

Polk County
Itemizer-Observer

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Polk could benefit from lawsuit

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — The payout wouldn't be big, but Polk County would benefit from a potential lawsuit over the Department of Forestry's management of state forestlands.

Harvests off those lands send revenue to the 15 counties that have state forests, which were deeded to the state starting in 1929 in exchange for a cut of the harvest money.

Linn County — one of the 15 counties, including Polk, among the Oregon Forest Trust counties — sent notice to the state on Jan. 13 that it intends to file a class-action lawsuit for \$1.4 billion.

The suit alleges the adoption of a new management plan in 2001 that slashed harvest revenues by \$35 million per year and prioritized other uses as a "breach of contract." According to the suit, that contract says the state's responsibility is to manage the lands for the economic benefit of the counties.

Polk County Commissioner Craig Pope, who is the vice chairman of the Forest Trust Land Advisory Committee, said he — like representatives of other counties named in the suit — was surprised by the timing of the lawsuit.

The Board of Commissioners has yet to talk about whether Polk will remain part of the lawsuit, though Pope said he didn't know of a reason why it would opt out at this point. Counties that elect to not participate would not receive financial benefit if the lawsuit is successful.

Pope said he shares the frustrations that motivated the lawsuit.

But he said the notice and eventual filing of the suit has ended any negotiations between the state and the trust counties for what he thinks is the best and most sustainable outcome: a new management plan that creates revenue for counties from harvests, not the state's treasury.

"We are done talking," he said. "I want to know how this lawsuit is going to expedite a better management plan."

The majority of the money would go to Tillamook and Clatsop counties, which contain the biggest tracts of trust lands. Polk County receives about \$100,000 annually now. The county could get up to about \$160,000 annually if the lawsuit succeeds.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer
Mike Ainsworth, center, and Buzz Brazeau, right, speak with Coleen Bradford at the open house of the Central Community Resource Center on Thursday. The center will be open starting Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

New resource center to open

Social services will be available at old Central District Office building

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — The new Central Community Resource Center opens Thursday, filling a hole in access to social services for residents of Independence and Monmouth.

The center is in the old Central School District offices, 1610 Monmouth St., across from Central High School.

The buildings are still owned by the district. "The reality is, this is a community building," Central Superintendent Buzz Brazeau said at Thursday's open house. "It served 3,000 kids (as the district office); now it's going to serve 17,000 people. That's a good use of a building."

The center will house many of the same health and human services located at the Academy Building in

Dallas through the service integration team.

Family and Community Outreach Manager Brent DeMoe said the center will have one reception area, one lobby, and one intake form for people who need services.

Coleen Bradford, with the Department of Human Services (DHS) self-sufficiency program, said DHS used to have a presence in Monmouth and Independence, but budget cuts

forced consolidation.

"I know the need's here," Bradford said. "This is going to be such a good thing."

County Commissioner Mike Ainsworth said transportation can be an issue for those who need social services.

"Some families have to decide if they're going to eat that night or put gas in the car," he said. "Five years ago, you only had to go to Dallas. Now we're here."

See CENTER, Page 13A

Falls City seeks solution to squatters

With banks not serving eviction notices, city hopes to take ownership, rebuild

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Several properties in Falls City have been foreclosed on or are otherwise abandoned, some with "squatters" living in the homes.

Those taking up residence in one of the homes have turned on the electricity, but can't have running water because of a lien against the account at that address.

The city has struggled for months to address the issue, but has been confronted with dead ends due to restrictions in its code, the lack of an active code officer, or inaction on the part of the banks that own the properties.

Mayor Terry Ungrecht said even with those difficulties, city staff is working on the problem, perhaps to the benefit the community.

"The hope is we can develop an abatement process on some of these abandoned properties that are bank-owned and maybe try to twist arms to get the bank to turn the property over to us. We can clean it up and sell it for develop-



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer
The Falls City City Council declared a nuisance on a property in the 500 block of Cameron Street. Without a code officer, the city has struggled with compliance.

ment," he said during a recent city council meeting. "We are taking steps. It's a very slow process."

Without a code officer, the city has had to rely on another city to have the properties registered as abandoned and find out

who owns them.

City Clerk Domenica Protheroe said she's been investigating the properties brought to the city council's attention as problems.

One was recently sold; three are bank-owned and another two were sold

under private contracts, so there is limited information on those.

Of the bank-owned properties, Protheroe said two banks were unresponsive and the other hasn't taken any action.

See SQUATTERS, Page 5A

IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS
School district holds meeting to discuss policy allowing a transgender boy to use the boys' locker room at Dallas High School.
»Page 13A

FALLS CITY
Four Falls City residents were arrested on drug charges on Sunday.
»Page 2A

INDEPENDENCE
An Independence man was arrested on Monday after officers and deputies responded to multiple calls of shots fired.
»Page 5A

MONMOUTH
Kevin McMillan hopes to raise awareness about multiple sclerosis through drag racing.
»Page 5A

SPORTS
Central boys basketball team seeks to turn its season around quickly.
»Page 12A

Comm. Connect offers help
POLK COUNTY — The fifth annual Community Connect will take place Wednesday (today) from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Valley Life Church, 1795 SE Miller Ave., Dallas.

The event connects people, especially homeless or at-risk of homelessness with local resources and services. It also serves as the Point in Time Homeless Count for the region.

The event is open to the public. Service opportunities will be available, including dental care, health screenings, pet care, bike repair and haircuts. Local social service agencies will also be on site to offer information about employment, housing, veterans and behavioral health.

All services are free and confidential.

Participants may receive free transportation to and from the event through Cheriotts or CARTS buses (a Community Connect bus pass is required) or through several churches and agencies.

For more information: Heather Wright, 503-623-6890 or Michelle Bornfleth, 503-623-9664 ext. 2457.

THE NEXT 7 DAYS PLANNING FOR YOUR WEEK

<p>wed</p> <p>Join St. Thomas Episcopal Church for its "Brew and BS" series discussing the Old Testament. Bring your own brew. 7 p.m. Free.</p> <p></p> <p>Rain Hi: 57 Lo: 49</p>	<p>thu</p> <p>Celebrate the music of Elvis Presley at the Dallas Senior Center's music jam. All music enthusiasts are welcome. 6:30 p.m. Free.</p> <p></p> <p>Rain Hi: 55 Lo: 45</p>	<p>fri</p> <p>Watch a movie and make a picture frame during the Marvel-inspired afternoon at the Monmouth library. 1 p.m. Free.</p> <p></p> <p>Showers Hi: 50 Lo: 38</p>	<p>sat</p> <p>Relay for Life will celebrate its 2016 event with a kickoff at the Independence Elks Lodge, "Ignite your Passion." 2-5 p.m. Free.</p> <p></p> <p>Rain Hi: 47 Lo: 35</p>	<p>sun</p> <p>Enjoy old-time hymns and bluegrass at the monthly Jubilee Service at Calvary Chapel in Dallas. 6:30 p.m. Free.</p> <p></p> <p>Showers Hi: 45 Lo: 35</p>	<p>mon</p> <p>AARP Tax Aide offers free assistance to low- and middle-income seniors. Call 503-831-0581 for an appointment. All day. Free.</p> <p></p> <p>Partly Cloudy Hi: 46 Lo: 34</p>	<p>tue</p> <p>Donate blood to the American Red Cross at Western Oregon University today and tomorrow. 10:30 a.m. Free.</p> <p></p> <p>Showers Hi: 46 Lo: 36</p>
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