

Boardman:

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The Oregon Legislature convenes Sept. 21-23 for legislative days. Heartquist said OHA expects the Human Services Subcommittee of the Joint Emergency Board to consider the request on Sept. 21. If the subcommittee gives the OK, it goes before the full Emergency Board for consideration Sept. 23.

Doherty said most of the filters the county has installed are doing the job, with more than 90% of homes testing at below 10 mg/l two weeks after installation. The kinds of filters the state is looking at buying cost \$1,500-\$1,800 each, he said, and he has some concerns if the filters can get to a stricter level of milligrams per liter requirement in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area in Morrow and Umatilla counties.

"We're worried a little bit because in the LUBGWMA, the trigger is 7," he said.

Oregon Health Authority has estimated there are approximately 4,500 domestic wells in the area serving about 12,000 household members.

Installation is weeks away

Republican Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena serves on the Emergency Board as does Rep. Smith. Hansell explained the board does just what its name says — address emergencies state agencies could not have planned for.

"A way to describe it is



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian, File

Ana Pineyro, Morrow County communicable disease and emergency preparedness coordinator, and County Commissioner Jim Doherty look at results from a rapid test of drinking water in a Boardman home on July 14, 2022. The Oregon Health Authority plans to ask the Legislature's Emergency Board for \$800,000 to test more wells and buy better water filters for Boardman residents.

this is the state of Oregon's contingency fund," he said.

Hansell also said he recently spoke with the governor, and she also is working on allocations for Echo due to the flooding there and for Wallowa County because of the sudden storm Aug. 11 that damaged property, injured people and killed livestock.

The requests for emergency funds come from the governor's office or state agencies, he said, not from legislators.

"They have to come from a budgeted agency," he said.

Doherty said while the state needs to help, it could be a while before those better filters are in the homes of Boardman residents.

Morrow County Emer-

gency Manager Paul Gray on Aug. 8 sent an email asking about the filters to Curtis Cude, manager of OHA's Environmental Public Health Surveillance Program. Cude in response stated OHA continues "to make progress towards our plan to support delivery of outreach and education, lab testing of domestic wells and point-of-use reverse osmosis treatment systems to households impacted by high domestic water nitrates in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area in Morrow and Umatilla counties."

He said he and staff were contacting local water professionals potentially interested in installing the filters and developing a contract

template for this purpose.

"It will likely be a few weeks before the first contract has passed review and we are ready to start work," he said. "That contract will give local professionals flexibility in terms of what products they use, provided they are NSF-certified to reduce nitrates. That flexibility is important because filters are added or removed from time to time."

But Cude also told Gray he believes there is emergency funding available to bridge the gap from when the first contract is issued and legislative funding becomes available.

Doherty calls out the state

Doherty also said he is



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian, File

Tory Uskoski, Blue Mountain Plumbing plumber, adjusts a newly installed filter July 14, 2022, in a Boardman home. The new filters, however, might not remove enough nitrates from contaminated wells to reach the Environmental Protection Agency's standard of 10 milligrams per liter of water. Two weeks after initial installations, more than 90% of the filters are meeting the standard.

concerned that state agencies could use the crisis in Morrow County to seek funds from the Emergency Board and then use that money for additional staff outside the county. And he said he took issue with OHA in a July 7 letter to the EPA claiming it was ramping up efforts to help Morrow County, including with "linguistically appropriate outreach and education to low-income households about nitrate contamination; a detailed hazard assessment of nitrate data and demographic analysis of impacted communities; domestic well water testing; and, for well users with elevated nitrate concentrations, alternative drinking water or drinking water

treatment options."

Doherty said that letter raised his hackles.

"Frankly, they've done none of the above," he said.

Likewise, the state's claims it is working with Morrow County and its partners don't carry much water with him.

"I sure as hell don't know where they've been," he said. "I haven't seen them."

Doherty also said it was time for the state to "Get your butts out there and do something, and pay us back."

By the time the Emergency Board meets, he estimated Morrow County will have spent at least \$500,000 since June 9, when the county board of commissioners declared an emergency due to the water contamination.

Epson Tour:

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"We think the economic benefits from it will be reaped by and enjoyed by the local economy," George said. "Our hotel doesn't have enough rooms for everyone, so they are going to have to stay at local hotels. They are going to have to eat somewhere. They are going to have to get their gas and other products that they need for the tournament. So we think that it's going to have a huge economic impact."

The tournament also will bring national and international media exposure to Pendleton. The tour already is generating attention from news outlets in Portland, Boise and the Tri-Cities, according to George. The professionals that make up the Epson Tour represent around 32 countries, which also means there will be international coverage.

"It won't be on the scale of an official LPGA event, but it's the next best thing to it," he said.

Growing the game of golf

Wildhorse is hosting two youth golf clinics as part of the tournament events. The first is Aug. 29 at Birch Creek Golf Course and is open to the general public. Members of the Epson Tour and Nike are helping run the camp.

The following day there will be a Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation youth clinic at Wildhorse Golf Course, which is sponsored by N7 — the Native American division of Nike. Gabby Lemieux is hosting the clinic. She is a member of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe of Duck Valley Indian Reservation and an N7 ambassador. She helped Vallivue High School in Caldwell, Idaho, win a state title in 2014 and played golf at the collegiate level for Texas Tech University, where she earned Big 12 Conference Player of the Year honors in 2016 on her way to the No. 1 ranking in the country.

Following the youth clinics early in the week, there will be Pro-Am tournaments Aug. 31 and Sept. 1.

"We brought (the Epson Tour) here with the idea that these are younger professionals, young ladies, who are aspiring to move onto something greater, to become a member of the LPGA. We hope that people can see that and I know that when you play with one of the professionals, you're just in awe and inspired by what they've been able to accomplish," George said. "We hope that some of those traits and qualities are observed by our youth from the region and, more specifically, to our tribal youth."

Another goal of the tournament is to provide more exposure to the world of golf to young women. George

said a lot of the time women's sports do not get the level of recognition they deserve, but that has slowly been changing. There has been a rising interest in women's sports and recognition of female athletes.

"Golf can be played by both men and women, and we want to grow the game of golf," George said. "To grow the game of golf is to have more exposure to golf and what you could do with golf as a young lady."

Hub of entertainment

Wildhorse Resort & Casino hosts a number of events from concerts to comedy shows throughout the year. According to George, they aim to bring in a diverse group of performers to cater to a wide variety of audiences from Pendleton and the surrounding area.

"We at Wildhorse like to think that we're the hub of entertainment around here," he said.

Whether Wildhorse will host other professional sporting events and tournaments of similar caliber depends on the price point. George said the Epson Tour — which cost \$200,000 to host — was a price point Wildhorse could afford. The resort and casino partners with 47 sponsors at the local and national level to help offset the cost, George said, adding sponsors also were how Wildhorse was able to keep the cost of attendance low — with a day pass costing

\$5 and a week pass \$20.

"There's a lot of possibilities out there, so I don't want to discount any of them," he said. "We bring in a lot of events now and especially bringing in the Epson Tour helps bring us to another level. So now, we hope we might become a host site for USGA national events, like the amateur women's

and amateur junior boys and girls."

There are plans to build a new hotel tower in place of the old hotel building from 1996, which would add 214 rooms and a larger multi-purpose event space. George said they would like to build the event space on hydraulic risers, which would allow for the area to be configured in

different ways for every event. The possibilities are endless — the room could be flat for a conference, raised into stadium seating for boxing or tiered for a play. He believes an event space of this caliber would help to differentiate Wildhorse as a venue.

"It will be an exciting venue in Eastern Oregon," George said.

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