



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo, File

A report from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife says a sheep herder on Horseshoe Ridge, outside of Meacham, reported seeing four wolves in close proximity to his sheep on a large, timbered private pasture.

Wolves:

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OR30 and his companions are the only wolves known to be in the Meacham area right now.

Because the area of this recent attack has become so well used by wolves, Brown said Greg Rimbach, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Pendleton office, has been working with this producer in this area for many years on cattle and sheep issues. Currently, the lambs are gathered each night and kept in a pen surrounded by an electric fence.

"They are very proactive and have been trying many different things over the years to reduce wolf-livestock conflict," Brown said.

OR30 was originally a Wallowa County wolf, but around the age of 2, he left the Snake River Pack and was collared on Mount Emily in February 2015. He spent much of that year in the Mount Emily, Starkey and Ukiah wildlife units south of Interstate 84. In December 2015, he was observed with another wolf in the area formerly used by the Umatilla River Pack.

In 2016, radio-collar locations showed OR30 primarily using a large area in the Starkey and Ukiah units that he had frequented in summer 2015.

He also was discovered from time to time in the Mount Emily Unit and was believed to be alone.

In the spring 2017, OR30 was observed with a different wolf and the pair was in the northern Starkey and Ukiah units south of I-84.

In 2017, the OR30 wolves produced at least two pups that survived to the end of the year, but they were not counted as a breeding pair because the female died in October. Radio-collar data showed a 306-square-mile use of area primarily in the Starkey and Ukiah units. Roughly 67% of location data points showed them on private lands.

The following year the OR30 wolf group totaled three animals and were monitored until September. By the end of 2018, two of the wolves remained in the pack area.

By January 2019, OR30 left the Starkey and Ukiah area, and the group's area of known wolf activity was discontinued. According to ODFW's website, OR30 spent most of 2019 in the Wenaha Pack area of known wolf activity. In early 2020, he was observed with another wolf in the Mount Emily wildlife management unit.

Brown said the department has documented three wolves in the OR30 group this spring and suspect they are denning in the area and there are probably pups, as well.

Finalists:

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Mountain, Browning said he felt like he and his family already had a "quasi-relationship" with Pendleton through all the times they stopped in town while traveling through Oregon.

"When this opportunity came around, it was like, 'Oh, we know where that's at and we've had really good experiences just stopping and talking to people,'" he said.

Responding to concerns from the audience about the lack of qualified applicants for open jobs across the region, Browning said community colleges needed to begin introducing themselves to students in elementary and middle school so young children could begin charting a path to the requisite job training.

But Browning said there also was a value to more traditional academic subjects such as philosophy and psychology. Besides engaging students in the "exercise of learning," it helped develop

in-demand "soft skills," including communication and critical thinking.

Carmen Simone

Carmen Simone has never worked for BMCC, but still represented a familiar face.

Simone, then a provost at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho, was a finalist for Blue Mountain president in 2013. She didn't get the job, but two college presidents later, she's seeking the job again.

Simone has extensive experience with both two- and four-year institutions, but she said she knew eight years ago that she was better suited for community colleges. She went on to become the president of Trinidad State Junior College in Colorado and the dean of the University of South Dakota Community College before becoming the president of Western Nebraska Community College in 2019.

"I'm a rural gal at heart," she said.

Simone said Blue Mountain is similar to Western Nebraska and other rural

BMCC TO HOLD A FOURTH PRESIDENTIAL FORUM

A last-minute addition to the finalist pool means Luca Lewis of Whatcom Community College became the fourth candidate for Blue Mountain Community College president.

Blue Mountain on Tuesday, June 8, announced the board of education decided to add Lewis to the finalist list after learning on June 7 the selection committee also recommended him.

Lewis has spent the past six years as the vice president of student services of Whatcom Community College in Bellingham, Washington. Prior to that, he worked in other administrative positions across Washington, including stints at Edmonds College in Lynnwood and Bellevue College. A BMCC press release highlighted his role in starting the "WCC Dismantling Racism and Advocating for Justice Endowed Lecture Series" and participating in a nationally recognized documentary.

Like the other finalists before him, Lewis will take part in a virtual community forum on Monday, June 14, 5:20-6 p.m. Community members can access the forum by visiting bluecc.zoom.us/j/91493173780.

community colleges across the country that are trying to stretch their services across thousands of square miles.

"Our students are the same. It doesn't matter where they are going to school," she said. "They have the same hopes, the same dreams."

Simone said community colleges needed to be adapt-

able to what students wanted out of their education because students who leave the area for college or career technical education often didn't come back.

She also said she was supportive of BMCC's dual credit program, but she wanted to make sure it wasn't just accessible to

the "high-flyers" but also to students who wouldn't normally think about college.

Christopher Villa

Christopher Villa's family emigrated from Mexico a century ago with his father obtaining his American citizenship following his service in World War II.

"I'm proud of my culture, of being Mexican American, and taking advantage of all this country has to offer," he said.

Villa has spent most of his 40-year career in higher education in California and Utah before he was named the president of Portland Community College's Rock Creek campus, one of four campuses associated with college.

His two-year tenure in Portland came to an end in 2020 when the college eliminated his position, but Villa said he was eager to return to Oregon. While in Eastern Oregon for his interviews, Villa said he planned to visit other campuses in Hermiston, Boardman and Milton-Freewater to get a sense of the

wider community.

Villa said he considered community engagement an important part of the job because it could help reach otherwise disengaged students.

While Rock Creek is based out of the city of Portland, Villa said the campus serves a more suburban and rural population. He found that while dual credit programs were well utilized by in places like Hillsboro, Villa said they weren't as regularly used in rural Columbia County towns like Scappoose and Vernonia.

Villa said the problem sometimes also extended to students with different cultural programs.

He pointed to Portland Community College's aviation repair program. Completing the program could lead to a job with a six-figure salary, but the college found students of color, especially Hispanic students, weren't enrolling.

He said he worked with the Oregon Air Show in Hillsboro to help stoke interest in the program among Hispanic students.

Lifeways:

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approved a unanimous recommendation from a five-person committee in late May to go with CCS over Lifeways, is considering Lifeways' protest and whether or not to maintain their earlier decision, according to Doug Olsen, the county's legal counsel.

Olsen said there is no specific timeline for an agency — in this case Umatilla County — to consider or rule on a protest, but the decision had to be made "in a timely manner." Olsen said the commissioners likely will announce their decision "in the next couple of board meetings."

Regardless if the county changes its mind, Lifeways says it plans to stay in Umatilla County and "is already underway in pivoting its services to retain staff," Hoekstra said in the statement.

Lifeways Director Liz Johnsen, however, could not provide specifics of what that might look like or what might change for its patients, employees and facilities, but said "we are looking at different business opportunities to continue to serve the residents of Umatilla County in mental health services."

She said it's possible Lifeways might pursue contracts or telehealth services with different states or different areas, adding the company is still investigating how its services might change.

Lifeways in the county

Lifeways has come under scrutiny from officials for its ability to respond when law enforcement requests help during calls for people experiencing mental health



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Lifeways, with its office at 331 S.E. Second St., Pendleton, has been Umatilla County's mental health services provider for 16 years. But the county earlier this month decided to not continue working with Lifeways and instead selected Community Counseling Solutions to provide mental health and addiction treatment. Lifeways is protesting that decision while claiming it can pivot to find new ways to serve local clients.

issues, and Lifeways in April drew attention for the closure of Aspen Springs in Hermiston. The acute care facility provided the highest level of psychiatric care for individuals experiencing a severe mental health crisis before it closed after being open for just seven months. It reopened in May as a secure residential treatment facility, a lower level of care.

Since July 2020, Umatilla County has paid Lifeways more than \$1,484,000 for behavioral health services, according to county Chief Financial Officer Robert Pahl. The provider serves 184 clients with schizophrenic disorders, 491 clients with major depression, 471 clients with post-traumatic stress disorder, 215 clients with bipolar disorder and more than 2,000 clients with adjustment disorders.

The provider has 11 facilities in Umatilla County and

more than 120 employees, most of whom are county residents, Johnsen has stated.

The county has allocated \$565,000 for school mental health services and almost \$1.2 million for mental health administration in its upcoming 2021-22 budget, and county officials in recent months have emphasized that revamping its mental health care is a primary goal.

Without those funds, Johnsen said Lifeways will continue operations "through our innovation, through looking at other contracts, service lines and programming."

Meanwhile, Lifeways employees have begun contacting Lindsay to discuss their transition should CCS remain as the county's new provider, Lindsay said.

Johnsen said she's confident many employees will

choose Lifeways over CCS.

"We in no way intend to prevent them from choosing CCS if that's what they choose to do," she said, adding, "we have also heard that many of them don't want to go to CCS."

Lifeways' claims, CCS' response

In the protest letter, Lifeways argues the county "failed to evaluate proposals" and "lacked a rational basis" in its decision to go with Community Counseling Solutions after the committee's unanimous recommendation.

An educator, business person and county employee, including Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer, served on the committee. Several committee members said they were asked not to comment about their decision until the appeal process is completed.

Lifeways in its protest letter called the county's decision "arbitrary and capricious" and pointed out Community Counseling does not have any active facilities, transportation services and personnel in Umatilla County. It claims CCS' proposal "is full of statements indicating its own serious doubt about its ability to become operational in time."

Lindsay said she doesn't "recall stating that we had doubts," adding, "I do think it's a lot of work, and I'm not minimizing that."

Lifeways also called out Community Counseling for not having started hiring the more than 100 employees necessary for the company's new services in the county. That would entail "a three-fold increase in the company's operations" leading to what CCS itself called "growing pains."

Lindsay said Community Counseling is waiting to begin hiring employees and finding facilities and transportation services until Lifeways' appeal process is complete.

"Our plan was to use the time starting from the time of the award to begin contacting entities about places to rent or purchase," Lindsay said. "We're kind of grounded right now because of the appeal. That's not a criticism. Lifeways is entitled to the appeal."

Lifeways also noted CCS has yet to be Medicare credentialed to provide behavioral health services, saying that "is akin to a medical student saying they are not a licensed doctor yet, but hope to be soon."

Lindsay said Community Counseling previously decided to not seek the license to bill Medicare "due

to the significant amount of paperwork that was involved." But a year ago, the company changed its mind. Lindsay said CCS should be credentialed within the next month.

The protest letter also claimed CCS has yet to reach out to Lifeways to discuss the transition between providers. Lindsay said that is not true.

On the day the county commissioners voted to award the contract to CCS, Lindsay said she contacted Lifeways Chief Executive Officer Tim Hoekstra to discuss the transition. According to Lindsay, Hoekstra "conveyed that any conversation regarding transitions or next steps prior to the end of the protest process would be premature and he would not be communicating more until then."

Johnsen clarified that CCS hadn't contacted Lifeways personnel in Umatilla County specifically.

Should the county maintain its decision to go with CCS, both providers have said they will work with the other in any way possible to promote a smooth transition for patients and to provide care in the county.

And despite the many claims Lifeways has made against CCS and the county, Johnsen said "unfortunately, the politics of this has pitted Lifeways against CCS, and that's not what this is about. This is about making sure that the breadth and depth of services in Umatilla County are retained to the level that they are now."

She added: "This isn't Lifeways versus CCS. This is what is best for Umatilla County, what makes most sense and what is most pragmatic in making this large of a decision."