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Counties to take feds to court

Polk among group alleging mismanagement of O&C timber harvests

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — The Bureau of Land Management released its final proposal for a new “resource management plan” for Western Oregon last week.

Pending a record of decision finalizing it as the new plan, its next stop could be in a courtroom.

Polk is among a group of 17 counties planning to sue the federal government

over the plan for managing 2.5 million acres the BLM oversees west of the Cascades, also known as “O&C lands.”

Those counties, part of the Association of O&C Counties (AOCC), say the plan is not following the law when setting target harvest levels.

The plan sets a goal of 278 million board feet per year, an increase what is being cut now, and puts 75 percent of the land in reserves.

Neither of those pro-

visions sit well with the counties.

O&C lands were once under private ownership, but taken back by the federal government and set aside through legislation to provide revenue to the counties containing the lands. The Congressional act mandated a minimum harvest of 500 million board feet.

“Our position simply would be to have the court force the BLM to rework the plan in accordance with the 1937

act,” said Polk County Commissioner Craig Pope, who also serves on the AOCC board. “We continue to maintain that we can achieve the harvest levels described in the act and maintain clean water, fish habitat, and recreational opportunities as well.”

Oregon’s lawmakers have crafted proposals to strike a balance on the lands, including a plan by Sen. Ron Wyden introduced that would increase the harvest target to 400

million board feet per year for the next 50 years. In 2012, reps. Peter DeFazio, Kurt Schrader, and Greg Walden proposed a plan to put 1.5 million acres of O&C lands into a trust to be managed by a committee appointed by the governor.

Ultimately, neither plan had enough support to become law.

Pope said filing the lawsuit is the last resort for the counties after years of wrangling over the issue.

“We are watching proponents of other activities succeed in their lawsuit process. They are dictating how government responds,” Pope said. “It’s resulted now in a plan that is going to lock up 75 percent of those acres that, by law, are directed to produce timber. In this particular case, we either do this or we just lay down and let the federal government just take it in a way that doesn’t make sense economically.”

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IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS

Library programs have evolved from just checking out books to programs that appeal to all ages.

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FALLS CITY

Council considers hiring its own city engineer with so many projects going on in Falls City.

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INDEPENDENCE

The city won a summary judgement in the foreclosure proceedings of the old city hall building.

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MONMOUTH

Sgt. Kim Dorn said the community must help protect children against abuse and dangerous situations.

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SPORTS

Kings Valley senior Ryan Macnab excelling in track and field despite a lack of experience.

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Fore! Deer dodges golf balls at Dallas tournament



Golfers during the Mid-Willamette Conference’s girls golf tournament on Monday morning received some surprise guests. Two deer ran across the fairway of the first hole at Cross Creek Golf Course, causing a brief pause in play. The deer made it safely across and play continued. Central, Dallas, Lebanon, Woodburn, Crescent Valley, Corvallis and South Albany competed in the league tournament. For results from the tournament, see Page 9A.
LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Enrollment numbers reason for \$1M loss

Fewer students attending causes state to ‘take back’ money from Dallas School District

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — It’s a “perfect storm” of circumstances that has Dallas School District ending its budget year with \$1 million less than it had anticipated.

With increases in Oregon Public Employees Retirement System looming, the loss couldn’t have come at a worse time.

School funding from the state is based on enrollment. Districts are paid about \$7,000 per student, more for those who are English language learners, in a teen parenting program, in special education, and considered in poverty. Districts send the state enrollment projections to base funding amounts on and later update the actual enrollment data.

The state uses the actual enrollment data to make adjustments, giving districts more money if actual student counts are higher than projected or less if it is lower.

For Dallas, the primary issue is an unanticipated decline in enrollment. The district made predictions for the current year in De-

cember of 2014.

“They were higher than they should have been,” said Tami Montague, the district’s business manager. “When kids started showing up in September, there just weren’t as many as we had anticipated.”

She said the district was expecting an increase based on development activity, but there was no corresponding jump in the number of children enrolling. The difference from December 2014, when projections were made, to December 2015, when actual data was reported, equaled 134 fewer students.

That pattern will continue, based on the district’s calculations, Montague said. In 2016-17, the expected loss is 138 students — 85 of those are due to law changes for the district’s fifth-year program. That is a one-time loss. But in 2017-18, the slide continues, with 63 fewer students expected.

“If you look at the numbers in each of the classes, even the ones we have attending through our charter schools, the class sizes are just going down,” Montague said.

“The numbers that we have coming in are not as big as the numbers that we have leaving.”

That trend isn’t the only factor in the \$1 million loss.

For a variety of reasons, districts typically lose students between December and the end of the school year. In a normal year Dallas loses about 12 students.

In 2014-15, it lost 58. The majority of them were students in the fifth-year program, Extended Campus, who took an extra term to finish their degree. So in December they were counted as students for funding purposes, but by June they were gone. That kind of decrease will never happen again as students are no longer permitted to participate in a fifth-year program for more than a year, Montague said.

That matters because the state assumes districts will lose students during that time period and builds it into its funding formula, Montague said. To prevent huge swings, it takes the average of the previous two years.

For Dallas, however, that formula means it will take another hit

equivalent to 40 students, she said. Dallas’ actual losses in the 2015-16 school year aren’t likely to be that high, so the state will “pay back” the district, but not until the next fiscal year.

Anomalies like this year can’t be accounted for, Montague said.

“It is written into the law that they take the December to June (ratio). That is the way the formula is applied,” she said. “That is how it is. I had that conversation.”

Another factor is contributing to the loss. The state is changing the way it calculates student poverty rates, using a yearly update instead of the U.S. Census figured every 10 years.

With the change, there are fewer students in poverty in Dallas, meaning a loss of \$114,000.

With all those factors added up, the district is losing the funding equivalent of 196 students, but with a new charter school opening this year in the district, the net loss is 87, Montague said. That equals \$604,334. The state also is reconciling the 2014-15 school year, comparing projections to actual enrollment, which has the district losing

another \$406,242.

Montague said the district will finish the year with an ending fund balance of about \$1 million, but it had hoped to have more to save for PERS changes. The PERS board will be reporting the new rates this summer which go into effect in July 2017.

“We get this year to plan for it, which we were trying to do,” Montague said. “We really had a great plan to get that ending fund balance up so we could weather that.”

Montague said with declining enrollment, it’s natural that the district is losing money, but in a biennium that added \$600 million to the state school fund, the losses are hard to swallow.

“I find myself feeling really frustrated this year because school funding was good,” Montague said. “We were anticipating a biennium of pretty solid ground to stand on. I think that many districts are feeling that is not the case and feeling frustrated with that.”

Dallas School District Budget Committee will meet on Monday at 6 p.m. at the district office to discuss the 2016-17 budget.

THE NEXT
7
DAYS
PLANNING
FOR YOUR
WEEK

wed
Learn more about the Old Testament while enjoying a brew of choice at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Dallas.
7 p.m. Free.



Partly Cloudy
Hi: 73
Lo: 43

thu
Monmouth-Independence Chamber will host its after-hours mixer, a networking event, at Washington Fed.
5:30-7 p.m. Free.



Partly Cloudy
Hi: 71
Lo: 46

fri
Dallas City Park is the place to celebrate Earth Day with tours of the Delbert Hunter Arboretum and refreshments.
1-4 p.m. Free.



Rain
Hi: 65
Lo: 48

sat
Bring work gloves and garden tools to Kings Valley Charter School and help with some gardening chores.
9:30 a.m. Free.



Showers
Hi: 61
Lo: 43

sun
Listen to what the candidates for House District 23 have to say about representing you at the fairgrounds.
6-8 p.m. Free.



Showers
Hi: 58
Lo: 40

mon
Come hear an expert on daylilies at the monthly meeting for the Dallas Garden Club at the Evangelical church.
6:30 p.m. Free.



Partly Cloudy
Hi: 60
Lo: 39

tue
James2 Community Kitchen feeds all who are hungry each Tuesday at St. Philip Catholic Church in Dallas.
4:30-6 p.m. Free.



Mostly sunny
Hi: 63
Lo: 43

