

TRIBAL: Federal government plans to resume construction

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River were cautiously optimistic that the federal government was making good on one of its promises. Starting with the Bonneville Dam in the 1930s, the federal government flooded villages where tribal members lived. Many of those villages were centers of economic, social and religious importance.

The federal government said it would replace the flooded homes, but never did.

Now, many people live six months to year-round at fishing sites built by the government that are decrepit, unsafe and unsanitary. *The Oregonian*/OregonLive documented the conditions and how the federal government’s unmet obligation to the tribes forced them into these conditions even while a town of predominantly white people was relocated.

Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley and Rep. Earl Blumenauer, both Democrats, spearheaded the effort to prod the government to replace the housing. They devised a plan with the Army Corps to pay for the work in two funding cycles. The first went forward in 2016.

But a second infusion of cash was blocked by Mick Mulvaney, head of the federal Office of Management and Budget, last year. He claimed that he wasn’t required to approve the money and he didn’t like the way it would be moved around the Corps’ budget.

Tribal representatives and Washington and Oregon lawmakers pleaded with Mulvaney and his staff to reconsider.

But eventually, they found a way around the office. In a bill that dictates Army Corps

priorities, they added language compelling the federal government to plan and build the villages.

Merkley and Washington Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat, sit on the Senate Appropriations Committee and added more than \$1.8 million to a separate funding bill without any dictates of how it must be used. A bipartisan and bi-state group of lawmakers wrote a letter to R.D. James, assistant secretary of the Army, and Mulvaney to suggest the \$1.8 million be used to finish the village planning.

The Army Corps, which had signaled willingness to start the work since 2016, added The Dalles Dam village plan to its project list of 2019 with the \$1.8 million.

“Now that the latest investment is in place, we will continue holding federal agency officials accountable to ensure that the plan is not only completed, but also carried out so tribal members get the facilities and river access they were promised more than 65 years ago,” Murray said.

Merkley said Monday that he wants The Dalles village to move forward first, but it is not the last of his efforts. He and other lawmakers want to start the same momentum for villages at the Bonneville and John Day dams.

“It was an unnecessary delay and I’m really pleased to see we’ve been able to get the legislation in place to push it forward,” Merkley said.

The money is needed to figure out where a village could be located near The Dalles Dam and how it would look. The Army Corps and a committee of tribal members had identified three Wash-

ington sites in 2016, but now need to figure out if they will still work. The site could end up on the Oregon side of the river.

The locations would need to be assessed for feasibility and environmental concerns. Tribal members are supposed to be involved at every step of the process, such as deciding whether the housing will be individual homes with covered garages, like at Celilo Village, or multi-family units.

Celilo Village, where 15 permanent homes take the place of one of oldest continually inhabited tribal centers in the world, took decades to build, but is considered a sign of success that could be replicated in this new effort.

Modern-day Celilo Village has 15 houses with good insulation and garages big enough for fishing gear. But, it took 50 years and several iterations to get housing there right.

After the decisions are made, the plans would be subject to public input. The Army Corps would also perform preliminary engineering, according to Corps spokeswoman Sarah Bennett.

All that work was expected to be done in 2016 — or shortly after. But now, the delay could add years to the project planning.

The Corps will have to ask for more money to actually build the village once all the planning is completed. There is no estimate of the cost yet.

At the same time, a stand-alone bill is in its final stages to fix up the existing 31 fishing sites. The sites are maintained and operated by the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, which took on the task because no one else was doing it.

CASA: CASAs must go through at least 30 hours of training

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Duncan-Osborn said she remembers the disappointment of showing up to supervised visits with her mother as a young child, only to have her mother not show up. And she remembers the feelings of hopelessness that sometimes came after her grandparents were gone.

“Maybe these kids are thinking about running away, maybe they’re contemplating suicide,” she said. “I want to tell them ‘I was there and look at me now.’”

In addition to her own experiences, Duncan-Osborn said she learned a lot from the training classes she and the rest of her class of CASAs took. They learned about coping mechanisms for dealing with difficult cases, learned about the legal system and took field trips to talk to everyone from judges to a mother who was in rehabilitation as she tried to win her children back.

“It really helps you see all sides,” she said.

Many CASAs don’t have such a direct connection to the foster system, but decided they could give back to their community by being an advocate for some of society’s most vulnerable children.

Jimmie Wilkins of Pend-

leton said now that she is retired she has more time. She volunteers in hospice, helping people at the end of their lives, and she decided she wanted to do something to help those at the beginning too.

She said she was shocked to learn how few foster families there are in the area.

“Now when I’m at the gym or getting coffee and CASA comes up I say, ‘Do you know Pendleton only has three foster placements?’” she said.

She said being a CASA will be a challenge but she’s ready to put her Type-A personality to use in being the most effective advocate she can, with the help of Umatilla Morrow County Head Start staff and the more-experienced CASA assigned to be her mentor.

During Monday’s swearing-in ceremony in a Hermiston courtroom, Judge Eva Temple thanked the new CASAs for their willingness to give of their time. She said CASAs are “of great help” to those tasked with determining what is best for the child.

“I don’t know if you understand how much the CASA reports are valued by the court,” she said.

CASAs must go through at least 30 hours of training, but CASAs in Umatilla and Morrow counties usu-

ally go through 40 to 50, as UMCHS supplements the national curriculum with field trips to local sites related to foster care. Some CASAs only take one case at a time, while more experienced ones with time on their hands can take several. They are expected to meet with the child and discuss how things are going a minimum of once a month, attend court hearings, provide reports to the court and do whatever else they think will help them be an advocate for the child. Sometimes that includes things like referring the child’s parent to parenting classes and other resources to help them be the best option for their child going forward. Other times it means reporting to the court that they believe the child would be in danger if returned home.

Diane Shockman, Hermiston’s CASA coordinator, said the CASAs’ reports become an official part of the court record. CASAs are also able to access records related to the child’s case.

For more information about CASA in Umatilla and Morrow counties, email casa@umchs.org or call Shockman at 541-667-6169.

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PDA: Many of the partnership details are still being worked out

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Under the agreement, both organizations will remain separate entities with their own executive directors and boards. But given the association and chamber’s shared goal to “recruit” and “retain” small businesses in the downtown core, the pair decided it was better to join forces than continue to overlap in some of their services.

Once solely an association event, the chamber and downtown association will collaborate on the Pendleton Holiday Stroll on Friday, an annual Christmas event on Main Street. Duffy said the chamber will be integrating its own annual Christmas social at the Pendleton Center for the Arts into this year’s festivities.

More long term, Bradbury said both organizations will work together on economic development projects, like creating a downtown plan or restoring downtown second story spaces.

Although the association and chamber will now be housed under one roof,

Bradbury and Duffy are adamant that the two organizations will remain independent entities.

The arrangement has practical applications: The association can apply for certain grants as a 501c(3) nonprofit that the chamber, a nonprofit trade organization, cannot.

But Duffy and Bradbury said that each organization still wants to carry out the parts of their respective missions that don’t overlap.

Although the agreement was made with both boards’ support, the agreement includes language that states that both boards will have to “respectfully disagree” should they ever come into conflict.

Duffy said many of the details of the partnership are still being worked out, a process that will be aided when the association hires a new executive director.

The association has been without a director since September, when former Executive Director Molly Turner resigned to take a job with Blue Mountain Community College.

Bradbury said a new executive director will start on Wednesday, but he declined to identify him or provide more details until the new hire got settled in.

A closer relationship between the association and the chamber isn’t a new idea.

When the association sought regular funding from the city, councilors suggested the two organizations pair up because both were being financially supported by the city.

The association currently receives \$55,000 per year from the city, although that number will eventually fall to \$25,000.

In the 2016-17 fiscal year, the city gave the chamber \$261,255 to run the visitor’s center and operate Travel Pendleton, the chamber’s tourism promotion arm.

While the association is merging some responsibilities with the chamber, Bradbury said he’s not worried that the city will pull funding from the association.

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SUSPECT: He is being held in the Benton County Jail

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with the circuit court. However, he said, his office used the name Decidero Cortez.

“That’s one of the things we’re trying to do is ascertain who the individual is,” Primus said.

The homicide took place Monday around 6:30 a.m. northwest of Milton-Freewater at the Umapine Creamery, where Vargas-Ortiz, 52, and Luiz-Antonio, 35, of Milton-Freewater, worked. The investigation at the scene of the crime led law enforce-

ment to look for the vehicle belonging to Vargas-Ortiz’s girlfriend, Rowan said, and Kennewick police spotted the vehicle at the Clover Island Inn, Kennewick.

Umatilla County sheriff’s detectives working with Kennewick police eventually saw Vargas-Ortiz and his girlfriend at the hotel’s parking lot, he said. The Kennewick Police Department called on the resources of the Tri-City Regional SWAT Team in Washington to take Vargas-Ortiz into custody without incident.

The sheriff’s office in a written statement Tuesday thanked multiple agencies for working long hours “making it possible to bring the case to a swift closure.”

The sheriff’s office also thanked the Clover Island staff and guests “for their patience in this matter.”

The suspect is in the Benton County Jail, Kennewick, under the name Decidero Vargas. Primus said he would remain there due to the warrant until going before a judge to deal with extradition to Umatilla County.

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