

Court denies injunction in property dispute

Hermiston property owners locked in a legal battle with Umatilla County were denied their motion last week

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Hermiston property owners locked in a legal battle with Umatilla County and the city of Hermiston over a road improvement project on Airport and Ott roads were denied a motion for a temporary restraining order last week.

"It is unlikely the plaintiffs will prevail, and

although it appears their fence and drain field may encroach on the road easement, there is insufficient evidence the county road improvement will encroach on their property or cause irreparable harm," Umatilla County Circuit Court Judge Eva Temple ruled in her May 13 order on the motion.

The ruling may seem like a loss for Chris and Monique Waime's case that

seeks to resolve conflicts between county surveys, their property deed, and identified historical monuments, which they claim would subsequently prove that 11 feet on the north and 5 feet on the east side of their property is in fact theirs and not a county right-of-way. But the Waines won't be deterred by it.

"The thing about an injunction is it's not really a loss, we just lost the argument that we had a plethora of evidence that would land us in a favorable decision," Chris Waime said. "There's a lot of witness testimony that still needs to be had,

there's depositions that still need to happen."

Waime said that the injunction also offered an opportunity for him and his attorneys to see what additional evidence the court will need to see and how it needs to be presented. But Waime said his team also relied heavily on survey records provided by the county in the injunction hearing, which are being impacted by excavation and additional surveys happening around the property now.

"The hard thing about this particular case is things are continually develop-

ing," Waime said.

Ultimately, Waime said they're hoping to prove the northeast corner of the property has been "lost" after mistakes were made during previous surveys and how historical monuments were tied to it.

While the legal process and ongoing standoff between the Waines and the county have been wearing on their family mentally and financially, they're committed to fighting the injustices they believe they've faced and will continue to take the case to higher courts if last week's ruling is a sign of more to come.

"We're going to scrutinize what they've done in the past," Waime said. "What this is really going to boil down to is was this done the right way, and I don't think that it was."

Meanwhile, the project's construction has progressed and Waime said this week that contractors are paving the roads. The next court date has yet to be set, and Waime said things around the neighborhood may soon be quieting down, but he has no plans of backing away from the conflict.

"We're going to keep holding the line," he said.

Harris Park reopens to the public

Park now open for day use, overnight stays with new guidelines due to COVID-19

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Harris Park is back open to the public with some new guidelines in place due to COVID-19.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners formally adopted new guidelines for the park Wednesday that include limiting overnight stays to Umatilla County residents, increasing sanitation protocols and implementing remote paying options.

According to the guidelines, the park will be open for both day use and overnight camping, though reservations will be restricted to Umatilla County residents only for the time being.

"No such residency requirement shall be in place for day use although travel regulations remain in effect in the State of Oregon," the new guidelines stated.

Those attending the park are encouraged to continue practicing social distanc-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan, File

An excavation company works near the entrance to Harris Memorial Park in rural Umatilla County outside of Milton-Freewater in early April. The park will reopen for day use and overnight stays with new guidelines for sanitation, limited overnight stays and remote payment options.

ing throughout the park and along its trails, and group contact sports are discouraged. The park's playground equipment will also be unavailable for use.

Park staff will be cleaning and sanitizing campsites after each use, and bathrooms will be cleaned and sanitized at least twice per day with plans to increase efforts during the weekends when more people are expected at the park.

Campers will need to bring food, personal hygiene products and chairs of their

own because the county won't make any of these items available at the park, and staff have been encouraged to implement a remote pay station rather than handling transactions by hand.

Harris park suffered severe damages during February's historic flooding and was initially expected to be a longer renovation project, but repairs came along faster than anticipated and staff have been preparing the park to ensure its water and electrical systems are ready to go.

Staff have also been directed to inspect that the park is better equipped for some rises in the river, which is especially prudent after the National Weather Service in Pendleton issued a flood watch for the region through Wednesday night.

"Where possible staff were also asked to help assure that campsites along the River have new levels of protection from potential overflows that might contaminate the park," the guidelines stated.

Oregon Veterans' Affairs launches Educational Bridge Grant Program

The new program was established during the 2019 legislative session

East Oregonian

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs is now accepting applications for a new grant program aimed at helping Oregon veterans complete their educational goals, according to a press release.

The Veteran Educational Bridge Grant Program provides financial assistance to veterans who are unable to complete their education due to the unavailability of one or more required classes.

"The financial reality of many student veterans' situations is that they can't simply take a semester off," said ODVA Director Kelly Fitzpatrick. "And we know that many of those who have to seek employment to provide for themselves and their families may never return to the classroom to finish their education."

The new program, which the Oregon Legislature established during the 2019 legislative session

with the passage of House Bill 2201, provides grants to eligible student veterans to alleviate the financial stress during a gap period when required courses are

unavailable, allowing them to stay in school and finish the academic program.

"In Oregon, we believe our veterans should not have to miss out on the chance to reach their career and educational goals simply because of the timing of course offerings," Fitzpatrick said. "At a time when student veterans' schedules and finances may be more challenged due to the COVID-19 crisis, this program is needed now more than ever."

Under the program, eligible student veterans, who are unable to complete their education due to the unavailability of required classes, may receive grants of up to \$5,000. Recipients must be a veteran eligible for GI Bill benefits, an Oregon resident, and enrolled in an Oregon-based academic program that is approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

For more information about the Veteran Educational Bridge Grant Program, or to apply, visit the ODVA website at www.oregon.gov/odva/agency-programs/grants/Pages/Educational-Bridge-Grant.aspx.

Questions may also be directed to ODVA's Veteran Educational Bridge Grant coordinator, Scott Salazar, at ebg@odva.state.or.us or by phone at 503-373-2338.

State seeks health care volunteers to support COVID-19 response

Eastern Oregon Medical Reserve Corps has added 30 new volunteers

By ANDREW CUTLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — As Oregon residents work to get back to some sort of normalcy, the Oregon Health Authority is increasing efforts to recruit health care professionals to join the State Emergency Registry of Volunteers across the state.

Since March, SERV-OR has added more than 800 volunteers, strengthening OHA's ability to contain COVID-19 cases and building the capacity of the volunteer program to respond to future emergencies.

The effort is picking up steam in Eastern Oregon.

"There has been a significant increase in people volunteering for different regions across the state for the Eastern Oregon Medical Reserve Corps (EOMRC) and for Serve Oregon," said Jason Yencopal, emergency management director for Baker County and the unit commander of the Eastern Oregon Medical Reserve Corps. "And we've seen that increase in Eastern Oregon, too."

Yencopal said about 30 volunteers have been added around the seven-county region that makes up the EOMRC, bringing the total volunteers in the region to about 90. Having volunteers spread out in all of the counties under the EOMRC umbrella helps cut down on response times if volunteers are needed to travel from, say,

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Oregon's response to COVID-19, please visit <https://govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19>

Pendleton to Burns, Yencopal said.

"If we only have volunteers in three of the seven counties, we're always pulling from those three," he said. "If we can get them spread out all over the region, the drive time for volunteers to respond in the case of a severe outbreak would decrease and make our response time increase."

The Oregon Health Authority is planning for volunteers to be a key part of the state's COVID-19 recovery

"WHEN OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WAS PREPARING FOR THE WORST OF THIS, VOLUNTEER HEALTH CARE WORKERS ANSWERED THE CALL."

— Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

effort by supporting contact tracing, testing and community wellness campaigns, and studies of long-term community effects and mass vaccination programs. Volunteers who sign up in the coming days will have the opportunity to train and deploy quickly.

"The objective is to get enough contact tracers for the counties, and then whether it's county or state, we have enough contact tracers to support positive cases in order to be able to go through that process to keep people safe and to reduce the spread," Yencopal said.

Getting the word out

to potential volunteers in Eastern Oregon has been productive.

"It's been positive," said Ray Denny, public safety director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and a manager for the EOMRC.

The EOMRC is a group of doctors, nurses, emergency medical technicians and residents around Eastern Oregon. The organization falls under the State Emergency Registry of Volunteers. The Corps

supports local county health departments, area hospitals, emergency management offices and local response teams in a seven-county area: Gilliam, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Grant and Baker.

In addition to helping with disease outbreaks, SERV-OR volunteers are ready to respond to other emergencies and natural disasters, such as flooding, wildfire and earthquakes. A couple of events the EOMRC has been involved with, Yencopal said, include the solar eclipse in 2017 and supporting the Red Cross shelter during the February flooding in

Umatilla National Forest seeks public input on Davis Project

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The North Fork John Day Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest is seeking public comment on the proposed Davis Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion project, according to a press release from the Umatilla National Forest.

The purpose of the Davis Project, located approximately 35 miles southeast of Ukiah, is to reduce the risk and extent of an ongoing insect and disease infestation. The Davis Project proposes to treat up to 3,000 acres by removing trees through mechanical treatments, including commercial thinning, small diameter thinning, pile burning and prescribed fire.

Treatments would remove insect- and disease-infested trees and reduce stocking levels to decrease competition for moisture, light and nutrients. Proposed activities are designed to improve the ability of trees to ward off insects and diseases and decrease fuel buildup

from dead and dying trees, increasing forest stand resilience.

The Forest Service is seeking scoping comments to help refine the proposed action and identify ways to improve the project. The comment period is an opportunity for the public to be involved in the process and offer thoughts on alternative ways the Forest Service can accomplish the project purpose and need. The Forest Service will be accepting comments on the proposal until June 18.

The North Fork John Day Ranger District also intends to host a field trip to the project area during the scoping period on June 11, with the date or the format for the field trip depending on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information about the Davis Project or the upcoming field trip, contact Wendy Eddy, the project lead, at wendy.eddy@usda.gov or 541-427-5387. Additionally, those interested in attending the public field trip are encouraged to RSVP to Eddy.