

Umatilla County sharpens security

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County is taking advantage of reduced foot traffic at the Umatilla County Courthouse in Pendleton during the pandemic to make some security improvements.

Starting last week, every person who enters the building will go through a security checkpoint and be screened at the first floor entrance.

“With the building basically being shut down, it’s been a lot easier for our maintenance guys to make a bunch of noise right now,” said Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer, noting other maintenance planned for later in the year has been streamlined recently with the county’s employees now alternating work weeks and most court cases postponed.

The courthouse previously stationed its security checkpoint at the entrance to the county courts on the second floor. This left the coun-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Workers construct frames for a new ramped entrance to the Umatilla County Courthouse in Pendleton on April 9, 2020. The accessibility changes are a part of security upgrades that will limit public access to the building to one entrance.

ty’s departmental offices on the first floor and below open to the public, and the district attorney’s offices on the third floor open could be accessed by taking the elevator and bypassing security.

“Anyone was subject to having a firearm, knife or another weapon of some kind,” Shafer said.

While thankfully this

never directly led to a dangerous situation at the courthouse, there were a couple of troubling incidents that pushed Shafer to prioritize the improvements.

In one instance, Shafer said a man who was visiting the planning department became upset and threatened to walk out to his vehicle and return with a gun. In another,

a man who was yelling with staff at the district attorney’s office left, went to his vehicle, and then returned to continue the confrontation without having gone through any security.

Neither incident led to anybody being hurt or staff being directly put in danger, but the risk alone was enough to convince Shafer reconfiguring the security was needed.

“They were without protection, and we realized that needed to change,” he said.

The change comes after the county updated its building security and access systems earlier in the year, which reduced the number of keys needed by county employees.

Due to the changes, which includes the building’s side doors now being locked to the public, this week the county is finishing its construction of a wheelchair ramp to the courthouse’s front entrance so that it’s handicap accessible.

BRIEFLY

Funding forces cutbacks to homeless assistance

PENDLETON — After reevaluating its available funding, the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon (CAPECO) restricted its housing assistance program on Wednesday that had provided shelter to about 60 homeless individuals at Pendleton’s Marigold Hotel for the last 26 days.

Local lodging assistance is now only available to people over the age of 65, people with compromised health conditions per guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and people seeking permanent housing solutions to meet their long-term housing needs.

“Those seeking lodging assistance must complete all necessary paperwork required by CAPECO. Contact CAPECO to confirm that you are eligible to stay. If you do not meet the above criteria you will need to vacate the property by 11 a.m. on 4/15/2020,” an update posted to the organization’s website stated.

It’s unknown how many of those who had been staying at the motel fit that criteria, or how much funding remains available for those who do.

CAPECO didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

The funding, which was allocated by the Community Action Partnership of Oregon and Oregon Housing and Community Services, provided free stays on a first-come-first-served basis in the motel’s 46 rooms to address the heightened risks of

COVID-19 among homeless populations.

Two new cases of COVID-19 brings total to 18

UMATILLA COUNTY — A Umatilla County resident has been hospitalized as the county’s number of COVID-19 cases continues to grow.

According to a Umatilla County Public Health press release, the two latest people diagnosed with the novel coronavirus had no connections to previous cases. One of the patients requires a hospital stay while the other is recovering from home in self-isolation. There are still no reported deaths from coronavirus in Umatilla County.

The latest announcement also brought a silver lining: The number of recovered patients grew from five on Monday to eight, with 10 cases still considered active.

As the number of cases continues to trickle upward, the county has begun to release more data.

While the health department still isn’t attaching demographic data like age range and city of residence to individual cases, the county has released a map that shows where some of the cases are concentrated.

While the county won’t reveal the location of COVID-19 cases if the communities have experienced four cases or less, the map shows that the Hermiston and Umatilla areas have five to nine cases each. The map was first published Tuesday and is updated only once per week.

Umatilla County’s 18 positive cases come from a total of 427 tests.

— EO Media Group

Tags reduced for some deer, elk hunts in Eastern Oregon

East Oregonian

SALEM — Tag numbers for some deer and elk hunts this fall have been reduced from the numbers shown in the 2020 Big Game Regulations, according to a press release from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The reduction of a total of 3,953 buck tags and 287 antlerless deer tags affects deer hunts in Desolation, Fort Rock, Hood, Metolius, Mt. Emily, Northside, Paulina, Silver Lake, Sprague, Ukiah, Walla Walla and White River units. A total of 670 elk tags are being reduced in Imnaha, Maury and Zumwalt Prairie hunts.

The deer tag reductions are due to fewer mule deer being observed during fall

surveys. ODFW wildlife biologists believe ongoing disease outbreaks in Central and Eastern Oregon are the main cause of the decline.

A large outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease was documented this year, which led to a die-off of white-tailed deer in the Walla Walla, Mt. Emily and Ukiah units and also impacted some mule deer. In addition to EHD, an uptick of cases of adenovirus hemorrhagic disease has been observed throughout the state. The disease is usually fatal to deer and death can occur in three to five days from the time the deer was exposed to the virus. AHD is transmitted primarily from “nose-to-nose” contact between infected animals and usually occurs in

summer through fall, particularly during drier weather that congregates deer near water.

“While not as severe as the EHD outbreak that caused a significant die-off of white-tails, we have continued to see AHD-caused mortalities of mule deer in Central and South Central Oregon for the last several years,” said Kevin Blakely, ODFW assistant wildlife division administrator. “Fewer mule deer were observed during population surveys in these units so we need to reduce tags. While cutting buck tags will not result in a population increase, as populations decline fewer bucks are available, so tags need to be reduced to maintain buck ratios.”

Earlier this year, ODFW

announced hunt cancellations for white-tailed deer hunts in Walla Walla, Mt. Emily and Ukiah units due to the outbreak of EHD.

Tag numbers for some elk hunts are also being reduced, though not due to disease. While Rocky Mountain elk are doing well throughout Eastern Oregon, antlerless elk tags are being reduced in the Imnaha and Chesnimnus units. The elk populations in these two units are now at or close to the population management objectives so tags are being reduced to numbers intended to maintain populations. Elk tags are also being reduced in the Maury Unit where fewer elk were in the unit the last several hunting seasons and hunter success has been very low.

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