

**BOMBERS  
DROP TWO  
LOSSES  
ON DAWGS**  
SPORTS, B1



**STEAMER  
TRUNKS COME  
FULL CIRCLE**  
LIFESTYLES, C1

**OUTGOING  
U.S. INTERIOR  
SECRETARY  
DEFENDS LEGACY**  
RECORDS, A6

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## Groundwork in place for water project

NOWA leaders see  
hope for boosting farm  
production in 2020

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
*EO Media Group*

It was a crisis more than 60 years in the making.

The Umatilla Basin is home to some of the state's most productive farmland, famously growing more than 200 different crops including wheat, corn, potatoes and watermelon. Irrigation pivots dominate the countryside, transforming scrubby desert into lush, green fields.

The development of the region's farms and cities, however, came at a price underground. As early as 1958, regulators began to see groundwater declines in the Butter Creek area of Umatilla and Morrow counties. Between 1976 and 1991, the Oregon Water Resources Department designated four critical groundwater areas within the basin — Butter Creek, Stage Gulch, Ordance Basalt and Ordance Gravel — to address the shrinking aquifers.

The designation allowed the Water Resources Commission to restrict groundwater pumping, taking once valuable agricultural land out of production or returning it to dryland crops.

"It is depressing, in the middle part of June, driving around these critical groundwater areas and seeing the lost opportunity," said Craig Reeder, former vice president of River Point Farms in Hermiston, the largest grower of fresh onions in the country.

Despite curtailing wells, regulators warn that groundwater levels have continued to decline in the basalt aquifers, albeit at a slower rate.

The declining aquifers and the need for irrigation water have led Reeder and others to seek creative ways to balance the needs of the region. On the one hand, pumping groundwater wells should be minimized to allow the aquifers to recover. On the other hand, strict state rules protect the Columbia River and its endangered fish.

Reeder now serves as chairman of the Northeast Oregon Water Association, or NOWA, a nonprofit corporation founded in 2013 to seek and coordinate solutions to the basin's water woes. The plan, revealed in 2014, involves building three massive new pipelines, up to 78 inches in diameter, to deliver Columbia River water to farms and ranches in the critical groundwater areas. By doing that, farmers would no longer have to pump water

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Ronnie Wick of Lincoln City receives a hug from Aaron Allen of Newport after Wick read a letter from a friend during a group counseling session at the Power House Treatment Center men's house on Wednesday outside of Hermiston.

## TAKING BACK POWER

Residents at Power House treatment center recover with peer groups, cognitive therapy

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
*East Oregonian*

Sitting in front of a group of his peers, a man named Corey Michaels unfolded two pieces of paper and, without knowing who they were from, began reading aloud.

"This is definitely from my dad," he said, after a few words.

Corey was reading a "changing places" letter, one of many exercises for residents at the Power House Treatment Center in Hermiston, a facility for people recovering from drug addiction. Sending requests out to friends and family, they hear specifics about how their drug use has impacted others.

"What has been hard for you about being a family member or friend to Corey?" he read.

"His drug use, and watching him sleep for days." He paused to collect himself. Others in the room wiped away tears.

"What would you like to say to Corey?"



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Clients have created a graveyard of painted rocks inscribed with the negative aspects of their lives they have given up as part of their treatment at the Power House Treatment Center women's house outside of Hermiston.

He paused for a moment, then read: "I'm proud you decided to get help on your own. It will be more than fun to do things with you now."

It can be tough for residents to hear those words from loved

ones, but it often leads to introspection and emotional vulnerability crucial to their recovery.

Tucked on the outskirts of town, Power House Treatment Center operates a men's house and a women's house, each

focused on developing skills for recovery. Most residents arrive after going through detoxification elsewhere, and stay at the inpatient facility for 60 to 90 days.

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### GET HELP

Power House Treatment Center  
Men's House: 541-567-2593  
Women's House: 541-567-2949  
Eastern Oregon Alcoholism Foundation  
Main Office: 541-276-3518  
Detox: 541-278-2558  
Umatilla County Alcohol and Drug treatment  
Pendleton: 541-278-6330  
Hermiston: 541-564-9390  
Milton-Freewater: 541-938-3988

**Pacific Power customer Seth Peterson has seen a marked increase in his power bill between this year and last year.**  
Staff photo by E.J. Harris



## Power bills cause customer outrage

By **PHIL WRIGHT**  
*East Oregonian*

Dozens of Pacific Power customers in Pendleton are charged up over their electric bills doubling and even tripling in cost from November to December.

The bills also show their

power use shooting up, but the locals asserted they did not tap into any more juice than usual.

Seth Peterson, 42, is among the many with the higher bills. He lives in an upstairs apartment on the 200 block of Southwest Third Street. He said he usu-

ally pays about \$60-\$70 a month for electricity, but his latest bill is for \$122.

"My bill was double what it was last year," he said. "It's just crazy."

Last December he used 654 kilowatts, according to

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