

# HOWELLS

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Multiple agencies responded and quelled the fire, but the residence and a nearby car were a total loss. A home and several pets were destroyed in the fire. A Wallowa County sheriff's deputy arrested Howells near the scene on Aug. 19.

On Wednesday, a subdued Howells — with hands and feet shackled — remained quiet be-

side his attorney Jared Boyd in the courtroom. He spoke very little except to assent that he understood the charges and accepted the terms of the plea agreement with the district attorney's office.

He looked down at his desk and did not make eye contact as his former girlfriend pleaded with Judge Dretke not to allow Howells return to Wallowa County upon completion of his sentence due to her fear that Howells would exact re-

venge upon his release. Dretke assented to her request and made that stipulation part of the sentence.

Deputy District Attorney Rebecca Frolander served as lead prosecutor in the case with assistance from District Attorney Mona Williams. Both said that while 65 months may seem light for the charges involved, it was the best their office could do under the legal circumstances. For example, the Oregon State Police arson investigator

was unable to determine how or where the fire started, which left prosecutors with only circumstantial evidence from previous statements made by Howells to an ex-girlfriend and some local friends previous to the incident.

"We certainly had probable cause, but what a jury would do with that, we didn't know," Williams said.

She added that when they looked into settling the case, their office wanted to make

sure Howells did prison time for the severity of the domestic abuse, but if the jury had questioned the arson charges or the attempted domestic assault charges, only the misdemeanors of strangulation and menacing would have remained.

"He would not have gone to prison. He would have served local time for misdemeanors, and that was not acceptable," Williams said.

Looking at the big picture, Williams said that Howells'

agreement to do the 65 months incarceration was a victory. Although Howells has previous felony convictions for domestic violence, including kidnapping and assault, his position on the Oregon sentencing guidelines grid that measures crime severity and criminal history would have netted a sentence of 25-30 months, much less than the 65 months Howells agreed to.

"It's far more than he would have gotten if we'd gone to trial," Williams said.

# BALLOT HORSES

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"Please wait until the envelope marked 'replacement ballot' arrives in the mail," she said.

Roberts also said that her office will accept ballots for the May 17 election until 8 p.m. of that day.

"This means the ballot is in my office; postmarks do not count," she said.

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John Hollenbeak, trails coordinator on the Wallowa-Whitman forest, said the horses will be used as pack animals to bring in tools and equipment during routine trail maintenance. They could also be used to pack out firefighting gear in the event of another active wildfire season.

"It's impressive how well they act," Hollenbeak said. "This stock has particularly good training. I have a lot of confidence in them."

The Forest Service will chronicle the horses' adventures with photos and video posted to Facebook throughout the summer. There's Bojangles, who is described as having a little bit of fire, but mostly gentle to be around. Then there's Ringo and Heart, and some of the wilder ones including Oden, Jed, Batman and Gil. Studley, Joe Kid, Spanky and Rupert round out the group, which will get to work out on the trails by next week.



Courtesy of Matt Burks  
**John Hollenbeak, left, and Curt Booher, with the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, work with mustangs brought up from Nevada to help pack in loads of gear for summer trails crews.**

to learn very well."

Alan Shepherd, Wild Horse and Burro Program lead for the Nevada BLM, said each mustang already has about 120 days of training under their belt thanks to the Saddle Horse Training Program at Northern Nevada Correctional Center. Inmates at the prison work with

about 100 horses every year to get them ready for adoption.

"The inmates have given them enough foundation training to be ready for packing and riding," Shepherd said. "Now, they are working in some of the most rugged country in Oregon."

Hollenbeak went down

in March to pick up the animals and bring them back to the Wallowa-Whitman. Most of the mustangs are 7-8 years old, and will work alongside the existing horses and mules on the forest — some of which are now into their 20s and 30s. Hollenbeak figures some of those animals will be retired by the end of the year.

Usually, a three-person trails crew will be accompanied by at least riding animals, and three pack animals, depending on the job.

"We have been struggling with having enough horses to keep a couple (trails) crews going," he said. "We just didn't have enough stock."

By partnering with the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program, Hollenbeak said it is a win-win situation for both agencies.

"They are now mustangs with jobs," he said.

Sharon's

Bouquet of the Week

"Mea Culpa" . . . I am guilty. I have in my home a spot I refer to as the "staging platform". A dog-proof spot where I put things that are to go out of the house. Imagine my surprise when I checked the spot and there was that darned cake. All's well that ends well.

*Sharon Sherlock*

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# BIRDS

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As different as the atoll is from Northeast Oregon, both Humphrey and Taylor said there are similarities to social life in Wallowa County.

"I think Wallowa County prepared me pretty well for this," Taylor said. "You get to know people, you kind of have to get to know people. I went from 7,000 people in Wallowa County to 40-45 on Midway. You have to make your own good times and these people seem to know that. Yesterday

we kayaked out to see the sunset as a birthday party for someone. It's a similar kind of attitude of people getting together to know each other."

Humphrey agrees.

"It's definitely like living in a small town," she said. "In that way it's very reminiscent of Wallowa County. Life is very quiet, not as many potlucks as Wallowa County, but a lot of time to spend outdoors in a really fascinating natural setting."

Humphrey and Taylor both live in military housing on Midway, which they say is very nice — especially the view.

"Right now I'm looking out the kitchen window and I see 200 albatross chicks," Taylor

said. "Beyond that you can literally see thousands of birds. The house is surrounded by birds. To get through the front door I had to push aside the albatross chick on the front door step."

Humphrey enjoys "Fabulous views," she said. "I look out across this huge field that is covered right now with albatrosses — that's pretty fun. We actually have all kinds of birds, including shore birds that come from the mainland, and some are winter residents. We also have a resident population of canaries that were released from cages in 1911."

When asked to narrow it down to one favorite thing about

her job, Humphrey just couldn't do it.

"There are so many it's hard to pick one. I love living in the seabird colony. We are definitely the visitors here. The second most favorite is ocean swimming. It's great here. I loved to swim in the Wallowa County Lake but it's a lot warmer here and we have a longer season for swimming."

Food and other needs are supplied by plane and boat, and because it was a military facility with a huge kitchen, three meals a day are served on Midway.

But no one can visit the Wildlife Refuge; the only way to see it is to volunteer and work there.

Both Humphrey and Taylor said the work is wonderful.

"I just feel very fortunate because I've had the opportunity to be out here," Humphrey said. "It is a special place."

"This place is for real," Taylor said.

To volunteer or learn more about the work on the atoll, visit: <http://tinyurl.com/hrksnoz>.

To learn more about Humphrey's list of accomplishments, visit <http://tinyurl.com/jqkxqyy>.

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