

Five resign from Morrow County Sheriff's Office

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

MORROW COUNTY — Five Morrow County Sheriff's Office employees have resigned in the past 30 days, according to officials at the sheriff's office.

Four of the employees who resigned were deputies and one was a sergeant, Morrow County Sheriff Kenneth Matlack said.

Matlack said there were several reasons why the employees left the sheriff's office. One employee was moving to a new home with his wife in Redmond, and another moved to Portland, where his daughter has access to better, more consistent medical care at a local hospital, the



A Morrow County Sheriff's Office truck passes through Heppner on Friday, Feb. 19, 2021.

sheriff said. Three of the employees, however, resigned to seek opportunities elsewhere after they were not promoted during a series of shifts at the sheriff's office that came

after a longtime operations lieutenant resigned. "Sometimes you don't get selected," Matlack said. "Sometimes you can work at it and do better, and sometimes the other guy is going

to win." Matlack noted that he is not a "seniority-based" sheriff. Personality, temperament, loyalty and vision are what he looks for in promoting someone, rather than

how long someone has been on the job. "If I have people who are missing the mark, are really jerks and they're just bad employees and whatever, generally speaking, they're not going to be happy with the sheriff," he said. "On the other hand, I get a lot of credit from people who are happy with my guys because they say, 'Boy, you really have good people,' and well, maybe I'm lucky, maybe I'm making good promotional opportunities, or maybe I'm hiring the right people and I luck out." Matlack said that some of the resignations may have been partly due to political reasons. He said some of the employees may have supported his opponent from the last election cycle, Mark Pratt, and over time decided that they do not align with Matlack's view and efforts. "Someone might have

a different opinion about it than mine," Matlack said. "I try to find people that I've hired who are loyal to the sheriff. They understand our mission, they buy into our mission, because I cannot hire people or promote people that doesn't see where the ship is going." Matlack said regardless of the reasons why the employees left, he wishes them well on their future endeavors. "My philosophy's been that if you can be happy in your job then you're going to do a lot better in your work," he said. "But if you're to the point where you're not happy, you're dissatisfied, then I'm not going to hold anybody" back. Matlack said there are currently five positions open at the sheriff's office. He added that the office has begun taking applications and is in the process of hiring more employees.



Matlack

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Cattlemen raise questions about wild and scenic river bill

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

PENDLETON — Eastern Oregon ranchers say they are wary of federal legislation that would add nearly 4,700 miles of wild and scenic rivers statewide, despite assurances the proposal will not affect existing private property or water rights.

U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats from Oregon, introduced the River Democracy Act on Feb. 3, which calls for dramatically expanding wild and scenic river designations in all corners of the state to protect water quality, enhance outdoor recreation and mitigate wildfire risks.

Oregon currently has 2,173 miles of wild and scenic rivers. The River Democracy Act would roughly triple that number.

The bill also expands wild and scenic river corridors from one-quarter mile to one-half mile on both sides of the river. For 4,700 river miles, that amounts to slightly more than 3 million acres of protected land — an area about the size of Connecticut.

"It's a huge, vast amount of land," said Todd Nash, a Willamette County commissioner and rancher. "That alone is of huge concern."

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by Congress in 1968 to shield certain waterways from development. In 2019, Wyden invited members of the public to nominate new streams and rivers for protection, which led to the River Democracy Act.

"Oregonians made it loud and clear: they cherish Oregon's rivers and want them protected for generations to come," Wyden said in a statement. "More protected rivers and clear management objectives mean more jobs, improved wildfire resiliency and a guarantee for the livability of Oregon."

However, Tom Sharp, president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said the bill caught him off guard.

Sharp, who ranches near Burns in Southeast Oregon, said many producers in the region depend on federal grazing permits with agencies like the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. More wild and scenic rivers could prompt greater restrictions, he said.

"We are cognizant of the importance of protecting the riparian areas along these waterways, but to have the potential exclusion of access in these areas, that could raise some serious questions," Sharp said. "That would be an obvious impact to producers."

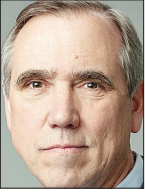
While the vast majority



Nash



Sharp



Merkley



Wyden

of streams and rivers identified in the River Democracy Act are on Forest Service or BLM land, some stretches do flow through private property.

Matt McElligott, a North Powder rancher and board member of the Public Lands Council, said the map of proposed wild and scenic rivers creates a "checkerboard pattern" of protected and non-protected areas that could make it more difficult for agencies to manage.

"Some of them, you can graze them. Some of them, you can't," McElligott said. "And they're not connected."

The bill's authors have said they were careful to include plain language that explicitly preserves existing property rights.

For example, the bill states that nothing in it will repeal any existing private contract, including those for utility corridors, communications facilities, recreational cabins, group facilities, roads and, importantly for ranchers, water transmission facilities.

If the bill is passed, agencies will have up to six years to write a comprehensive plan for the newly designated wild and scenic corridors. Specifically, the bill requires them to assess wildfire risks, and implement a plan to protect homes, businesses and clean up watersheds post-fire.

McElligott said ranchers appreciate the acknowledgment of wildfire risks, though the Public Lands Commission criticized the bill for not recognizing grazing as a potential management tool for reducing fuel loads.

"If we have that big of a set-aside (of land), that's more of a fire danger than fire prevention," he said.

Nash, the county commissioner, said ranchers and local leaders are continuing to gather more information about the bill and working with the senators' staff to answer questions.

"We have good-faith communication and intentions from the Wyden administration, I do believe," Nash said. "But I can't help but think there will be some unintended consequences at some point."

Bendixsen sworn in as municipal judge pro tem

HERMISTON — Cameron Bendixsen was sworn in as a municipal judge pro tem for Hermiston on Tuesday, March 2.

The judge pro tem fills in for Municipal Judge Thomas Creasing when he is not available to hear a case or has to excuse himself due to a conflict of interest. The previous judge pro tem, Phillip Spicerkuhn, stepped down after being elected to the city council.

According to a news release from the city, Bendixsen is president of Bendixsen Law P.C. in Hermiston. He graduated from Hermiston High School and earned a Juris Doctorate from Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing, Michigan. He now lives in Hermiston with his wife and four children, and serves in various local organizations, including on the Eastern Oregon Mission Board of Directors.

LOCAL BRIEFING



Cameron Bendixsen, left, is sworn in as municipal judge pro tem for the city of Hermiston on March 2, 2021.

Grants available for Morrow County businesses

BOARDMAN — Morrow County and Tillamook County Creamery Association have announced another round of funding is available to assist small businesses affected by COVID-19.

The businesses must have their principal operations in Morrow County, and have fewer than 25 employees. They must also be able to demonstrate that they were prohibited from operating by Executive Orders 20-12 or 20-65 or can show a total decline in sales of 25% or more, caused by COVID-19 pandemic regulations between March 1, 2020, and Dec. 31, 2020, as compared with the same period in 2019.

The deadline to apply is 5 p.m. on Monday, March 15. The grant application must include all information at the time of submittal, and can be dropped off in person at the Board of Commissioners Office, 110 N. Court St., Room 201, Heppner, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., except over the noon hour. They can also be mailed to the Board of Commissioners Office, P.O. Box 788, Heppner, OR 97836 or submitted via email to gzody@co.morrow.or.us.

For questions, contact Gregg Zody, Morrow County Director of Community Development at 541-676-5605.

EOCI completes vaccine efforts

PENDLETON — Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton has finished offering COVID-19 vaccines to all adults in custody at the prison, a spokesperson from the prison said in an email to the *East Oregonian* on Monday, March 1.

Prison officials offered vaccines to 1,618 adults in custody during three clinics since vaccine efforts began at EOCI in February. In all,

1,081 inmates have been vaccinated, for an acceptance rate of approximately 67%.

The prison has also given 155 inmates a second dose, the spokesperson said.

The vaccinations come after a federal judge ordered the state in February to begin offering the vaccine to all adults in Oregon prisons as infection spread rapidly through the state's prison system in December 2020 and January. The order came during a larger case where a group of inmates criticized the state for its response to COVID-19 outbreaks in state prisons.

Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla has also been vaccinating its adults in custody since February, but officials at the prison did not respond to questions about vaccine progress prior to press time.

Good Shepherd offering vaccine appointments

HERMISTON — Good Shepherd Health Care System expects to receive weekly COVID-19 vaccine allocations and will hold weekly vaccine events for those eligible under Oregon Health Authority guidelines.

The vaccines are free, but by appointment only. According to a news release, as of Feb. 12, Good Shepherd had vaccinated 2,096 individuals with first doses and 1,563 with second doses.

"Allocation projections are looking better for Umatilla County and our primary goal is to help Umatilla County Public Health to vaccinate as many as we can," Devin Goldman, quality and infection control director, said in a statement.

Vaccine clinics will be held weekly until further notice on Good Shepherd's campus in Conference

Centers 1 & 2, located at 610 N.W. 11th St. in Hermiston. Community members should sign up for an appointment online at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050c4cafaf2ca0f49-good>. The signup link goes live at 8 a.m. the Monday before the vaccine clinic takes place. Those signed up are encouraged to wait in their vehicle until 10 minutes prior to their scheduled appointment to allow for social distancing while waiting in line, and will need to be monitored for 15 minutes after the vaccine is administered.

For questions, Good Shepherd's COVID-19 Vaccination Hotline at 541-667-3426.

PSD announces potential COVID-19 exposures

PENDLETON — As high school athletics ramps back up for the first time in 2021, the Pendleton School District is dealing with potential COVID-19 exposures among two of its sports teams.

In a Wednesday, March 3, email, Pendleton Superintendent Chris Fritsch wrote that members of its high school dance and boys soccer teams were potentially exposed to the coronavirus.

"Students and their families have been informed that (Umatilla County Public Health) is currently conducting contact tracing," he wrote. "Once that is complete, the District will make a determination of the appropriate actions to be taken and the duration of any suspension of activities. At this time all activities associated with both teams have been suspended."



Fritsch

In an interview, Fritsch said it was still early, but he didn't anticipate the COVID-19 exposures would affect Pendleton High School's reopening later this month.

Construction begins on water project

HERMISTON — The city of Hermiston is preparing to begin work on a project to replace about 2,000 feet of a 100-year-old water main running under Ridge-way Avenue, Northwest Sixth Street and Northwest Seventh Street between Hermiston Avenue and Standard Avenue.

The city warns that there will be some delays and detours along the route while construction is underway for the next two months. The project is expected to cost \$320,000, paid for out of the city's utility funds.

For more information, visit www.hermistonprojects.com.

—EO Media Group

WILDHORSE RESORT & CASINO
3/5-3/11
Cineplex Show Times
Theater seating will adhere to social distancing protocols
 Every showing \$7.50 per person (ages 0-3 still free)

Raya and the Last Dragon (PG)
1:40p 4:40p 7:40p
•••••
Chaos Walking (PG-13)
1:20p 4:20p 7:20p
•••••
Tom and Jerry (PG)
2:00p 5:00p 8:00p
•••••
News of the World (PG-13)
1:00p 4:00p 7:00p

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