

# PIPING

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“To have the pipeline connecting one pond to the other is pretty exciting,” Owen said. “We’re almost there. It’s progressing and as soon as we get that freeway bore completed and all the pipe installed, that will be a super accomplishment,”

She said the goal is to have wastewater moving from the current lagoons to the new lagoon by January 2022.

Also this winter, the city is preparing to apply for a state permit allowing the city to use the wastewater from both the current and new lagoons to irrigate nonfood crops.

“We have to have a new type of permit in place before we can do the irrigation,” Owen said.

The city will have to drain the existing lagoons to allow workers to install gates and valves that allow wastewater to move between the current and new lagoons.

Water will drain by gravity from the current lagoons to the new pond, but the pipeline can also be pressurized so water can be moved between the two sites as needed for irrigation, Owen said.

In January 2021 the City Council voted to hire Gyllenberg Construction of Baker City, the lowest among 10 bidders, to oversee the project.

Owen said the new lagoon will increase the city’s wastewater storage capacity, making the city better able to deal with population growth.

The additional storage also will allow the city to hold water when there’s no need for irrigation water.



Baker City Public Works/Contributed Photo

A liner has been installed at Baker City’s new wastewater storage lagoon east of the Baker City Airport and south of Highway 203.

The city had to choose a lagoon site more than 10,000 feet from the Baker City Airport, because the lagoon could attract flocks of geese and other birds that can pose a danger to aircraft.

The city bought a 51-acre property in 2019 for \$123,000. The site is at the eastern end of Baker Valley,

south of Highway 203. The city also paid \$37,900 for an easement across another property that the pipeline crosses.

In November 2020 the City Council agreed to have the city borrow as much as \$7.5 million from the state to pay for the wastewater project. The city will repay the loan over 30 years with

a 1.36% annual interest rate, and annual payments on the loan are estimated at \$275,000, Owen said.

Based on the contract with Gyllenberg Construction, for about \$5.7 million, the city likely won’t need to borrow the full amount, which could reduce the annual payments somewhat, she said.

# SIGNS

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“The driving factor pushing us towards installing extra signage at these locations has been the recent uptick with search and rescues involving Wallowa, Union, Grant, and Baker counties,” Dan Story, roads manager for the south zone of the Wallowa-Whitman, said in a press release.

“We carefully considered the language, colors, and placement of these signs to help more people understand that wheeled vehicles cannot safely pass through these roads while they are covered with snow,” Story said. “Signs are bright yellow or orange to get the driver’s attention before entry.”

Most of the new signs are along the two routes where several rescues have taken place over the past decade or so — Forest Road 73, the Elkhorn Drive Scenic Byway west of Baker City, and Road 39, the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road, in eastern Baker County and southern Wallowa County.

Both are paved, two-lane roads that are popular scenic driving routes during summer but which traverse high elevations where deep snow accumulates each winter.

Depending on the year, sections of both roads are impassable to wheeled vehicles for several months.

The new signs will be removed or covered after the snow melts in the spring and the roads reopen.

Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, who has personally rescued drivers stranded on the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road, lauded the Wallowa-Whitman’s new signs.

“I’m pleased to see the pro-

active steps the Forest Service has taken to warn travelers that Road 39 is closed during the winter months,” Ash said. “So far, we have been fortunate to locate and save stranded motorists, and I hope the additional signage will prevent people from trying to traverse the closed road.”

The most recent rescue on the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road was in April 2021, when a Beaverton couple and their son got stuck in their Ford Fusion sedan about 8.9 miles north of Highway 86.

Three members of the Baker County Sheriff’s Office search and rescue team rescued the trio 12 hours after their car got stuck. None of the three was hurt.

There were several other search and rescue calls on the road the previous winter in both Baker and Wallowa counties. That prompted the Forest Service to issue a press release reminding drivers that the road is open to snowmobiles and other over-snow vehicles during winter. The Forest Service also placed barriers along the road to discourage passenger vehicles from continuing, along with a sign. The barriers didn’t prevent snowmobiles from accessing the road.

Ash, however, said that the Beaverton couple told rescuers they hadn’t seen the warning sign.

Peter Fargo, public affairs officer for the Wallowa-Whitman, said the barriers could be put up again this winter, depending on circumstances.

“Our current plan is to rely on the signs to inform motorists that these major roads are closed to wheeled vehicles because of winter snow,” Fargo said. “As the season progresses, if we continue to see vehicles passing those signs

and getting stuck in the snow, we will consider additional safety measures, including barriers.”

## Other rescues

Several months prior to the spring 2021 incident, on Dec. 7, 2020, a San Diego couple got their four-wheel drive Toyota Tacoma pickup truck stuck in snow on Forest Road 73 between Anthony Lakes and the North Fork of the John Day River.

The couple used their satellite device to alert police that they needed help.

Volunteers in three side-by-side ATVs, equipped with tracks rather than tires, reached the couple about three and a half hours after they had sent the emergency message.

They also were unhurt.

On Thanksgiving Day 2020, Ash rescued an 18-year-old Boise man whose car got stuck in snow on Road 39 when he was driving to drive to Lewiston, Idaho.

The man, who left his Volkswagen Jetta and started hiking north toward Joseph, was cold but otherwise fine when Ash found him.

That incident might not have happened if not for an early episode when a group of travelers also was stranded in deep snow in the same area.

During that rescue, crews plowed snow from the road, which allowed the Boise man to drive much farther into the mountains than would have been possible otherwise.

Coincidentally, Ash had rescued someone in a similar predicament exactly 20 years earlier, also on Thanksgiving Day in 2000.

## Drivers lured into trouble

Ash said one issue with Roads 39 and 73, and several other forest roads that are popular with snow-mobilers, is that the snow machines compact the top layer of the snow into a firm surface that can support the weight of a regular car, convincing drivers that they’re on a road maintained for wheeled vehicles.

But even a small section of softer snow can give way, leaving a car mired up to its fenders.

“You can do fine on that compact snow until you break through,” Ash said. “Then you’re stuck.”

Another issue that Story cited is the failure of navigation systems, which are installed in most new vehicles, as well as phone-based apps and GPS receivers, to alert users to roads that are not maintained for winter travel by wheeled vehicles.

# PHARMACY

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Wyden has also asked federal officials to review pharmacy closures across the U.S. over the past five years.

Wyden has cited in particular the fees charged by pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) and by Medicare Part D plans, and their paltry reimbursements to pharmacies.

“Exploitative business practices conducted by pharmaceutical middlemen are driving locally owned pharmacies out of business,” Wyden said. “These practices are not unique to the Pacific Northwest, so I am calling on the FTC to investigate this trend on a national level so action can be taken to protect local businesses.”

Brian Mayo, executive director of the Oregon State Pharmacy Association, also

called PBMs a culprit in the pharmacy crisis.

Mayo said the Pharmacy Association has been warning for years that reimbursements are too low.

The organization is calling on elected officials to reform the PBM system and to exempt prescription drugs from Oregon’s Corporate Activities Tax, which the Legislature approved in 2019 and which took effect Jan. 1, 2020.

Mayo said Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s mandate that health care workers, including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, be vaccinated or receive a medical or religious exception, has had a “minimal” effect on the current staffing shortages because most affected employees are vaccinated.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, as of Nov. 1, 88% of Oregon pharmacists were vaccinated, and 83% of pharmacy technicians.



Kevin Whitlock/Massillon Independent-TNS

Narcan nasal spray.

# SPRAY

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The Narcan includes directions on how to use the spray in the case of a suspected opioid overdose, said Andi Walsh, public relations and grants manager for New Directions Northwest.

That includes the requirement to call 911 after administering the medication, because the treatment can cause harmful withdrawal effects, she said.

Naloxone is an “opioid antagonist,” which means it attaches to opioid receptors and reverses and blocks the effects of opioids such as fentanyl, heroin, oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine and morphine.

Officials in Northeastern Oregon have reported an increase in drug overdoses this year.

On Nov. 23, the Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics, Center for Human Development and La Grande Fire Department and La Grande Police Department released a statement about a recent rise in heroin and fentanyl overdoses in Union County.

The Grande Ronde Hospital Emergency Department reported eight heroin overdoses in the six days prior to the statement, which is a 400% increase. The department typically sees two to three overdoses per month in Union County.

Officials at the hospital in La Grande suspect heroin is being tainted with additional drugs, such as fentanyl, which can lead to accidental overdoses.

“People may be taking substances thinking they are one thing but are actually mixed with other things that are more potent

or have a different effect than they are expecting,” said Carrie Brogoitti, public health administrator at the Center for Human Development in La Grande.

Walsh said there are also reports of pills that purport to be one drug but are in fact the more potent fentanyl.

She said several people who have overcome drug addictions will be at the Dec. 14 Narcan drive-thru event and available to talk about their experiences.

The nasal sprays will be available to anyone, Walsh said — including people who aren’t drug users but want to be able to help someone in the event of a possible overdose.

“Anyone who feels they might be able to use it,” she said.

Sara Blair, division chief for EMS at the Baker City Fire Department, said the department’s ambulance crews carry Narcan, both in nasal and intravenous forms.

Although she didn’t have any specific statistics, Blair said crews do administer Narcan occasionally, and when the number of overdoses increases in Union County a similar trend often follows in Baker County.

Blair said emergency responders can use Narcan in both confirmed and suspected opioid overdoses.

The product won’t harm the patient even if opioids aren’t involved, she said.

If Narcan has no effect on a patient who is in respiratory distress, that can indicate that opioids aren’t an issue, which affects how the patient is treated, Blair said.

She emphasized the importance for the public to immediately call 911 if they administer Narcan.

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