

DEQ:

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The port reported it received notification from DEQ on Jan. 10 of an assessment of a civil penalty for violations of its wastewater disposal permit. According to the release, the port will work in collaboration with DEQ toward finding solutions.

“The Port takes this matter seriously and looks forward to help from DEQ, working together as environmental stewards, to develop a long-term solution that will be a win-win for Port industries, local farmers and the region,” according to the statement.

“The Port of Morrow has been working cooperatively with DEQ on the content of this action,” Port of Morrow Executive Director Ryan Neal said in the press release. “We look forward to jointly developing a resolution.”

Under a DEQ water quality permit, the port collects nitrogen-rich wastewater from food processors, storage facilities and data centers at its industrial parks near Boardman, which it then reuses to irrigate neighboring farm fields growing potatoes, onions and other high-value crops.

But according to the agency, the port violated its permit more than 1,000 times from 2018 to 2021, exceeding the limit on how much nitrogen can be safely applied to farmland and resulting in 165 tons of excess nitrogen in the fields.

Leah Feldon, DEQ deputy director, said these are “serious violations of water quality regulations that are in place to protect public health and the environment.”

The Port of Morrow is Oregon’s second-largest port, behind only the Port of Portland. It is in the Umatilla Basin of Northeastern Oregon, where in 1990 the state declared a groundwater management area due to high levels of groundwater nitrates exceeding 7 milligrams per liter.

High levels of nitrates in drinking water are linked with serious health concerns, particularly for babies and pregnant women. Groundwater is used as a primary source of drinking water across the basin, which spans northern Umatilla and Morrow counties — including the cities of Hermiston, Boardman, Irrigon, Stanfield and Echo.

Historically, the sources of groundwater contamination in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area are fertilizer used on irrigated farmland, confined animal feeding operations, livestock pastures, food processing wastewater and septic systems, according to DEQ’s press release.

“The existing nitrate contamination in the basin’s groundwater means everyone in the region has to do their part to reduce this contamination,” Feldon said. “The Port of Morrow has not been doing its part, and DEQ looks forward to working together to correct these violations and protect our aquifers from future contamination.”

DEQ also alleges the port failed to monitor nitrogen at application sites on 121 separate occasions each year from 2018-20.



Patty Nance/Contributed Photo
People gather for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March on Jan. 20, 2020, in downtown Hermiston. This year’s event is Monday, Jan. 17, which includes a program in the Hermiston United Methodist Church.

MLK:

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“The faith-based community is called to represent the heart of God, which is love, unity and equality,” Jordan said. “The church is supposed to lead by example in these areas, not the world.”

Pastor Patty Nance of the Hermiston United Methodist Church also highlights the importance of peace and inclusivity, which is why her congregation readily opens its doors to host the Martin Luther King Jr. Day program. King, she said, preached hope for a better tomorrow through nonviolent civil action.

King’s efforts and the response of people march-

ing in the streets, Nance said, helped shine a spotlight on the teachings of Jesus Christ. And, she said, King’s legacy has had a lasting impact.

“Faith communities began to look at the inherent racism within their own walls,” Nance said. “While it has been a slow and arduous journey, that glimmer of hope that King shared so long ago still burns bright in many of our faith communities.”

While Carbage said progress has been made in regard to racial division, it’s important to continue to be diligent in promoting peace. Continuing the work and remembering the nonviolent and peaceful leadership King stood for is paramount, he said.

“We don’t want the past

to repeat itself,” Carbage said. “We want peace, even in Eastern Oregon and our small community of Hermiston.”

Jordan agreed, saying everyone can take an active role to effect change on a daily basis. It’s simply, he said, a matter of perspective.

“Begin to view each other through the eyes of God,” Jordan said. “Every individual is valuable in the eyes of God.”

Everyone is invited to get involved with the Hermiston Cultural Awareness Coalition. It meets at 2 p.m. on the second Saturday of each month at the Hermiston United Methodist Church. For more information, contact Carbage at 541-701-7073 or jcarbage@yahoo.com.

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Spider-Man: No Way Home (PG13)
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