

Smoke management plan goes before commissioners

Aim is to get the word out of a 'smoke event'

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — A plan for communities in Wallowa County to be able to most effectively respond to a “smoke event” is taking shape and only needs the approval of government agencies before it can be implemented, the county commissioners learned Wednesday, March 3.

“Basically, this is a plan to notify people that there is a smoke event ... and here are the things to do to take care of yourself,” Commissioner Susan Roberts said. “We have to have this plan in order to do some of the other stuff we’re trying to do.”

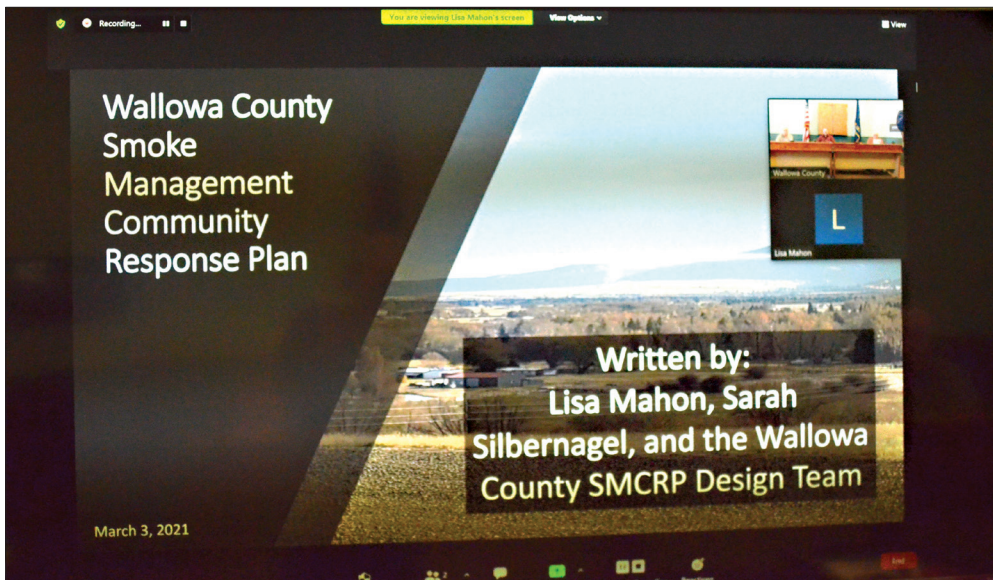
Lisa Mahon, who with Sarah Silbernagel and the Wallowa County Smoke Management Community Response Plan design team, produced the plan that Mahon presented to the commissioners via Zoom. She went through a recap of the plan designed to assist residents of the county in the event of a smoke event like last summer when much of Oregon was ablaze. No significant wildfires occurred in the county, but much smoke did come over the mountains.

“There’s not much we can do to stop the smoke (like last year), but we can be ready for it,” Commissioner Todd Nash said.

After reviewing the plan, Mahon said the next steps are to present it to the Enterprise City Council on Monday, March 8, have it ready for the commissioners to approve at their March 17 meeting and then get the approval of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. After that approval, “We can begin implementing the action plan,” she said.

Partners in the plan include:

- The city of Enterprise.
- The Wallowa County Board of Commissioners.
- The U.S. Forest Service.
- The Oregon Department of Forestry.
- County emergency services
- The Oregon DEQ.
- The Oregon Health Authority.
- Wallowa Memorial Hospital.
- The Northern Blue



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Lisa Mahon gave a presentation via Zoom to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners on the county's Smoke Management Community Response Plan during the board's Wednesday, March 3, 2021, meeting.

Mountains Cohesive Strategy.

Mahon said the new plan is to better understand and address the vulnerable populations in case of a smoke event. It also allows opportunities to better manage the forests in case of fire.

The final plan includes:

- A description of Wallowa County's smoke-vulnerable population.
- A notification plan to inform those vulnerable populations and the general public.
- Action items to protect the vulnerable populations from smoke exposure.
- A communication plan to connect the prescribed fire entities for public health and the general public.

Mahon said six community input sessions were held during fall 2020, reaching all but Imnaha. Of the 327 residents represented from Wallowa, Lostine, Enterprise, Wallowa Lake, Flora and Troy, about 80% prefer social media or a website to be used for emergency contact.

“We weren’t really surprised at that, since with those without cellphone coverage, the internet is one of their best tools,” she said.

What they learned from the input sessions included a need to prepare for smoke events with advance notice, education on home air purification, assistance in purchasing air purifiers and education on the appropriate masks to have.

Among the overall benefits to the county in the plan, Mahon said, is an increased ability to implement proscribed burns, which are used for community wildfire

protection and to help with forest health.

“It’s better to deal with the forest with proscribed burns than let wildfires manage them for us because with the state our forests are in, we can do better good for our forests and our community by having better control of that,” she said.

The “action items” in the plan include education and essential assistance they’ll put out for the public; additional notification protocols; working with county emergency services to develop a notification system working with Paul Karvoski, emergency services director, to allow individuals to sign up for notifications in addition to emergencies; additional education with partners year around about smoke intrusions and what one can do during an event; and more about proscribed fires and forest management.

Nash — a rancher who often deals with agricultural issues on the commission — asked Mahon about agricultural burning, although, he added, not much goes on in Wallowa County.

“One complaint we got last year had to do with field burning on agricultural land,” he asked. “Is that addressed here?”

Mahon said it is not, but because of differing regulations the state Agriculture Department and Department of Forestry handle that issue.

Roberts said field burning can be regulated through Karvoski and emergency services.

She said that one concern the plan addresses is how to get the word of a smoke

event to outlying areas, such as Imnaha and Troy. She said notices can be put up at local post offices or other central gathering places that will say who to contact.

“At Troy, they singled out several people and said to get the word to them and the rest of us will get it,” she said.

In another matter, the commissioners officially received from the state a \$13,101 Election Security Grant and already have plans on how they intend to use.

“One of the things we need to do is build a fence with a gate around our boxes out here on the side of the building so we have all our electronics enclosed,” Roberts said. “We can ask Stangel (Industries & Machine Shop) to build an attractive enclosure and gate with keys so we can get in when needed.”

Commissioner John Hillcock added that others, such as the fire department, can be given keys for when they require access.

The commissioners also are prepared to appoint three more people to the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District Board. Jennifer Piper, the new executive director of the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce, and Ashley Sullivan, the new mayor of Enterprise, have confirmed that they are interested in such appointments. Roberts said one other representative has yet to confirm a desire for appointment.

Nash said the board can approve the appointments by resolution at its next meeting, March 17.

Solar in Wallowa County topic of Zoom Energy Brown Bag

Virtual event is noon March 17

Chieftain staff

ENTERPRISE — These days, solar panels are visible on roofs of homes, businesses and farm buildings as well as in large commercial arrays all over Wallowa County. That solar energy will be the focus of a Brown Bag luncheon on Zoom at noon Wednesday, March 17.

Solar panels now quietly, cleanly crank out “roughly 6% of the total energy demand in the county” according to Matt King, energy program manager, for Wallowa Resources Community Solutions Inc.. That amounts to 1 million watts of installed solar capacity or about 1,200mw hours of energy use. And the value of that energy stays local.

How this came about and what additional solar can mean to energy resilience of the county will be the topic of the hour long Brown Bag. The zoom link to the free program can be found on the Community Events section of the Wallowa Resources website at wallowaresources.org.

The program will touch on the nature of solar to date and a look at the future, including solar combined with battery storage, community scale solar and special solar opportunities for low- and moderate-income households, renters and others. The program also will include time for Q&A.

“Solar is part of a diverse local energy mix now emerging that keeps more energy dollars working here and

contributes to making this county much more energy resilient in times of natural disaster,” King said.

Micro-hydro and biomass are other local energy-generation opportunities.

Upcoming programs in the Brown Bag series include, Micro-Hydro-power, Thursday, April 15, and Community Energy Opportunities, May 20. More information on those can be found on the calendar at wallowaresources.org.

For more information on this program content, contact King at 605-387-7194 or matt@wallowaresources.org.

Births

A son, Harlan Mark VanderZanden, was born Feb. 19, 2021 in Enterprise to Jonathan and Jamie VanderZanden of Enterprise. Grandparents are Melanee Micka, Jesse Micka, Peg VanderZanden and Mark VanderZanden.

A son, Ryder James Quinby, was born Feb. 26, 2021 in Enterprise to Austin and Kimberly McQuown of Joseph. Grandparents are Holly McQuown, John McQuown, Wendy Quinby and James Quinby.

A son, Ira Wilson Schott, was born Feb. 26, 2021 in Enterprise to Mark and Adele Schott of Joseph. Grandparents are Liza Jane McAlister, Todd Nash, Diane Schott and Kevin Schott.

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This week's featured book

The Doctors Blackwell

by Janice P. Nimura

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Enterprise OR 541-426-3351
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Fishtrap workshop series begins this weekend

Chieftain staff

ENTERPRISE — Fishtrap is offering the first of three spring online workshops for writers this weekend, according to a press release, with Finding and Using Joy as a Source — A Virtual Weekend Writing Workshop with Perrin Kerns.

From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 13, and Saturday, March 20, Kerns will follow in the tradition of Ross Gay by focusing on writing about joy in the midst of pandemic, protest, climate change and solitude. The generative writing class will mostly spend time writing to prompts. At the end of the class, participants will share pieces pulled together from shorter writings and thus explore the lyric essay as a celebration of the fragment and the collage.

Kerns has been teaching creative writing for over 30 years. She currently teaches literature and creative writing at Prescott College, Portland State University, Clark College, Sitka Center for Art and Ecology and Portland's Literary Arts Program. Her own creative work has taken her from lyric essay to digital storytelling to personal narrative documentaries

based on her lyric essays. She won the Director's Choice award for her documentary Between Sasquatch and Superman: Living with Down's Syndrome and Best Short Animation for her film about her miscarriage from the Oregon Independent Film Festival.

Registration costs \$270 or \$240 for Fishtrappers. Register at fishtrap.org.

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