

John Day greenhouse may be headed to private managers

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — After losing \$122,000, the city-owned greenhouse in John Day soon could be under new management.

City Manager Nick Green said he plans to propose that a private corporation run the greenhouse at the Tuesday, May 10, city council meeting. Green declined to disclose the name of the company at this point but said that information will be made public at the meeting.

The greenhouse cost the city \$155,000 to operate in fiscal year 2020-21 and produced \$33,000 in revenue. Green said the coronavirus pandemic put a lot of the plans the city had for the greenhouse on hold, contributing to the \$122,000 deficit for the fiscal year.

There are no plans to recover the funds lost on the greenhouse to date, but Green said the greenhouse played an integral part in securing some of the grant funding for the city's planned \$17.5 million wastewater treatment plant.

"It was a proof of concept to show that we could grow hydroponic crops in the valley," Green said. "And (as a) result of having that and having economic value-added traded-sector indus-



Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

The city-owned greenhouse in John Day on April 20, 2022. The city could lose the greenhouse after running a \$122,000 deficit for the fiscal year.

try that can benefit from the reclaimed water, we gained about \$6 million in grants for the water treatment plant."

Green said he doesn't see the greenhouse as a failure.

"Next month we'll be announcing the \$3 million award for the reclaimed water system, which is going to give us all the purple pipe and the storage capability to provide water to the greenhouse, golf course, Malheur Lumber and our parks," he

said. "I'm not counting that with the \$6 million we've already gotten. This is \$3 million on top of that."

Green said the firm taking over the greenhouse will benefit from the purple pipe and water treatment facilities as well as provide private sector jobs and sell produce locally.

"The greenhouse is absolutely not a failure," Green insisted. "It did exactly what we intended it to do. I would

do it again. I think we should do it again, probably with a private partner out of the gate this time, but we didn't have that luxury in 2017. Nobody was growing anything hydroponically in the valley four years ago."

Green added the plan always was to take the greenhouse private or move to a co-op arrangement because the facility wasn't ever going to work with government labor.

"We knew that up front," he said. "What we didn't know was COVID. So we lost time having to adapt to a very dynamic marketplace with changing customer preferences and needs as a result of that pandemic. That happened to every enterprise."

The COVID-19 pandemic probably accelerated the timeline for moving the greenhouse to private ownership, according to Green, but

he added that things happen for a reason.

"We probably would've kept growing had the pandemic not happened. At the end of the day we're not worse off for it," he said.

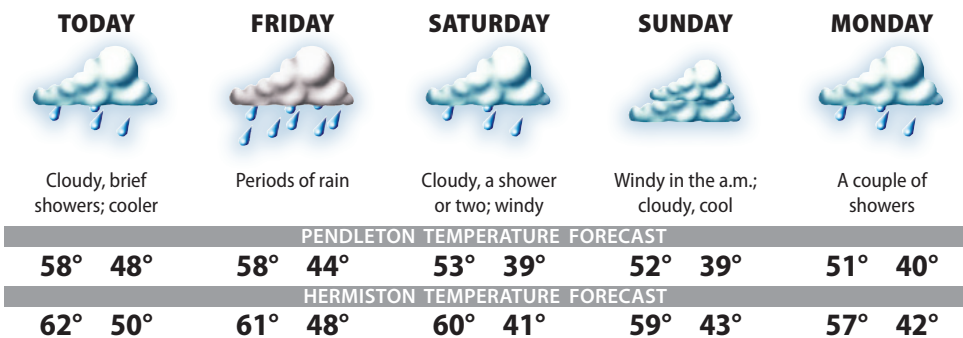
"It brought our timeline forward a bit, but having a private operator who is less constrained about what they can grow, where they can sell, who they employ and at what prices — I don't have much choice. I have to pay all government employees PERS and public benefits. They don't have that restriction."

Despite the monetary loss, Green said it would have been "highly unlikely" that the city would have gotten as much grant funding as it did for the wastewater treatment plant if the greenhouse had not been tied to the proposal. "What is the story without it? We're building a wastewater treatment plant, so give us money?"

Green added he thinks the new owners of the greenhouse will be successful if the council approves the proposal to transfer operations.

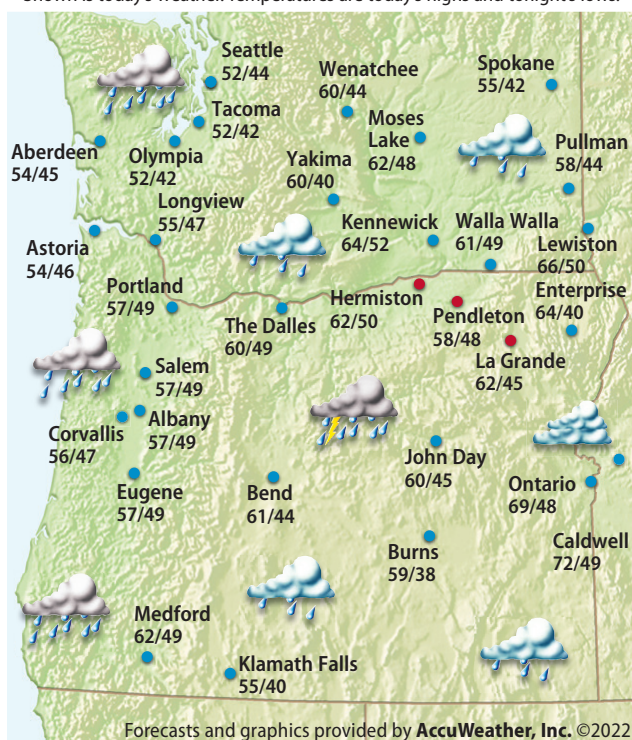
"They've got a turnkey facility, the staff is ready to roll, they've got the seeds," he said. "We're going to partition the facility off into its own lot, lease the lot with the buildings and let them roll."

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



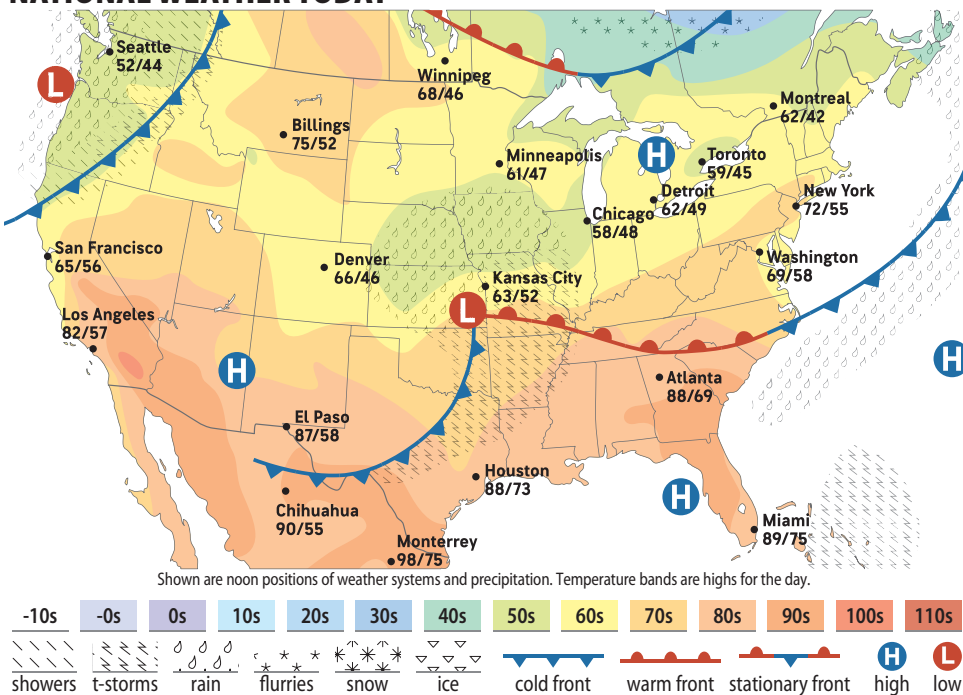
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	75°	41°
Normals	69°	44°
Records	92° (1966)	22° (1897)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	
Month to date	0.30"	
Normal month to date	0.16"	
Year to date	5.92"	
Last year to date	3.81"	
Normal year to date	5.50"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	74°	41°
Normals	73°	43°
Records	90° (1966)	29° (2011)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	
Month to date	0.25"	
Normal month to date	0.10"	
Year to date	4.14"	
Last year to date	1.99"	
Normal year to date	3.65"	
WINDS (in mph)	Today	Fri.
Boardman	SW 6-12	WSW 7-14
Pendleton	NW 6-12	W 7-14
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	5:37 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	8:07 p.m.	
Moonrise today	8:33 a.m.	
Moonset today	12:26 a.m.	

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 96° in Thermal, Calif. Low 11° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Soggy Saturday no deterrent to search and rescue training

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Mannequins, fortunately, don't mind getting soaked.

They're immune to hypothermia, too.

Those attributes helped keep a major search and rescue training exercise going last weekend despite heavy rain on Saturday afternoon and evening, April 30, in the forest near Phillips Reservoir.

About 50 search and rescue team members from six Eastern Oregon counties gathered for the annual training, said Ashley McClay, public information officer for the event's host, the Baker County Sheriff's Office.

Baker County search and rescue members were joined by their counterparts from Union, Wallowa, Malheur, Gilliam and Umatilla counties, McClay said.

Those six counties, along

with Grant, Harney, Morrow and Wheeler, constitute the Eastern Oregon Search and Rescue group.

Participants spent the weekend at Union Creek campground, on the north side of Phillips Reservoir about 17 miles southwest of Baker City.

The initial plan was to have a ground search, involving a live "victim," as well as a rope rescue, involving a mannequin, both on April 30 followed by a second ground search on May 1, McClay said.

But with rain forecast, organizers decided to replace the live subject of the search with a pair of mannequins, simulating a father and son who failed to return from a trip to the woods, McClay said.

"We didn't want to have someone sitting out in the cold and wet for several hours," she said.

The rain also delayed the rope rescue since the showers made the rock cliff slick.

Instead, searchers, after finding the two mannequins during the ground search April 30 in the Old Auburn Road and California Gulch area, north of Highway 7, returned to the campground and welcomed meals provided by retired Baker County Sheriff Terry Speelman.

On May 1, with the skies having cleared, the rope rescue exercise took place, but the second planned ground search was canceled, McClay said.

In addition to the ground searchers, teams from Umatilla and Malheur counties brought aerial drones to participate in the training.

The annual exercise shifts among the 10 counties in the region. This was the first time Baker County has played host since 2015.

IN BRIEF

Walla Walla park to become more walkable

WALLA WALLA — Pioneer Park's accessibility and "walkability" just got a boost from Walla Walla city leaders.

The Walla Walla City Council recently accepted a \$300,000 grant to build additional sidewalks, ramps compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and crosswalk enhancements around the well-used park between Alder and Whitman streets just west of downtown.

The proposed improvements would cost a total of \$600,000, half of which the city or other funding sources would need to cover.

The project will build more than 1,000 feet of sidewalk infill along Whit-

man Street, with a number of crosswalk enhancements on South Division Street.

The grant was awarded through the Washington state Transportation Improvement Board's Complete Streets program, which funds infrastructure that accommodates different modes of transportation, including walking, biking and driving.

While the project focuses entirely on pedestrian improvements, Mayor Tom Scribner recommended stop signs at the intersection of Division and Whitman streets should be incorporated into the project while crews are working in the area.

A number of residents have expressed concerns about vehicles traveling at high rates of speed in that area, Scribner said during the April 27 meeting.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

CORRECTION: In the Page A4 letter to the editor, "Susan Bower has Umatilla County's best interest at heart" published Saturday, April 30, a sentence should have stated: "She is a team player, but one who is willing to take charge and work in a transparent method when the situation merits."

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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