

Umatilla plans new footbridge to replace one floods destroyed

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Umatilla City Manager David Stockdale said hangups with the Federal Emergency Management Agency has delayed a \$7.2 million project to replace the footbridge the city lost when the Umatilla River flooded in 2019 and 2020.

“They’ve been great to work with, but it’s been three steps forward and two steps back all along the way,” he said.

He said the agency has changed representatives frequently, leading to misunderstandings between it and the city. Stockdale said his office has had to submit and resubmit the same information, repeatedly. With the approval of FEMA, Stockdale said the city of Umatilla has a green light, and he announced a timeline.

Work on the bridge begins in July, with a demolition crew removing the demolished bridge from the Umatilla River. Pieces, which now exist either in the river or along the bank, will be taken from the area.

“That might take a month in July and August,” he said.

Actual construction, he added, will start in the winter of 2022-23, and completion will be in early fall the following year.

FEMA will provide \$4.7 million for the project, Stockdale said, the state of Oregon will chip in \$500,000 and the city will take out a \$1



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Boaters on Thursday, April 14, 2022, float past the remains of a footbridge in Umatilla. The city starts work this summer on the \$7.2 million project to replace the bridge.

million loan to help cover the remaining amount.

“We did get some insurance proceeds, but they were very low, \$100,000,” Stockdale said.

Fixing a water main that was part of the bridge adds another \$1 million to the project, with \$750,000 coming from FEMA and \$250,000 from a state emergency grant. “The new bridge will be a significant improvement over the old one,” he said.

It will be about 140 feet longer in length, as the abutments will be set back farther on the shoreline than the ones on the old bridge. The new bridge also will be higher than the old one by 8 feet and have a “slow and steady arch,” he said.

“If the old bridge was at this elevation, it would not

have been damaged by flood,” Stockdale said.

A steel-frame bridge, it will not require a mid-river pier support. This will remove a hazard from the river, which troubled recreationalists and created a damming effect during floods.

“We’re really excited about the enhancements,” he said, which also include a boat house, benches and information boards.

Stockdale said the old bridge was important to the community. A hundred students a day crossed the bridge to get to school. Other people crossed, too, as they walked downtown.

More improvements ahead

Stockdale said more is planned for both sides of

the bridge.

The city obtained a recreational trails program grant from Oregon last year and plans to construct a new trail that will go from Powerline Road and loop down and connect to the new bridge.

“That will go in at the same time we are building the bridge,” he said.

Also in the works, thanks to a grant from the land and water conservation fund, is a playground, pavilion and sidewalks at Nugent Park. The trail and playground will meet federal standards for accessibility.

As the city recently installed a new restroom at the park and has made improvements to the nearby Little League field, Stockdale boasted the area is on its way to being something special.

Part of FSR 32 reopens

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla National Forest officials have reopened access on just more than 1 mile of Forest Service Road 32 along the Umatilla River and are cautioning visitors about spring weather conditions in the forest.

While snow may have thawed from the foothills, forest roads still are not accessible due to mud or snow, according to a Forest Service press release Tuesday, April 12. In addition, traveling on thawing, saturated and muddy roads can result in resource damage and serious safety concerns, especially if visitors are unprepared.

“We typically see incidents this time of year where families head up for the day, get stuck and end up spending the night or making a very long hike out to look for help,” Shane Dittlinger, Recreation Program Manager for the Umatilla National Forest, said in the release.

This can become a serious situation quickly, particularly if travelers are not prepared for the elements. Many places in the Blue Mountains have limited or no cellphone coverage, so forest visitors always should be prepared to spend the night in the forest with warm clothing, food and plenty of water.

Forest officials also are encouraging the public to minimize impacts to natural resources from travel on roads that are susceptible to rutting due to warmer weather and melting snowpack.

Forest Service Road 32 is a popular access route into the Umatilla River drainage on the Walla Walla Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest. The road closure is being lifted as repairs are complete for each portion. The Umatilla National Forest also reported it will provide updates as work progresses.

Additional information about the Umatilla National Forest is available at www.fs.usda.gov/umatilla.

in a manner that damages or unreasonably disturbs land and vegetation and urged people to report resource damage if they see it.

Some roads and trails are closed in areas with significant flood damage from the 2020 February and May flood events. One portion of the popular Forest Service Road 32 that flooding in 2020 damaged now is reopen.

The Forest Service recently announced it reopened the road from the forest boundary near Corporation Guard Station (approximately 8 miles east of Gibbon) to the bridge near Umatilla Forks Campground. With access to this portion of FSR 32 restored, forest officials plan to reopen a portion of Umatilla Forks Campground in late spring or early summer.

Flood repairs on this portion of FSR 32 were completed in the fall of 2021, which included clearing debris slides on the road, cleaning or repairing damaged culverts and ditches and removing trees along the road that were posing risks to public safety. Additionally, personnel cleared debris and removed danger trees at Umatilla Forks Campground to reopen nine campsites later this year. The remaining campsites will be closed until further flood damage repairs are completed.

Forest Service staff continue to work with the Federal Highway Administration to develop repair plans for the remaining flood-damaged sections of road upstream from Umatilla Forks Campground.

Hermiston students selected for capital tour

Youth advisors Gardner and Doherty look for more experience in government

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A pair of Hermiston High School students is going to the nation’s capital, thanks to a Umatilla Electric Cooperative program.

“I’m stoked,” Hailey Gardner said about the opportunity. She and a fellow Hermiston High School junior, Elizabeth Doherty, are going on the 2022 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.

Leaving in June, Gardner and Doherty will enjoy an all-expenses-paid, week-long trip. In Washington, they will join more than 1,500 other students from across the country. They will visit famous historical sites, meet with Oregon’s congressional leaders and learn leadership skills, according to Weston Putman, UEC manager of public relations. The students also will create podcasts and digital photo projects as they learn about electric cooperatives and current issues in energy and climate change legislation.

The Youth Tour had been suspended for two years because of the pandemic. Robert Echenrode, CEO and general manager of Umatilla Electric stated in a press release it’s a program UEC holds in high regard.

Gardner looks to gain experience

Gardner said the coming trip will be a lot of fun and she looks forward to the experience.

A youth advisor for the city of Hermiston, Gardner



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Hailey Gardner demonstrates the use of a 3-D printer Wednesday, April 13, 2022, at Hermiston High School. The Umatilla Electric Cooperative selected her to be a youth ambassador to Washington, D.C., this June.

attends Hermiston committee meetings and provides feedback on city decisions. As such, she is interested in government. She said she looks forward to meeting political leaders in Washington. Meeting the president would be especially interesting, she said.

The architecture and history of the capital are exciting to her, too, she said.

“It really spikes my interest,” she said.

She said the Lincoln Memorial tops her list of fascinating sights. The grandeur of the statue, combined with her appreciation for Lincoln, makes the memorial inspiring, she said.

Gardner is a varsity girl’s swim team captain and track team member and also is in the National Honor Society and the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America. She said her school participation is probably the reason why she was selected to go to Washington.

Doherty hopes to be inspired

Doherty said she wants to get something special out of the trip. Active in school with

FFA and busy at home with her family farm, she participates wherever she can, she said.

“I’m very excited about being selected to be one of the youth ambassadors,” she said. “It is a great honor, and I think it’s going to be a great place to develop leadership.”

She said she is looking forward to meeting other ambassadors as well as government officials.

Having once served as a page for Bill Hansell, Oregon state senator, she is no stranger to leaders in government. She has met other officials, too, as her grandfather, Dennis Doherty, is a former Umatilla County commissioner. And she said she has met Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden.

“They spurred my interest in politics,” she said, “because they mainly portrayed it as a public service, rather than something to benefit themselves.”



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Elizabeth Doherty speaks at a Hermiston City Council meeting Monday, April 11, 2022. A Hermiston High School student, she will be going to Washington, D.C., this June on the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour.

In Washington, she said she looks forward to meeting Oregon representatives on a visit to the White House. She added it would be “really cool” to meet the president.

The Jefferson Memorial and other monuments will be interesting and educational, too, she said.

Like Gardner, Doherty is on Hermiston’s Youth Advisory Committee. She is one of the select three advisers who sits alongside the city council. She said she is enjoying it, and she is becoming more comfortable as she learns “the language of it all.”

Doherty said she hopes to return from Washington with confidence and understanding that will make her more vocal at city council meetings.

“It is a leadership conference,” she said of the upcoming tour. “I’m assuming it will help develop my public-speaking ability, as well as other leadership skills.”

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REGISTRATION



HAVE A CHILD STARTING KINDERGARTEN IN THE FALL OF 2022?

Join us for our Kindergarten Registration event at the Helix School District! Come meet the teacher, complete enrollment paperwork, and meet other kindergarten families.

Where: Kindergarten Classroom at Helix Elementary

When: Thursday, April 28th Drop in between 2:00-4:30 pm

Who: Parents, guardians, and incoming kindergartners

**Please bring a copy of your child's birth certificate and immunization record. Students who will turn 5 before September 1st, 2022 are eligible to enroll in Kindergarten.*

