

Local & State

What's New At The Library

•2400 Resort St.

FICTION

•“The Last Romantics,” Tara Conklin
•“Old Newgate Road,” Keith Scribner
•“Paranoid,” Lisa Jackson
•“Backlash,” BradThor
•“At the Wolf's Table,” Rosella Postorino

NONFICTION

•“A Pilgrimage to Eternity,” Timothy Egan
•“Trump Vs. China,” Newt Gingrich
•“The Rise of Wolf 8,” Rick McIntyre
•“Touched by the Sun,” Carly Simon
•“Sam Houston & the Alamo Avengers,” Brian Kilmeade

DVDS

•“Game of Thrones, Season 8” (Drama)
•“How To Train Your Dragon: Homecoming” (Family)
•“The Party” (Comedy)
•“Ready or Not” (Horror)
•“Renoir” (Drama)

HOURS

•Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m.;
Friday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.;
Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.;
Sunday, noon-4 p.m.

Residents could lose food stamps this April

By Dick Mason
The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Some food stamp recipients in Baker and Union counties could lose their benefits due to a new federal rule set to take effect April 1, 2020.

The rule will reduce the food stamp benefits of able-bodied adults 18 to 49 who have no dependents if they are not working or receiving training at least 20 hours a week.

Those who fall into this category will not be allowed to receive food stamp benefits for more than three months in a three-year period. The rule means that at least 19,000 food stamp recipients in Oregon could lose their food stamp benefits, according to a news release sent out Friday by the Oregon Department of Human Services. This would be at least 3% of Oregon food stamp recipients.

DHS statistics indicate through June of this year an average of 3,384 people in Baker County received food stamps each month — 3% of this total would mean about 102 county residents would no longer be eligible.

In Union County, 4,951 people received food stamps each month — 3% of this total is 149, meaning nearly

150 Union County residents could lose their food stamps, now officially known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Wallowa County has an average of 988 food stamp recipients a month, and Umatilla County has 15,075 recipients. Based on the 3% formula, among those who could lose their food stamp benefits would be at least 30 people in Wallowa County and at least 452 in Umatilla County.

Audrey Smith, manager of the Community Connection of Northeast Oregon's regional food bank, based in La Grande, said she believes the new rule could have a dire impact on Northeast Oregon residents.

“I'm very worried about how our houseless population might be impacted,” Smith said.

She noted the new rule means people who are struggling to get enough to eat and do not have a residence are not in a position to successfully obtain the employment they will need to retain their SNAP benefits.

“Being hungry and not having a home address does not help you ace a job interview,” Smith said, noting people are

not at their best when they do not have adequate nutrition.

Smith said people who do not have homes will also be hit hard by this rule because they do not have the ability to cook or store food, so they will have to buy more expensive ready-to-eat food items.

The new SNAP rule will apply only to those who are “able-bodied,” but Smith said those who appear to be well and capable of working are not always in a position to hold down a job.

“They may have hidden disabilities, which may keep them from being eligible for jobs,” she said.

Smith also said this will especially impact individuals living in smaller communities. For example, the food pantries in Union County's smaller towns are often open only one day a month, while in La Grande they are open once a week.

Recipients of SNAP benefits in Union, Wallowa, Baker and Umatilla counties receive an average of less than \$4 a day. The average SNAP benefit amount in Union County each month is \$113.18. The average is \$114.69 in Wallowa County, \$112.40 in Baker County, and \$110.44 in Umatilla County, according to 2019 DHS statistics.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Police K9 program fundraiser Dec. 14

Tickets are available for the Baker City Police Department's fourth-annual fundraiser for its K9 Drug Prevention program. The event will be Saturday, Dec. 14, at 4 p.m. at the Baker County Event Center, 2600 East St. Tickets are \$30 for adults, \$10 for kids 6 to 12 and free for kids under 6. Tickets are available at the Police Department, 1768 Auburn Ave., at Barley Brown's Tap House and Thatcher's Ace Hardware.

Durkee Christmas program Dec. 15

DURKEE — A Christmas children's program and a potluck are set for Sunday, Dec. 15 at the Durkee School. The annual potluck starts at 4:30 p.m., and will be followed by the program. Santa Claus will also make an appearance.

Local BMCC students earn honors

More than a dozen Baker County students earned academic honors for the fall 2019 term at Blue Mountain Community College.

President's List (GPA of 3.75 to 4.0)

O'Keeya Brown, James Dunlap, Tammy Fry, Christopher Kyriess, Elisabeth Munsell, Taylor Price, Rachel Talbor, Amelia Wentz, Tiana Williams

Vice President's List (GPA of 3.5 to 3.74)

Cierra Bork, Dallas Hardesty, Deanna Johnson, Kelly Shank

Democrats plan holiday party Dec. 19

The Baker County Democrats will not be having their monthly meeting at Rogers Fellowship Hall as usual. They will instead be having a holiday party at the home of treasurer Ramon Lara. Dinner will begin at 6 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 19.

If you wish to attend call Peter Hall at 541-519-7274.

Bazaar supports Upward Sports program

A Last Chance Bazaar that supports the Upward Sports Program is set for Dec. 20 and 21, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. both days, in the Family Life Center at the Baker City Church of the Nazarene, 1250 Hughes Lane. Lunch options will be provided by the Upward Sports Program.

Lane restriction continues at Ladd Canyon

The Oregon Department of Transportation will continue the Interstate 84 westbound lane restrictions through the Ladd Canyon construction zone over the next two to three weeks.

Motorists should slow down in this area and be prepared for congestion 10 miles east of La Grande between mileposts 273 and 270, from the top of the steep downhill grade to the bottom. The two eastbound lanes in this area will not be impacted and remain open.

“We had planned to remove the westbound lane restrictions by November, but discovered late in October some unexpected conditions,” Mike Remily, ODOT project manager, said in a press release. “The final 120-foot-long section of the new Brush Creek alignment we are constructing was supposed to have bedrock, but it didn't. The solution is to construct a concrete lined channel, which required one lane to remain closed for part of December.”

Brush Creek is currently routed along a temporary alignment in the project area which includes a section of pipe not large enough to handle increased water volumes anticipated in the spring.

“The creek detour we created to accommodate construction was never meant to remain in place through the winter and won't be able to handle springtime water flows,” Remily said. “We need to complete the Brush Creek realignment now and our contractor, Knife River Construction, is putting in the extra time needed to get the work done as soon as possible. We plan to have the freeway completely open by December 21.”

The project, which will also include construction of a third lane on the uphill grade and replacing an ice-prone bridge with a box culvert, is more than half finished, according to ODOT. The third lane, intended to reduce congestion due to slow traffic, will be built in 2020.

Lostine logging project to Appeals Court

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was slated to hear oral arguments Thursday regarding the destiny of the Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project. The hearing was set in Seattle.

The approximately 2,100-acre forest treatment project, purported by the U.S. Forest Service to aid in protecting both campers and corridor residents from wildfire, was highly controversial from the start.

Nearly as soon as the project was announced in 2017, environmental groups Greater Hells Canyon Council and

Oregon Wild used legal means to try to thwart the project. The groups filed an appeal to the project in May of 2017, essentially calling it a thinly disguised commercial logging venture.

The groups also accused the USFS of skirting National Environmental Policy Act regulations by improperly labeling the project with a “categorical exclusion” moniker to avoid formal environmental analysis of the project.

Wallowa County applied for and received status as an intervenor in the case, which allows it to act as a third party.

The environmental groups lost the ini-

tial hearing presided over by Magistrate Patricia Sullivan in District Court. A further appeal to U.S. District Judge Michael Simon upheld Sullivan's decision.

Undeterred, the environmental groups went up the ladder and appealed Simon's decision to the court of appeals. Although preliminary work had started on the project, the groups also filed an emergency motion for injunction to stop the work ahead of the appeals court hearing.

Both the USFS and Wallowa County filed their opposition to the injunction request. The court rejected the emergency injunction without comment.

POWER LINE

Continued from Page 1A

Two La Grande groups last month filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking to block the B2H project. The plaintiffs, the Stop B2H Coalition and Greater Hells Canyon Council, contend the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service, which in 2017 approved a proposed route for the line, failed to properly review the potential environmental effects of the project.

Idaho Power is not a defendant in the lawsuit.

Baker County officials are among those who submitted written comments regarding the Council's draft order released on May 22, 2019.

Among the topics county officials addressed are what they see as inadequate protections against the spread of noxious weeds resulting from the power line.

The county requested “as-

urance... that the spread of existing weed infestations is prevented.”

In its response, Idaho Power, referring to the county's claim that the noxious weed protections are insufficient, describes the county's contention as “inaccurate, unsubstantiated, and lacks specificity.” The noxious weed plan, Idaho Power writes, is “a highly developed plan with sufficient detail...”

County officials also argue that Idaho Power should be required to pay for a security bond, in place for 10 years after the line is built, to “secure its weed management obligations.”

Idaho Power officials refused the county's request for a security bond, writing that the county's request “assumes, without substantive evidence or specificity, that the implementation of Idaho Power's Noxious Weed Plan will be ineffective.”

The Boise company had

a similar response to Baker County's comments regarding the potential visual effects of the power line.

The county writes that “Baker County is known for its scenic quality, and a 500 kV transmission line will be detrimental to those qualities, which will in turn harm both the Baker County tourism industry and the scenic qualities residents enjoy.”

In response, Idaho Power officials write: “Idaho Power respectfully disagrees with the county's statement that a number of the resources in Baker County will be significantly impacted. Idaho Power analyzed potential impacts to scenic resources using a thorough, reasoned methodology developed by visual resources experts.”

County officials also contend that the draft order doesn't require Idaho Power to do enough to reduce the risk of wildfires that could be sparked by crews building


the line.

“Given the high fire risk and the minimal available public services, (Idaho Power) needs a more robust Fire Prevention and Suppression Plan,” county officials write.

In their response, Idaho Power officials write that the company would try to contract with private firefighting companies if it can't reach an agreement with a public agency to provide firefighting response during construction.”

The Stop B2H Coalition also submitted extensive comments to the draft order, one of which questions whether Idaho Power has even justified the need for the power line under the Energy Facility Siting Council's “Least Cost Plan Rule.”

Idaho Power officials dispute that claim, writing: “The commenter's argument is incorrect as a matter of law and of fact.”



VFW Christmas & Awards Dinner

**Friday,
December 20th
5 PM**

**Main Course:
Turkey & all the stuffings**

Please bring desserts, side dishes and salads

**Come meet our “Voice of Democracy”
and “Patriot's Pen” winners!**

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