



Wolf plan review brings hunting, management zones to forefront

ODFW Commission briefed in La Grande

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

Living with wolves remains a polarizing subject in Eastern Oregon as wildlife officials chug along with a five-year review of the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission heard from 53 people

who testified during an informational hearing Oct. 7 at the Blue Mountain Conference Center in La Grande, highlighting some of the chief concerns for managing wolf packs into the future.

The first Oregon wolf plan was adopted in 2005, and since then the fledgling population has grown to a minimum of 110 wolves at the end

of 2015. Russ Morgan, wolf program coordinator for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, said the agency is required to look back at the plan every five years to determine what is working, and what could be changed to improve management — all while maintaining a conservation focus.

Not surprisingly, Morgan said stakeholders are divided about the 2016 update.

“Certainly, many of the comments we heard at the meeting were divided along expected lines,” Morgan said.

Two issues under review include whether the state should create more local wolf management zones with their own population targets, and whether ODFW should allow controlled hunting as a management tool in certain situations.

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ELECTION

A closer look at local candidates

By Scot Heisel
Wallowa County Chieftain

While national and statewide elections certainly are important and can affect our lives, we at The Chieftain feel that careful consideration of local government races is just as important, if not more so. To that end, we've collected information for our readers about the candidates in contested local races in the Nov. 8 election.

This year we have four candidates for Enterprise mayor, two separate races for seats on the Enterprise City Council, four candidates vying for three council seats in Joseph and three candidates for two council seats in Wallowa.

We have included information from each person's candidate filing documents. Also, on Oct. 19 we sent an email to each candidate asking for corrections or clarifications for the information they provided the county, as well as three short questions:

- What is the most important issue facing your town in the next few years?
- What compelled you to seek the position for which you are running?
- What makes you the best choice?

Here are their answers (candidates are listed alphabetically for each race).

Enterprise Mayor BILL COFFIN



Party affiliation: Democratic Party

Occupation: Retired. Former journalist, business manager, commercial fisherman and truck driver

Education: Studied journalism at University of Oregon and education at Eastern Oregon University

Military service: Eight years in U.S. Army and Army Reserves

Civil service: Former member of Okanogan, Wash., Planning Commission; four years on Enterprise City Council (current member)

Most important issue?: We must find a way to reduce water and sewer rates to a fair and affordable manner through the budgeting process and researching other means of economic income.

Why are you running?: I grew up in Enterprise and have lived here most of my life. I have a passion for this community and its people.

Why vote for you?: I've served four years on the City Council, I am a former president of the Enterprise Chamber of Commerce, former member of Enterprise Volunteer Fire Department, served 26 years a volunteer bartender and helper at our local VFW and have served two terms as deacon at the Enterprise Community Congregational Church.

GEORGE HILL



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Pamplin Media Group
Secretary of State candidate Brad Avakian's campaign Monday denied allegations of wrongdoing made in an opinion piece posted on forbes.com.

Avakian campaign denies claims of misconduct

Charges politically motivated, manager says

By Claire Withycombe
EO Media Group

SALEM — Brad Avakian's campaign denied wrongdoing following accusations made Monday that his campaign fund paid government employees for campaign work, and that the work may have been done on state time.

Avakian, the Democratic candidate for secretary of state, is the head of the Bureau of Labor and Industries.

In an opinion piece Monday on Forbes.com, Adam Andrzejewski, of Open The Books, a private transparency group, claimed that three of Avakian's employees were paid money out of Avakian's campaign fund and that two of those employees also contributed to Avakian's campaign for secretary of state.

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THE PERS EFFECT

3.62%
average contribution increase

900
statewide employers in PERS system

5%
projected PERS budget increase for Joseph Charter School

\$66K
budget increase for Wallowa schools

Wallowa County agencies have some guardedly optimistic projections for impact of retirement costs, though much remains up in the air

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Public employers have known since last year that their contributions to the Public Employees Retirement System will be going up again in 2017. Now they know better what the damage will be. The numbers supplied are still “squishy” but provide some basis for planning.

The PERS board released the rates for the 2017-19 biennium in late September, updating a previous forecast last fall by the actuarial firm Milliman.

More than 900 employers across the state are part of the PERS system, including cities, schools, counties and special districts. The increase in their required contributions depends on a variety of factors — such as how many of their employees are on the more generous Tier 1 benefits earned by those hired before 2003 — but the average increase is about 3.62 percent.

The need for higher contributions from employers comes from a combination of factors. About 70 percent of the system's revenue comes from investment earnings, which have been falling below the assumed 7.75 percent. Retirees are also living longer than expected, and the Oregon Supreme Court struck down reforms that lowered costs in 2015-17, ruling them an unconstitutional breach of contract with public employees.

Many counties, cities and schools are facing a real budgetary crisis, but some Wallowa County agencies are protected by a variety of factors.

At the county level the protection comes primarily from the fact that most city employees do not have PERS. Their retirement program is through Lincoln Financial. While nearby Umatilla County is looking at an increase in PERS payments that amounts to \$450,000-500,000 from its general

fund, Wallowa County is getting off with a wave.

“Financially, Wallowa County is not looking at taking a big hit,” said Brenda Micka, administrative services director for Wallowa County.

Only five members of the Sheriff's Office will be affected: one Tier 2 employee and four Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan (ORSRP) employees.

OSRP payments actually will decline by 0.43 percent in the next biennium, Micka said.

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Despite increases in costs, county schools say they will most likely avoid layoffs

Ballot error: Disregard incorrect date on final page

Wallowa County Chieftain

Wallowa County Clerk Sandy Lathrop is notifying the public that there is a minor error regarding the election date on the 5,468 ballots that were mailed Oct. 19.

The ballots list the correct election date of Nov. 8, 2016 on the first page. However, due to an error

at the printing firm, a 2012 election date appears on the final page of the ballot.

Lathrop asks Wallowa County voters to please disregard the incorrect date on the final page and to go ahead and fill out the ballots.

The printing firm, Ryder Election Services of Bend, has agreed to send letters of clarification to Wallowa County voters in response to

the error.

Lathrop said the ballots went to Portland first before being distributed within the county, so they should be arriving in mailboxes early this week.

Once completed, ballots may be dropped off at the following sites:

- Wallowa City Hall, 211 E. 2nd St. in Wallowa — 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Monday through Thursday and 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Friday.

- Joseph City Hall, 201 N. Main St. in Joseph — 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday

- Wallowa County Courthouse, 101 S. River St. in Enterprise — 24-hour outdoor dropbox or 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday inside

