

Rail trail unlikely in Wallowa County

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — Efforts to create a 63-mile Elgin-to-Joseph trail alongside the tracks of the Wallowa Union Railroad are coming to virtually no fruition since Wallowa County has denied permits for the trail within its borders, despite thousands of dollars of grant money going toward the project.

“It’s doubtful it’ll ever go through because people were vehemently opposed to it,” said Wallowa County Commission Chair Susan Roberts, who is co-chair of the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority, during an interview Monday, Feb. 21. “Wallowa County Planning (Department) at this time is not involved because it’s not in our county.”

The Joseph Branch Trail Consortium has reported receiving \$290,000 in grants intended for facilities on the Union County end of the “trail-with-rails” project, that would pay for a trailhead and pocket park in Elgin, as well as a 15-mile segment of the trail from Elgin to Looking-glass.

But, as the Wallowa County Chieftain was notified last week, the lion’s share



Joseph Branch Trail Consortium/Contributed Photo

Members of the Joseph Branch Trail Consortium help with trail cleanup along the tracks in Union County in this undated photo. Funding has been received to pay for the first 13 miles of a trail, but permit holdups in Wallowa County may prevent the trail’s ultimate goal of running from Elgin to Joseph.

of the project — that which would be in Wallowa County — was stopped dead in its tracks three years ago when the Wallowa County Planning Commission denied a conditional use permit for the project.

Planning Director Franz Goebel said Feb. 17 that although there were many people in favor of the project, there was a significant number opposed.

“There were quite a few people who vehemently opposed it and the planning commission denied it” Feb. 26, 2019, Goebel said.

He said there have been no attempts by the consortium to get a permit since that time.

Goebel said while benefits of exercise were acknowledged during a public meeting at the Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise before the

vote, the burden of proof was on the applicants to show there would be no significant negative impact on farms and ranches alongside the proposed trail.

“Where it’s tricky is it passes through all these resource zones,” he said. “It would be a tricky proposition. There was a lot of concern over disruption to farming practices along the trail.”

La Grande police arrest pair for 61 counts of mail theft

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Police arrested a pair of suspects in connection to a string of mail thefts in the La Grande area.

La Grande Police Department in a press release reported officers on Sunday, Feb. 20, arrested George Kelly, 26, and Gracee Shelley, 22, for 61 counts of mail theft and 61 counts of conspiracy to commit mail theft each.

During the arrest, La Grande officers collected enough stolen mail to fill two copy paper boxes, according to the press release, and are working diligently to return all stolen mail and packages to their owners.

“I am proud of the citizens who were able to report this incident and give us a good suspect vehicle description,” said acting La Grande Police Department Sgt. Brandon Boucher, the lead investigator on the case.

Boucher added he was

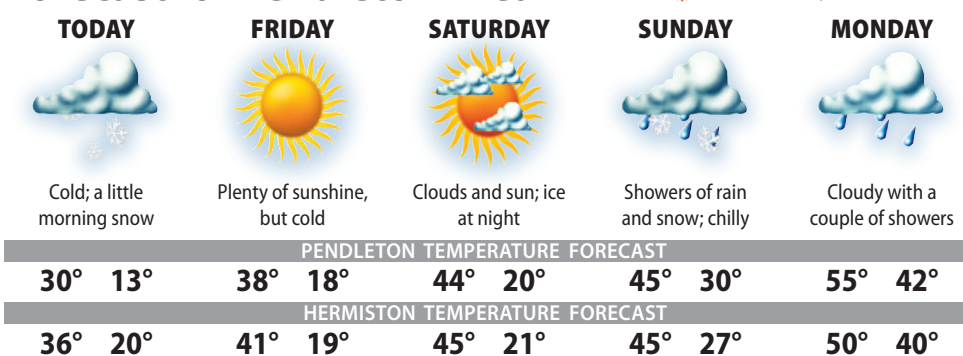
impressed with the hard work investigating officers are putting into the case and that “we were able to stop any more mail thefts from occurring.”

La Grande police officers responded at 7:25 a.m. Feb. 20 to the area of South 20th Street for a report of mail theft. Witnesses reported seeing the suspects driving a blue Chevrolet Impala.

The arrests came just before 8 a.m. after La Grande police conducted an investigation with the assistance of the Union County Sheriff’s Office and the Oregon State Police following reports Shelley and Kelly were on a crime spree and had stolen mail and packages from many addresses in La Grande and other portions of Union County.

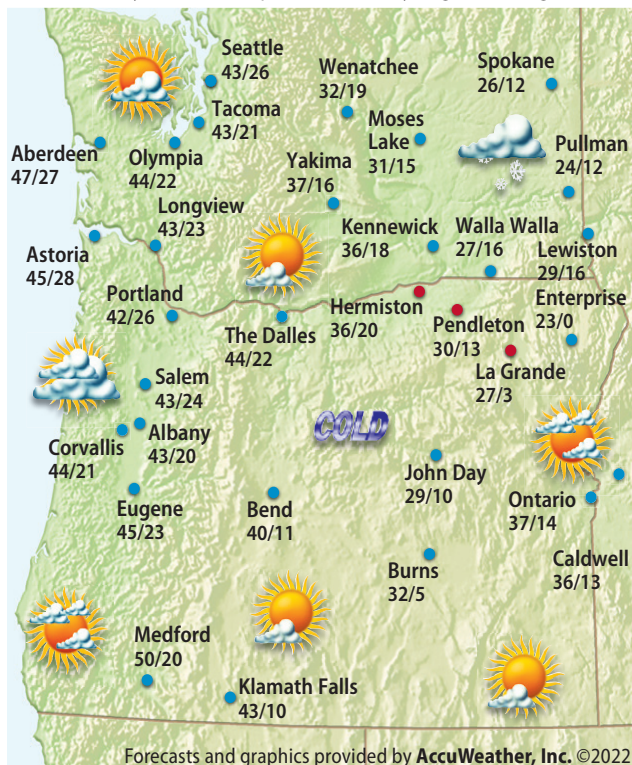
The investigation of the case is ongoing and there may be more charges. Anyone with information that could assist the investigation should contact Boucher at 541-963-1017.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today’s weather. Temperatures are today’s highs and tonight’s lows.



ALMANAC

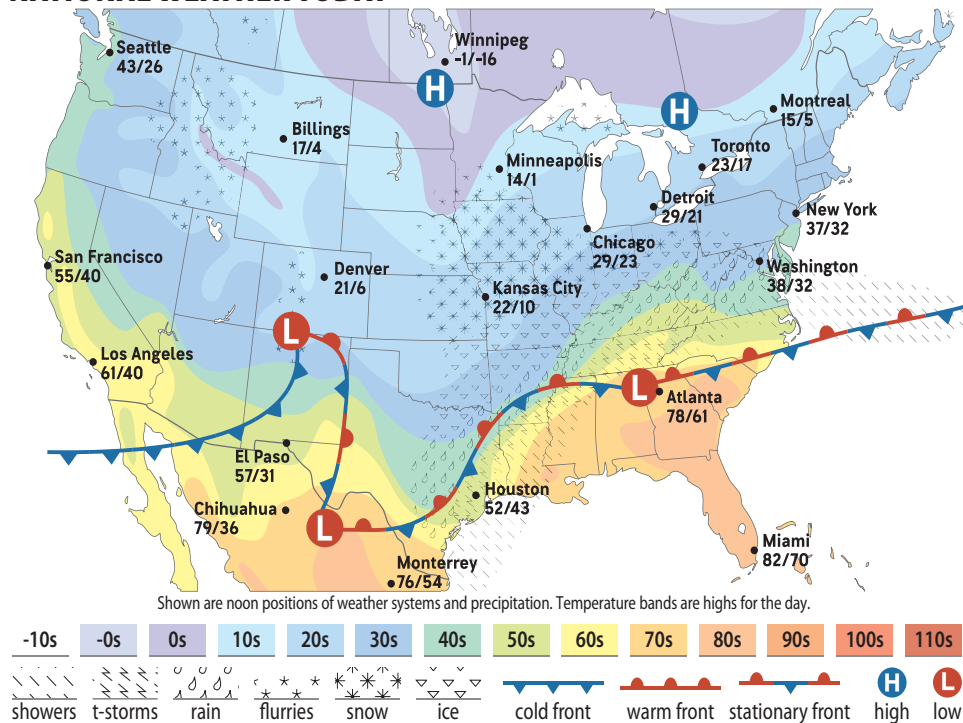
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	20°	4°
Normals	50°	31°
Records	66° (1921)	4° (2022)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.70"	
Normal month to date	0.95"	
Year to date	2.23"	
Last year to date	2.99"	
Normal year to date	2.49"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	30°	7°
Normals	52°	30°
Records	67° (1947)	7° (2022)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.05"	
Normal month to date	0.72"	
Year to date	0.98"	
Last year to date	1.08"	
Normal year to date	1.86"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Fri.
Boardman	ENE 4-8	ENE 4-8
Pendleton	NW 4-8	NE 4-8
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	6:43 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	5:35 p.m.	
Moonrise today	2:07 a.m.	
Moonset today	10:48 a.m.	

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday’s National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 90° in Plant City, Fla. Low -36° in West Yellowstone, Mont.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Regional superintendents give comments on Senate Bill 1521

By ALEX WITWERT
EO Media Group

SALEM — The Oregon bill that would protect school superintendents from firings is making its way through the regular session, passing in the Oregon Senate 16-7 on Feb. 10.

Senate Bill 1521, which would protect superintendents from no-cause dismissal, was brought about by recent high-profile superintendent firings. The bill itself explicitly calls out the prohibition of firing superintendents who are pressured by a school board to go against state laws and mandates, such as what happened to former Adrian School District Superintendent Kevin Purnell last August.

The Senate Interim Committee on Education sponsored the bill, which has no individual senator’s name attached.

Testimony attached to the bill showed a large amount

of opposition to the legislation, mostly from concerned parents arguing the bill would diminish local control of schools.

“I’m certainly a local control supporter, but then at the same time we don’t want superintendents that are just being let go because they won’t break the law,” said Morrow County School District superintendent Dirk Dirksen. “It’s kind of a Catch-22 if you want to look at it from a local control perspective.”



Dirksen

Albany, Adrian and Newberg school districts fired their superintendents last year. The Newberg School Board drew ire for its banning of Pride or Black Lives Matters symbols in the classroom — and then fired its superintendent, Joe Morelock, for not enforcing the ban. Adrian’s former superintendent, Purnell, was dismissed in part because he would not stand against statewide mask and vaccination mandates.

School boards asking superintendents to disregard or flout state laws and mandates puts them in a tough position, according to Grant County Education Service District Superintendent Robert Waltenburg.

“We’ve had, occasionally but not very often, superintendents being asked to act in a way that’s contrary to legislation,” he said. “That puts them in a bad place. When your boss is asking you to do something that is illegal, what is your recourse?”

Dirksen noted the new legislation would offer stability for schools, and that would be a boon for students.

“It just is another method for stability, and as we’ve experienced this COVID-19 dilemma, one of the most difficult parts is the lack of stability,” Dirksen said. “That’s just not good for students. I see this as a step in the right direction in regards to staff stability. (Staff stability) is very important to supporting students, and that’s what I see as advantageous.”

IN BRIEF

State police seek help with wolf shooting

COVE — The Oregon State Police is requesting the public’s assistance in locating the person(s) that shot and killed a collared wolf in the Cove area.

According to a press release, Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife troopers were notified Feb. 15 by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife that a collared wolf, OR 109, may be deceased at the end of Haggerty Lane off High Valley Road approximately 3-½ miles south of Cove.

State police and ODFW personnel responded and found a dead wolf lying in a field. The wolf is a black collared female. Troopers believe the wolf was shot and killed the morning of Feb. 15.

The wolf was a single wolf and not part of a pack, according to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist Phillip Perrine.

Anyone with information regarding this case is urged to contact OSP through the Turn in Poachers (TIP) line at 800-452-7888, *OSP (*677), or email at TIP@osp.oregon.gov and reference case No. SP22039030.

— EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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