

Forum:

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in the wake of the passage of Measure 110, the law that decriminalized the personal possession of small amounts of hard drugs.

Pullen said Umatilla County is his home and talked up his 10 years in county management and 20 years in government overall. He also is serving a three-year term on the Tillamook County Fair Board, which expires June 30, 2023.

He said he would make improving county roads a priority. While some are fine, others are in serious need of repair.

“They look like they’re on the moon,” he said.

And the county needs to be ready to help farmers due to the 2022 Legislature passing a bill to establish overtime pay requirements for agricultural workers in Oregon after 40 hours per week. He said that bill is going to have devastating effects on local farmers and the county needs to get ahead if what is coming.

Barton, owner of Barton Laser Leveling Inc., said his decades in business give him the skills the county board needs. He said he considers homelessness a major hurdle for the county, which faces challenges to increase housing and providing enough services.

In a similar vein, he said, the county needs to find a way to confine people suffering from mental illness to protect them and the public. He also said he wants more for the county’s youth, such as a virtual recreation center.

Umatilla County, he said, afforded him the opportunity to have a good life, and he wants to pass that on.

Bonifer said as commissioner he would take hard stances again state mandates for masks and vaccines.

“We are a charter county. We don’t have to listen to the state,” he said.

He also said he would cut “unnecessary” county jobs to free up more funds to help with mental health and homelessness.



Umatilla County commissioner candidate Jesse Bonifer speaks to the audience during a candidates forum on Thursday, March 31, 2022, at the Pendleton Convention Center.



Umatilla County commissioner candidate Susan Bower speaks to the audience during a candidates forum on Thursday, March 31, 2022, at the Pendleton Convention Center.

Bower said as commissioner she would focus on the roll the county plays in regional economic development and working on ways to improve mental health services, perhaps through grants but also through private-public partnerships.

The county’s organizational health also is of importance, she said, and voters need to support commissioner candidates who have professional backgrounds. That way, she explained, the county would not have to go down the road of hiring a professional manager.

During a question about what the candidates know on the defunct Blue Mountain forest management plan, Bower said as a commissioner, she would not have to know the ins and outs of that kind of sweeping plan, but she has to know who the experts are to call about the topic.

Timmons touted her work

serving on the Blue Mountain Community College Foundation and as vice-chair on the Umatilla County board for CAPECO.

“I think it’s important to be involved because that’s how you have the thumb on the pulse of the community and know what’s going on,” she said.

As commissioner, she said, she would want to take on homelessness as well as push for helping local businesses keep their doors open while recruiting new businesses to the county. The county also needs to address the rising use of drugs, she said, and focus on elder care.

Beers, Pullen and Bonifer admitted they knew nothing of the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line, the project to build a massive 500-kilovolt line across from Boardman to Western Idaho.

The Umatilla County Republican Party hosted

UPCOMING FORUMS

If you missed the Umatilla County commissioners candidates forum on Thursday, March 31, you still have a pair of opportunities to learn more about those running for the positions:

- April 7, 6 p.m. at the Oregon National Guard Armory, 900 S.E. Columbia Drive., Hermiston.
- April 8, 6 p.m. at the Milton-Freewater Community Building, 109 N.E. Fifth St.

For questions about the April 7 forum, email valerie.bradley@gmail.com or josiabarron.pcp@protonmail.com. For the other event, contact Suni Danforth, Umatilla County Republican Central Committee chair, at 541-215-9389 or ucrcpchair@gmail.com.

the forum at the Pendleton Convention Center, and Vance Day, a former Marion County Circuit Court judge, served as moderator. Day was on a swing through Eastern Oregon campaigning for a seat on the Oregon Court of Appeals. Perhaps as many as 50 people were in the audience when the event began at 6 p.m.

The Oregon primary election is May 17. The last day to register to vote in the primary is April 26. For more information about voter registration, visit bit.ly/38lxaHk.

Grazing:

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be barred from the pastures for research, he said.

“It’s hard to accept the permittees were somehow caught by surprise,” Lacy said, noting that the plan to stop grazing was enacted seven years ago, while the ranchers were formally notified two years ago.

Attorneys for the BLM and Cahill Ranches, which intervened in the lawsuit, argued a temporary restraining order isn’t justified because livestock grazing won’t cause irreparable harm to sage grouse populations, the environment or the nonprofits.

Barring livestock would be an “extraordinary remedy” that would be far more detrimental to the ranch than any harms to the environmental plaintiffs if grazing continues another year, the defendants argued.

“At core, the plaintiffs’ argument is one of impatience rather than harm,” said Arwyn Carroll, attorney for BLM. “They have not identified any data that would be lost or not collected if the closures don’t happen this season.”

BLM insists on bureaucratic processes

According to ONDA, grazing must be prohibited in the 13 pastures to allow for research on the sage grouse under a broader 2015 conservation plan for the species across the West, where its populations have been falling for decades.

These 13 “research natural areas” were originally required under a conservation plan developed during the Obama administration but dropped from a revised version enacted by the Trump administration.

However, a 2019 federal court order in a separate case reinstated the original conservation plan that required grazing to end in the 13 pastures. The environmental groups then filed the lawsuit alleging

the federal government has unlawfully failed to implement the livestock-free “research natural areas.”

The BLM counters that it must follow bureaucratic processes before halting grazing within the 13 pastures, such as studying the environmental impacts of building necessary fences to keep cattle out.

“Fences don’t spring into existence at the stroke of a pen,” said Carroll, noting that fences are “not the most environmentally friendly way” to close pastures due to the effects on wildlife and plant species. For that reason, BLM is studying alternative methods.

Ending grazing permits requires additional regulatory steps that take time, but the agency hasn’t issued new ones, according to BLM. The delay in implementing the “research natural areas” hasn’t been unreasonable in light of those hurdles.

“BLM has complied with that requirement and has not issued any new permits for those pastures,” Carroll said. “The plan does not create a deadline. It doesn’t use the mandatory language one would expect to see in a deadline.”

The environmental plaintiffs want to block grazing in pastures that have met rangeland health standards, so continued livestock grazing is unlikely to cause population-level effects on the sage grouse, according to BLM. Invasive weeds and other fuels for wildfires are also reduced by grazing, benefiting the public interest.

Meanwhile, halting grazing would force Joe Cahill, the ranch’s owner, to take drastic measures, such as reducing his cattle herd, feeding expensive hay, finding other forage ground, or disrupting irrigation schedules, the defendants said.

“We don’t know what the options are until he knocks on doors to find alternative pasture,” said Caroline Lobdell, the ranch’s attorney.

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