

Tribe receives \$800,000 EPA grant to clean up Blue Heron site

By Dean Rhodes and Danielle Harrison

Smoke Signals staff members

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde will receive an \$800,000 Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields grant to restore the former Blue Heron Paper Mill site at Willamette Falls in Oregon City.

The Tribe will use the funds to begin environmental remediation of the 23-acre site, which was purchased in August 2019. The Tribe will begin evaluating the property and identifying any hazardous substances from previous operations at the site, which had been home to a paper mill and other industrial and commercial uses since the arrival of European settlers in the mid-1800s.

The EPA grant will fund environmental testing and decommissioning of underground storage tanks, and allow the Tribe to create plans for larger remediation projects that will focus on repurposing portions of the site and making preparations for demolition.

The EPA, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Tribe hosted a virtual meeting on Wednesday, May 12, to announce the grant.

"Oregon communities have long been initiators and innovators of this program," said Michelle Pizadeh, EPA Acting Administrator for Region 10. "That is something to be proud of. We are looking forward to seeing the impact it has on the community."

The Grand Ronde Tribal Council approved an almost \$850,000

contract with Elder Demolition of Portland on May 5 for the Blue Heron site.

"As caretakers of the Willamette Falls area, we're thankful for the EPA and this funding," said Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy in a press release announcing the grant. "Tending to the land by addressing the environmental remediation needs will help ensure that the Tribe's vision can be fully implemented across the site and bring people back to Willamette Falls."

During the May 12 virtual event, Kennedy addressed meeting attendees from the Blue Heron site, backed by Willamette Falls.

"These have been our people's homelands since time immemorial," she said. "We lived off this river ... and are so excited about this opportunity. The \$800,000 grant is tremendous, hayu masi, words cannot explain what this means. We have been in a visioning process, hopefully completing a master plan design by the end of the year. This will allow our people to reconnect to traditional homelands. ... It is with great gratitude and sincere humility that we accept this award. We are the original keepers of the falls."

The EPA allocates grants annually for high priority assessment and cleanup of contaminated properties. "Through these grants, EPA and its state and Tribal partners will advance priorities to deliver environmental and public health results across the nation," the agen-

cy's website states.

The Tribe applied for the grant in October 2020 and will begin cleanup work this year.

In March, the Tribe released its vision for the site, which includes environmental restoration, mixed-use development and opportunities to share the Tribe's cultural and historical stories.

"The reconnection to our land and history is of paramount importance," Kennedy said. "This grant will help us to move along with that process. We will work to restore it and will welcome any visitors."

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Director Richard

Whitman said that the state had partnered with the EPA on the Brownfields program in the past.

"We appreciate the partnership and the one with the Grand Ronde Tribe," he said. "The Tribe approached DEQ as part of its due diligence to make this place safe for people to come. We assembled a team to do the work with the Tribe, and understand the conditions of the property and future uses. This grant will help the Tribe carry out the actions that are called for in the prospective purchaser agreement. The falls is an iconic place. We look forward to working together to restore this amazing place." ■

Tribe included in disaster declaration

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde was included in a disaster declaration from President Joseph Biden on Tuesday, May 4, that will provide federal assistance to state, Tribal and local recovery efforts in the areas affected by a severe winter storm that occurred Feb. 11-15.

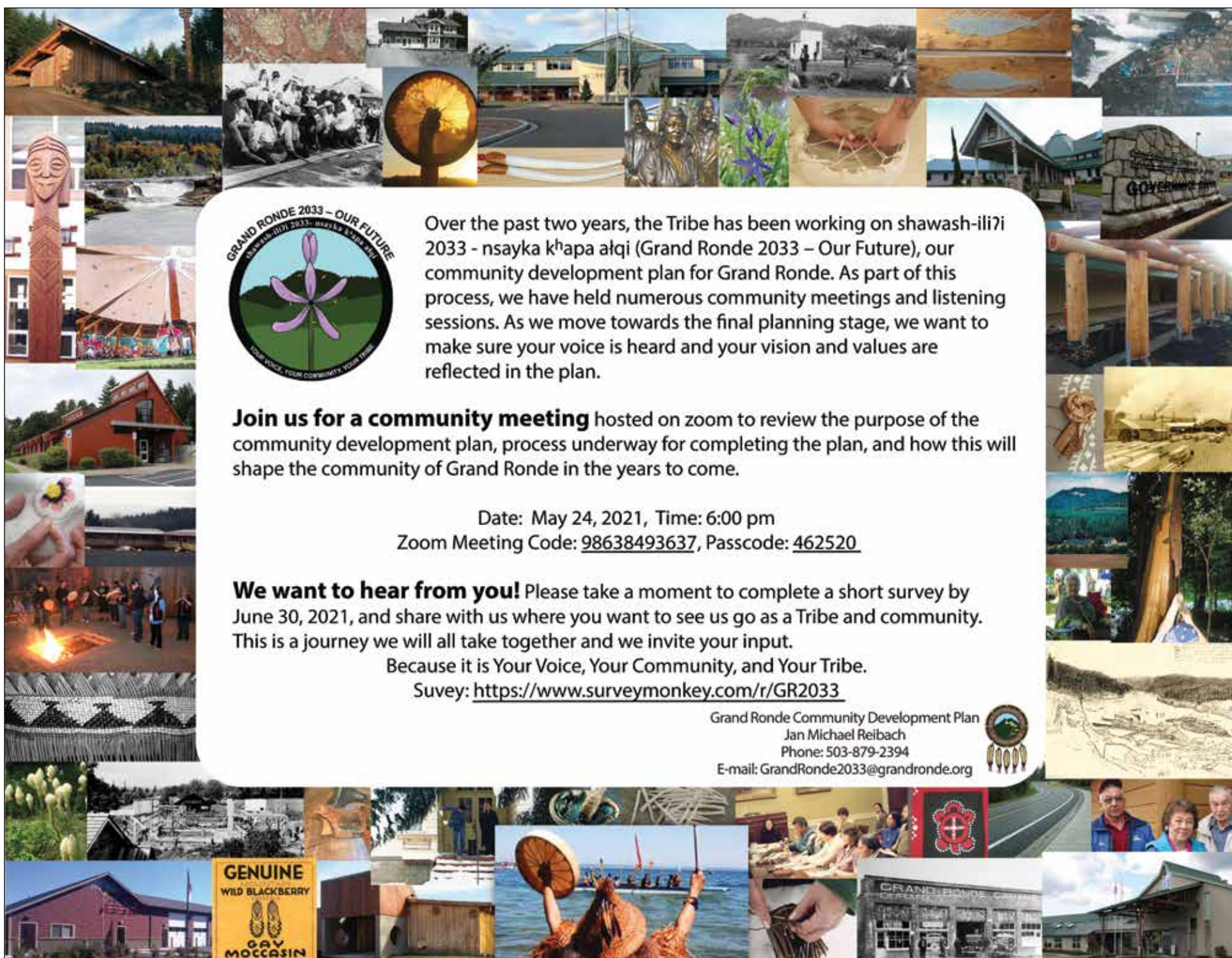
Because of the declaration, federal funding on a cost-sharing basis will become available for emergency work and repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the winter storm. Along with the Tribe, the counties of Benton, Clackamas, Linn, Marion, Polk and Yamhill were included in the declaration.


Federal funding also is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard

mitigation measures in all areas within the state.

The Valentine's Day winter storm dumped freezing rain and snow on most of northwestern Oregon and closed two state highways at Grand Ronde Road. Many trees on the Grand Ronde Tribal campus and Spirit Mountain Casino were damaged and power went out for approximately 36 hours in the Grand Ronde area.

"February's extreme winter storm killed four people and left more than 200,000 Oregonians without power," said Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley in a press release. "From clearing debris to restoring and rebuilding impacted buildings, we still have a lot of work ahead of us to put this storm behind us." ■





GRAND RONDE 2033 - OUR FUTURE
 ʔəwəw-iliʔi 2033 - əsəyka kʰəpə əlqi
 FOUR RIVERS. FOUR COMMUNITIES. FOUR TRIBES.

Over the past two years, the Tribe has been working on shawash-iliʔi 2033 - nsayka kʰəpə əlqi (Grand Ronde 2033 – Our Future), our community development plan for Grand Ronde. As part of this process, we have held numerous community meetings and listening sessions. As we move towards the final planning stage, we want to make sure your voice is heard and your vision and values are reflected in the plan.


Join us for a community meeting hosted on zoom to review the purpose of the community development plan, process underway for completing the plan, and how this will shape the community of Grand Ronde in the years to come.

Date: May 24, 2021, Time: 6:00 pm
 Zoom Meeting Code: 98638493637, Passcode: 462520

We want to hear from you! Please take a moment to complete a short survey by June 30, 2021, and share with us where you want to see us go as a Tribe and community. This is a journey we will all take together and we invite your input.

Because it is Your Voice, Your Community, and Your Tribe.
 Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GR2033>

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