

ODOT to close Highway 37 bridge in 2020 for major repairs

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Oregon Department of Transportation announced plans to close a railroad overpass bridge on Highway 37 for five weeks in 2020.

The 67-year-old bridge is approximately 1.2 miles east of the junction with U.S. 730 and 30 miles northwest of Pendleton. Cracks in the concrete, worn girder bearings, gaps in bridge joints and more have accumulated from decades of use. The state transportation department conducted maintenance over the years but now must shut it down for major repairs, including to the support structure and road surface.

ODOT is providing an online open house on the \$1 million proj-

ect at <http://openhouse.oregon-dot.org/uprr-at-cold-springs>. The open house closes May 30.

The road at the site is 26 feet wide, according to ODOT, which is too narrow to accommodate repair crews and traffic at the same time. When construction begins in early 2020, traffic may be down to one lane, causing traffic delays less than 20 minutes. But ODOT will close the bridge to all traffic for about five weeks sometime between March 15 and May 1.

After that span, single lane closures could continue.

Depending on the direction of travel, motorists will need to use Highway 395 and Interstate 84 to detour around the closure. Local county roads will not be an alternative for freight or other large

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To find out more about the project, visit <http://openhouse.oregondot.org/uprr-at-cold-springs>.

vehicles, according to ODOT, due to sharp corners, narrow widths, substandard base and other issues.

“We know closures are frustrating,” according to the announcement from ODOT. “We are working to minimize traffic impacts. The project will result in a safe and efficient bridge for decades to come.”

ODOT also reported it expects the completion of the bridge design this fall and the completion of the project by the end of 2020.



Photo contributed by the Oregon Department of Transportation

The Oregon Department of Transportation in 2020 plans to shut down this 67-year-old railroad overpass bridge on Highway 37 in Umatilla County for five weeks while crews work on major repairs.

Umatilla couple dies in house fire

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

A Umatilla couple died inside their burning home on Sunday evening in what appeared to be an accidental fire.

Roger Frances, 67, and Ruth Frances, 68, were found deceased inside the home they owned at 125 John Day St. The fire is under investigation, but a news release from the Umatilla Police Department stated it “is believed that this is no more than a tragic accident.”

Umatilla Rural Fire District and Umatilla Police Department responded to a 911 call about the fire at 5 p.m. Sunday. Upon entering the residence personnel found the couple, who were declared deceased on scene.

The news release stated that fire damage to the building was minimal but it sustained “significant” heat and smoke damage. Oregon State Fire Marshal, Hermiston Police Department and Umatilla County Fire District are assisting with the investigation.

New officers take the leash at PAWS

PENDLETON — The Pioneer Humane Society/Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter elected new board officers.

Melissa Nathan took the helm as president and Shaindel Beers is the new vice president. Jackie Carey is treasurer, Brooke Franklin as secretary and Amy Word rounds out the executive committee as the past president.

Franklin also reported PAWS is looking for more board members. The board meets the second Thursday of each month starting at 5:30 p.m. in the back room of The Saddle Restaurant and Lounge, 2220 S.E. Court Ave., Pendleton.

Watching you



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

A great horned owl watches with big yellow eyes from a cottonwood tree Sunday evening at McKay Reservoir.

Forest Service cautions visitors about road hazards

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The U.S. Forest Service urged visitors to national forests in Eastern Oregon to be prepared for muddy and hazardous roads.

Snow may have thawed from the foothills, but forest officials in a news release warned most forest roads remain inaccessible due to mud or snow. In addition, traveling on thawing, saturated and muddy roads can result in resource damage and serious safety concerns, especially for unprepared visitors.

“We typically see multiple incidents this time of year where families head up for the day, get stuck, and end up spending the night or making a very long hike out to look for help,” said Lisa Rynearson, safety officer for the Malheur National Forest.

Many places in the Blue Mountains have limited or no cellphone coverage, so forest visitors should be prepared to

spend the night in the forest with warm clothing, food and plenty of water.

“Before you head out, always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return,” added Lee Mercer, safety officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Forest officials also encouraged the public to minimize damage to natural resources from travel on roads that are susceptible to rutting due to warmer weather and melting snowpack. David Plummer, engineering staff officer for the Wallowa-Whitman, said forest roads are not constructed to be all-weather roads and can easily sustain damage when wet.

“Imagine driving onto your own lawn at this time of year,” he said in the announcement. “Tire ruts that are just an inch deep can leave lasting impressions that only grow with rain and erosion.”

The Forest Service also warned operating a

Ballot returns stand at less than 9 percent in Umatilla County

East Oregonian

Ballots for the May 21 election are dribbling into the Umatilla County.

County elections manager Kim Lindell said her office has received 3,678 ballots out of 43,874 for a return rate less than 8.4%.

“It’s going really slow,” she said.

Just six seats out of 122 seats on the ballot for next week’s election feature a competition between two candidates. Most of those are school boards.

Echo School Board member Connie Caplinger faces a challenge from Emily Spike.

Umatilla School Board member Toby Crans-ton drew an opposing bid from Jennifer Armstrong, the co-owner of Encore Wellness 4 Life, a Umatilla medical clinic. Cecili Longhorn, Stanfield Public Library director, is running for an open Stanfield School Board seat against Jim Griffin. And Athena-Weston School Board incumbent Jennifer McClure-Spurgeon faces Shannon Hoehna. McClure-Spurgeon is the mayor of Weston, and Hoehna is the owner and food safety consultant for SH Consulting, Weston.

Fire district boards round out the contested races.

Kelly Payan is running against incumbent Fred Sheely for a seat on the Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors, and incumbent Spike Piersol has a challenge from Sebastian Sanchez for the Umatilla County Fire District Board of Directors.

Morrow County has a better turnout. County clerk Bobbi Childers said her office sent 6,325 ballots and as of Monday accepted 1,154, about 18.3% return.

“We do have a tax measure and have a contested race for Port of Morrow for

port commissioner,” she said.

Morrow County voters will decide on renewing the 39-cent levy to fund the hospital in Heppner, three clinics across the county and county-wide ambulance services. Morrow County residents John Murray and Debbie Radie are contending for Position 5 on the Port of Morrow Board of Commissioners.

Write-in votes could decide most of the races, which primarily consists of school boards and small taxing districts. If no one files for a seat, county elections officials look to the write-ins to determine the winner, then contacts winners to find out whether the person accepts the position.

If the winner declines, the board, council or commission in charge of the seat makes an appointment.

Ballots are due to county elections offices or drop boxes by 8 p.m the night of the election.

“Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”

- Vince Lombardi

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