

USDA research center to add new positions in NE Oregon

USDA will add positions and expand lab space in Pendleton

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

PENDLETON — A federal agricultural research station in Northeast Oregon plans to hire three new scientists to help the region's wheat farmers become more resilient to climate change.

The Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center, north of Pendleton, is part of the USDA Agricultural Research Service and focuses on improving dryland farming in areas of the Pacific Northwest that receive less than 18 inches of rain annually.

Earlier this year, Congress passed the 2019 agriculture appropriations bill that included an additional \$2 million for the station — roughly

double its previous budget.

It is a welcome change of fortune for the center, which faced potentially deep cuts in 2016 and 2017. Instead, the USDA will add positions and expand lab space in Pendleton, with the goal to find new solutions for growers as seasons shift and summers get hotter.

“There are new challenges, all together, that we face,” said Dan Long, station director and research leader. “Obviously, the growers have asked us to do work to help them in these challenging times. We intend to do that with these dollars.”

Long said the station will hire an agricultural economist, crop physiologist and bioinformatics technician to join the five scientists already on staff, experimenting with things such as cover crops, alternative crops and methods to retain soil moisture without access to irrigation.

Profitability is at the heart of every management deci-



USDA Photo, File

The Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center near Pendleton is adding three scientists to its staff.

sion farmers make, Long said, and the station economist will help them to examine their bottom line. The crop physiologist will look specifically at heat stress in plants, and what sorts of biochemical changes are happening in the field.

Bioinformatics is an interdisciplinary field that works with software tools to better understand biological data. Long said this position will complement the other scientists and their research.

Long said the USDA also intends to collaborate more

with Oregon State University's Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Station — a similar but separate research station that operates out of the same building on Tubbs Ranch Road.

The station, commonly known as CBARC, has even more expertise to offer, including agronomy, plant pathology and weed science. About \$450,000 of the USDA funding would be passed through to CBARC under a new cooperative agreement with the university,

Long said.

“More can be done if we work together, rather than separately,” Long said. He expects an agreement in place by July.

Wheat is the dominant dryland crop in northeast and north-central Oregon, with a combined 777,501 acres harvested across eight counties in 2017, according to the latest USDA Census of Agriculture.

With such little moisture, Long said growers have few other options available to them. But research at the two stations could pin down new rotational and cover crops to keep soils healthy, curb erosion and break up disease cycles.

“We've heard pretty strongly from growers in the lower rainfall areas they would like us to work on cover crops and alternative crops,” Long said. “We have learned from attending field days in June that crops like winter peas are drought-re-

sistant, and they fix nitrogen.”

Nathan Rea, of H.T. Rea Farming Corp. in Milton-Freewater, serves as chairman of the grower liaison committee that works with both research stations. The committee was instrumental in reaching out to members of Oregon's congressional delegation to secure funding for the USDA center.

Rea said Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Republican Rep. Greg Walden were all champions for the station's funding. Merkley, in particular, played an important role as the top-ranking Democrat on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, he said.

The research ultimately will help dryland farmers remain profitable, Rea said.

“It's a very important long-term benefit,” he said. “The research that they're doing has a direct impact on every grower.”

BRIEFLY



Umatilla National Forest Photo, File

Forest officials on the North Fork John Day Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest have opened a limited number of campsites at Olive Lake Campground due to hazard trees surrounding the campground.

Olive Lake opens limited number of campsites due to hazards

PENDLETON — Forest officials on the North Fork John Day Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest have opened a limited number of campsites at Olive Lake Campground due to hazard trees surrounding the campground.

Trees within the campground have been impacted by a recent Mountain Pine Beetle infestation that has caused tree mortality within the area. These trees have been identified as hazardous and must be removed prior to opening the campsites to the public. All closed campsites within Olive Lake Campground are clearly marked by a sign on the site number post that states “Campsite Closed Due To Hazard” in orange and red lettering. The limited number of campsites that have already been cleared of hazard trees are open to the public for camping. A volunteer camp host is onsite and available to help answer questions or assist forest visitors with identifying available camping locations.

Olive Lake is a popular mountain lake and campground located 12 miles west of Granite. The natural lake was deepened by a 30-foot-high dam built in the early 1900s by the Fremont Power Company to provide hydroelectric power, generated at the Fremont Powerhouse, to the then-booming gold mining community.

Phones down at state prison in Umatilla

UMATILLA — The state prison in Umatilla went several days without phone service before it was restored late Thursday afternoon.

Sherry Iles, public information officer for Two Rivers Correctional Institution, said the problem started Monday and affected incoming and outgoing calls.

Inmates, however, were able to make calls.

“The Telmate network they use is separate and working at this time,” she said.

Iles sent a follow-up email at 5:43 p.m., writing that CenturyLink restored service around 4 p.m. Thursday.

Council takes street funding ideas to public

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Months into discussions over the best way to raise revenue for road repairs, the Pendleton City Council is taking its ideas to the street.

The council met for a Tuesday workshop, where they reviewed a survey of proposals they plan to distribute to the public through a series of public meetings and presentations to community groups, city committees, and other organizations.

The council plans to use the feedback they get from these meetings and presentations to inform their decision on how to move forward on road funding.

The city has allocated \$1.2 million for street maintenance for 2019-20, but a 2018 pavement study states that the city would need to spend somewhere between \$1.6 million and \$4.4 million per year to improve the overall quality of the street system.

A survey introduction states that the council is aiming to boost their annual road maintenance budget to \$2.2 million.

After collecting input, the council will advance only a few of the ideas for deeper consideration.

Not listed among the proposals is a one-time \$3 million appropriation from the urban renewal district. The Pendleton Development Commission will decide to spend the money at a meeting in July, but it can only go to streets in downtown Pendleton and some of the surrounding area.

Gas tax

This idea is the most familiar to both the council and local voters.

The city estimates it would generate \$110,000 per year for every cent they assessed at the pump, with

40% of the revenue coming from out-of-town drivers.

But implementing the tax would require approval at the ballot box, a process the city has struggled with before.

The city attempted to pass a 5-cent gas tax in 2015, but it was defeated resoundingly when it went up to a public vote.

Voters did approve a 4-cent gas tax in 2009, but the money was specifically earmarked for the Airport Road extension, and it sunsetted within a few years. The city has since shifted much of its economic development focus to the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range.

Payroll tax

According to the city, the payroll tax would be assessed to employers of people who work in Pendleton.

For every 0.1% that's taxed, the city expects to raise \$343,000 per year.

A city-based payroll tax is not unheard of in other parts of the state. On June 10, the Eugene City Council passed a 0.003% payroll tax for public safety.

Hotel room entertainment fee

This fee would be assessed to every hotel room, bed and breakfast stay, and recreational vehicle spot in the city.

The city estimates that each dollar from the fee would generate

\$153,000 annually.

Lodgers already pay an 8% lodging room tax and a \$1.50 tourism promotion assessment charge, but most of those funds go to the Pendleton Convention Center and the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce.

Ticket fee

The fee would be focused on events attended by 500 people or more, and is expected to bring in \$92,000 per dollar raised.

Some councilors said the revenue figure could be higher if the city counts events that attract 500 people or more over multiple days.

Street utility fee

Out of all the proposals, the street utility fee is the only one that's already been implemented in Pendleton.

The council passed a \$5 street utility fee in late 2015, and the fee has been subject to an annual consumer price index increase each year since then, meaning the residential fee is now \$5.21 per month.

The fee currently raises \$438,000 per year, and if the council were to raise it further, it would generate another \$84,000 for each dollar raised.

Street light fee

The street fund is budgeted to spend \$190,000 to power street lights in 2019-20, but if the city were to charge residents a street light fee, the city would be able to direct more money in the street fund toward road maintenance.

Pendleton would raise \$86,000 per year for every dollar raised, according to the city's estimates.

Restaurant sales tax

The state of Oregon is famously sales tax-free, but cities can impose their own sales tax.

The city expects that for each 1% assessed on restaurant sales, the city would garner \$100,000 per year.

The city of Ashland has a 5% tax on all prepared food, but a 1% sales tax was voted down in Ontario in 2018.

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and at 12PM
GHOSTBUSTERS 1984

Annabelle Comes Home (R)
11:50a* 2:10p* 4:40p 7:20p
9:50p

Toy Story 4 (PG)
2D 2:30p* 4:50p 7:10p
ED 12:10p* 9:30p

Men in Black: International (PG13)
1:40p* 4:20p 7:00p 9:40p

The Secret Life of Pets 2 (PG)
12:00p* 2:20p* 4:30p 6:50p
9:10p

Aladdin (PG)
12:50p* 3:40p* 6:30p 9:20p

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