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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2018

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Overdue forest plan to be released Friday

Document will guide management over 5.5 million acres

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
EO Media Group

At long last, the U.S. Forest Service is ready to unveil its final draft of the much-anticipated Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision. The plans, which were last updated in 1990, will guide land management activities — includ-

ing timber harvest, recreation and livestock grazing — over 5.5 million acres in the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur national forests in Eastern Oregon for the next 10-15 years. A draft environmental impact statement, or EIS, for the plans was released in 2014, but after a significant public backlash the Forest Service embarked on three more years of outreach to build consensus. The result is a final EIS and draft record of decision that will be published Friday, June 29, kick-

ing off a 60-day period for individuals or groups with legal standing to file objections. The process then segues into a 90-day objection resolution period, before the Pacific Northwest regional forester, Jim Peña, makes his final decision. Tom Montoya, supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Baker City, said that if all goes according to schedule, the revised forest plans could be adopted and in place by the begin-

See **FOREST/8A**



EO Media Group file photo

A view of the Strawberry Mountains from Keeney Fork Road on the Malheur National Forest in Grant County. The U.S. Forest Service is ready to unveil its final environmental impact statement for the much-anticipated Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision, covering 5.5 million acres of public forests in Eastern Oregon.

HERMISTON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Late afternoon traffic begins to get heavy on Highway 395 on Monday in Hermiston. The Oregon Department of Transportation and the city of Hermiston have agreed to work together to help alleviate traffic on the busy highway.

FINDING RELIEF

\$4.5 million North First Place project could relieve congestion on Highway 395

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

As traffic congestion increases on Highway 395, Hermiston city officials are hoping to drive more local traffic to alternate routes.

On Monday the city council signed an agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation for a \$4.5 million project to improve North First Place, which runs parallel to the highway. The project will be paid for by state funds after it was included as an ear-

mark in the 2017 transportation package. “We as a community need to find alternative routes to 395, and I think this will help,” said Mayor David Drotzmann. According to the agreement approved by the council Monday, the city can spend the \$4.5 million to widen North First Place and put in center turn lanes, plus add a sidewalk, curbs, gutters, street lights and

a bike-ped trail running parallel to the road on the east side. It can also include upgrades to the intersection of North First Place and Elm Avenue, allowing signalized left turns onto First Place from Elm. “People recognize that’s a lot of the reason people don’t use First,” assistant city manager Mark Morgan said. “I

See **PROJECT/8A**

PENDLETON

City needs last-minute loans totaling \$1 million

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

At risk of ending the fiscal year in the red, several key Pendleton city funds required bridge loans. At a special meeting Tuesday night, the Pendleton City Council approved three inter-fund loans that will borrow money from other funds to supplement cash flow to the water, sewer and the Pendleton Convention Center Tourism Promotion Assessment Charge funds. City Manager Robb Corbett said that the state prohibits public entities from ending the fiscal year with a negative balance. The fiscal year ends June 30. The state does, however, allow public entities to borrow money from other funds to cover the difference, although each borrowing fund will have to pay back the lending fund the totality of the loan plus a 1.5 percent annual interest rate. The city will have to pay it back by the end of the next fiscal year unless they extend it. Explaining why these funds needed a last-minute loan to make ends meet, Corbett said their initial projections didn’t match the way the city’s financial situation would eventually play out. “We failed to anticipate that we were going to have a problem at the end of the year,” he said. **Water** Under the proposal, the water fund will borrow \$250,000 from the water reserve fund, the sewer reserve fund, or both. The city received a \$14.9 million state loan to repair Pendleton’s aging water sys-

See **LOAN/8A**

Fire season on northeast Oregon state lands starts Thursday

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian



Staff photo by Tammy Malgesini

Scrub brush continues to smoke as a firefighter with Umatilla County Fire District 1 continues mop-up work from a fire late Tuesday afternoon in the vicinity of Joy Lane and Alpine Drive, northeast of Hermiston.

Fire seasons starts Thursday on state forest land in northeast Oregon. Despite scattered rains from recent thunderstorms, the Oregon Department of Forestry announced parts of the Northeast Oregon District are showing increased potential for fire starts. Forecasts of higher temperatures and drier conditions prompted state fire managers to declare fire season beginning Thursday, at 12:01 a.m., for forest and range lands under the protection of the Northeast Oregon District. Jamie Knight, national resources specialist with the forestry department, said this opening of the season is about average. “This is about the time we go into fire season, give or take a few days every year,” she said.

Justin Lauer, Pendleton wildland fire supervisor, stated long-range forecasts indicate “high to extreme fire danger beginning in July and extending through September across the district.” The United States Drought Monitor shows northeastern Oregon is about the only part of the state not in some phase of drought, but Lauer said the light fuels in the lower elevations are drying out and can soon carry fire easily. The fire season declaration places fire prevention restrictions on landowners and the public. Open burning and burning in barrels require permits, Knight said, and landowners who burned brush and slash piles in the fall and spring need to make sure they are full out and not giving off any heat. Industrial logging and forest management activities also come under strict fire

See **FIRE/8A**

