve project outcomes.

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