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**ENVIRONMENT**

## EPA urges Oregon to act on nitrate polluters

Regional EPA administrator leaves door open to federal intervention.

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*Oregon Public Broadcasting*

**BOARDMAN** — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is urging state officials to take more action on nitrate pollution in Eastern Oregon's Lower Umatilla Basin.

A July 29 letter from the EPA to the Oregon Health Authority, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Department of Agriculture praised the state for some of the measures it's taken to provide clean water to residents in Morrow County, but said that's not enough.

"EPA expects the state to hold nitrate sources accountable by requiring them to assume some of the responsibilities set forth above and, more importantly, to change their practices to reduce the amount of nitrate they discharge to groundwater," wrote Edward Kowalski, director of EPA Region 10's enforcement and compliance division.

Nitrates are a chemical commonly found in fertilizer. In excess amounts, they can affect the health of people's lungs, thyroid and bladder.

High nitrate levels in Morrow County and western Umatilla County's groundwater supply has been on the state's radar for more than 30 years, but a recent round of water testing of private wells in the Boardman area found many residents had unsafe levels of nitrates in their drinking water.

Kowalski highlighted a Lower Umatilla Basin work plan completed by the three agencies, the plan including initiatives for nitrate contamination education, free drinking water tests and alternative water sources where necessary. He also gave plaudits to the agencies' plans to seek funding for these initiatives at the Oregon Legislature Emergency Board's September meeting and the long session in 2023.

But Kowalski wrote the state could no longer rely on voluntary practices and had to address the source of nitrates. According to a 1997 study by the state Department of Environmental Quality, agricultural and industrial operations were among the top sources of the chemical.

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Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

**Jaclyn Jenkins, Umatilla County chief deputy district attorney, works a case Aug. 3, 2022, in front of Circuit Judge Daniel Hill at the Stafford Hansell Government Center, Hermiston. Jenkins earlier this year returned to her former DA position after a stint as a federal prosecutor in Portland.**

## Veteran prosecutors boost Umatilla County DA's Office

Newest hire graduated law school in April and did stint in public defense

By **JOHN TILLMAN**  
*East Oregonian*

**P**ENDLETON — The Umatilla County District Attorney's Office is down three deputy prosecutors, but the return of three veterans since early 2021 and a new hire have eased staffing issues.

Daniel Pachico returned Feb. 1, 2021, as chief deputy for the DA's office in Pendleton. Jaclyn Jenkins departed from her service as assistant United State attorney in Portland and on April 1 began working again as chief deputy district attorney out of the Stafford Hansell Government Center in Hermiston. And Monte Ludington returned April 15 to his position as senior deputy in Pendleton.

District Attorney Dan Primus said the trio boosts the office's experience and productivity "immensely."

He said his office had been working with only five of the 10 attorney positions filled.

"Our allotment is 10.5 prosecutors, including myself,"



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

**Monte Ludington, Umatilla County senior deputy district attorney, works July 21, 2022, in court at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton. He returned to the DA's office in April after a period in private practice.**

he said, and now six-and-half attorneys are working in the office and one works remotely.

**The veterans**

Pachico left the DA's office for Legal Aid Services of Oregon in July 2020 because he said he wanted to work in the community.

"I didn't think I'd have to go against my former deputy colleagues," he said. "It was very important for me not to do defense work."

It was his decision to return to the DA's office on Feb. 1, 2021. "Legal Aid was distanced during COVID. It didn't feel like walking into the office,

when working from home. I missed specific people as well. I had a wonderful boss (in Primus). His expectations were high, but the office provided great support, which made a demanding job more doable."

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## All Aboard Northwest stops in Eastern Oregon

Group advocating for passenger rail

By **ISABELLA CROWLEY**  
*The Observer*

**LA GRANDE** — All Aboard Northwest rolled into La Grande on Saturday, Aug. 13, to host a Train Trek meeting at Cook Memorial Library, La Grande. The organization the day before pulled into Pendleton.

The stops are part of a larger series of talks happening across Oregon, Idaho and Utah to gather support for the return of passenger trains to the Pacific Northwest.

"We look at trains as part of a world class transportation network, that is a seamless way to get people

from here to there," said Charles Hamilton, vice president and treasurer of AANW.

**Importance of passenger trains**

Around 30% of Americans do not drive and that number is growing, according to AANW. Many people cannot drive due to age — too young or too old — or disability. Owning a car is expensive — from the initial purchase, yearly maintenance, insurance to the price of gas — so socioeconomic status can be a factor. Many people live in places where seasonal weather, such as snow or ice, impact their ability to drive. There also are people who choose not to drive due to the environmental impact.

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Isabella Crowley/The Observer

**From left, Jon Nuxoll, Daniel Bilka and Charles Hamilton from All Aboard Northwest lead the Train Trek meeting Saturday, Aug. 13, 2022 at Cook Memorial Library, La Grande. The purposes of the meeting was to advocate for a return of passenger rail lines to Oregon, Idaho and Utah.**



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