



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
A segment of trail in Umatilla winds along the Umatilla River near Umatilla High School.

Umatilla River Trails Project seeks input

By JESSICA POLLARD
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — For two years now, planners at Umatilla County have dreamed of a trail system that would string four of its west-side cities together. Next month, they’re holding workshops to hear from the public and get the ball rolling.

The Umatilla River Trails Project — which would connect Stanfield, Hermiston, Umatilla and Echo through a network of recreational trails — started coming to life in 2018, when the county received a technical assistance grant from the National Park Service.

“Local cities were doing their own work,” said county planning director Robert Waldher, “But there wasn’t any effort to connect these communities.”

The grant, administered by the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program, has assigned a technical expert to the project from the National Park Service. Stephanie Stroud from Seattle will provide

planning assistance to the county.

One of the program’s previous projects was the 3,000-mile East Coast Greenway, which links cities from Maine to Florida. Umatilla County was previously involved in the Blue Mountain Regional Trail plan with the assistance program.

Waldher said the main objective of the project is to connect the already existing trail infrastructures that the cities may have with public land, although some private citizens have expressed an interest in opening up their properties.

“We’ve encouraged cities to continue with their own work,” Waldher said.

He said after the public provides input on the route, safety components and aesthetics of the project at the four October workshops, the county and cities will formulate a concept plan by early 2020.

The plan will have to be adopted by the four cities before the county can apply for grant funding to begin engineering the project.

Waldher said the project

would open up access to the Umatilla River for fishing and kayaking, and possibly provide a safe commuting opportunity for bike riders. The trail system would also be able to be used for horseback riding, jogging and walking.

“These are great places for people to come for the day on their bikes, and stop at local shops. Local businesses can gain a lot by having a destination near a trail,” Stroud said.

She also noted that with a larger trail project like this one, people can expect the implementation to be fast for some parts of the route and slow for others depending on what sort of permits the county may need to obtain.

“This is an opportunity to highlight existing natural and historical resources,” Waldher said. “We have a pretty good story to tell here.”

The public open house workshops will take place from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. at Umatilla City Hall on Oct. 7, Echo City Hall on Oct. 8, Stanfield School cafeteria on Oct. 9, and at the Hermiston Community Center on Oct. 10.

Health fair offers fitness and fun



Staff photo by Jade McDowell
Tricia Wattenburger, right, of Good Shepherd Health Care System, discusses a teddy bear’s diagnosis at the Family Health & Fitness Fair on Saturday at Hermiston High School. The annual fair sponsored by the Healthy Communities Coalition drew hundreds of area families in with free screenings, food, cooking classes, yoga, informational booths and more. The teddy bear clinic was designed to help children know what to expect at a hospital by walking their new teddy bear through admission, diagnosis, treatment and discharge.

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Clouds build in the Blues



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Sun filters through clouds gathering above the Blue Mountains late Monday afternoon.

BRIEFLY

Expect extended lane closures on Cabbage Hill

PENDLETON — Travelers heading up or down Cabbage Hill along Interstate 84 east of Pendleton can expect lane closures in the westbound and eastbound lanes over the next few weeks. Shoulder paving will begin the week of Sept. 30 in the westbound lanes, then shift to the eastbound lanes in a week or two. Motorists are advised to slow down and be prepared for single-lane travel. Depending on weather conditions, this work is expected to be completed around mid-October.

The paving will seal the area where power cables were installed. Those wires will help provide electricity to a dozen digital message boards, freeway lighting and other enhancements that are part of a \$15 million I-84 Snow Zone Safety Improvements Project. The project includes new highway cameras, road sensors, curve warning signs, a new freeway ramp gate and other features that will improve safety, especially during the winter season.

Construction and some lane closures will continue near the top of Cabbage Hill through October. The two-year project that started earlier this year will resume next spring. All work is expected to be completed by next fall.

HERMISTON —
Hermiston-area emer-

gency responders, along with local medical facilities and the National Weather Service, will take part in a mass casualty incident emergency drill at 6 p.m. Wednesday, according to a press release from the Umatilla County Sheriff’s office.

Jodi Florence, the public information officer for the sheriff’s office, said local residents might see a number of emergency vehicles present outside of Hermiston during the drill. She said the exact location and nature of the mass casualty incident will be kept a secret for responders until the day of the exercise.

Florence said the drill will be focused on following an emergency response plan, interagency communication and simulating communication to the public.

“Responders will be communicating as though it is a real emergency. They need to do this for their practice,” she said.

The press release said in the event of an actual emergency, the public should listen to local TV and radio broadcasts for instructions and information.

UMATILLA COUNTY — The non-agricultural burn ban in unincorporated areas of Umatilla County is set to be lifted.

According to a press release from Umatilla County Planning Department, the ban will no longer be in effect beginning at noon on Tuesday.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners adopted an order lifting the ban on Sept. 18. It excludes land under the jurisdiction of the state or federal government, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation or covered by a fire district, which each set their own rules for burning in their jurisdictions.

Regular burn day protocols are still in effect, requiring residents to check www.umatillacounty.net, the Umatilla County Smoke Management Facebook page or call 541-278-6397 for daily burn determinations.

Open burning in unincorporated areas outside fire districts requires a permit. Contact the Umatilla County Planning Department at 541-278-6252 or visit the county website for permit applications.

—East Oregonian staff

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9:50p

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Guest Speaker John Bishop

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12pm-2pm
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