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— Jan Alexander of Unity, mineral policies director for the Eastern Oregon Mining Association, said of the draft environmental impact statement

Mining

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Locations near Sumpter include claims along Cracker, McCully, Deer and Lake creeks, and Buck Gulch.

Several of the claims are southwest of Baker City, including ones along Blue Canyon, French Gulch and California Gulch. There is one proposed mining operation along Salmon Creek west of Baker City.

The proposed work includes placer mining, suction dredging and, in four places, underground (lode) mining.

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The initial project started around 2005 or 2006, said Ray Lovison, minerals coordinator for the Wallowa-Whitman.

At some point, he said, a previous forest official stopped work on the analysis of the proposed mining plans. Lovison said the work restarted soon after he started work on the Wallowa-Whitman in 2017, in response to repeated requests from miners.

He said a staffing shortage on the forest forced officials to hire a contractor to do much of the work on the draft EIS, which is part of the reason the process has taken four years.

Alexander said many of the miners whose operating plans are included in the draft EIS are members of the Eastern Oregon Mining Association, based in Baker City.

Although claim holders can do minor exploration on their claims without an approved plan of operation, they need such a plan to use equipment to process ore, even at a small scale, Alexander said.

That means the release of the draft EIS, with the potential for final approval of the 22 operating plans, is significant, she said.

Alexander, a former Wallowa-Whitman employee who retired in 2001, said all 22 of the proposed mining operations are relatively small scale projects, generally involving a few miners who work their claims during the spring and summer, often only on weekends.

She said that in most cases the mining proposed would take place on less than one acre each year.

“The amount of ground disturbance we will see is pretty insignificant,” Alexander said.

None of the mining plans involve the use of chemicals to process ore, she said.

The claims are unpatented, meaning the land remains publicly owned, with the claim holder having the exclusive right to prospecting and mining for minerals or precious metals.

One exception is the Bald Mountain lode mine northwest of Sumpter, which is a patented claim, meaning it was converted to private land decades ago.

The Bald Mountain plan of operation is included in the draft EIS because the owner plans to use ponds that are on adjacent public land as part of the mining.

The draft EIS includes a 45-day public comment period, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

That federal law, which dates to 1969, requires agen-

Claims covered in draft EIS

A list of the mining plans covered in a draft environmental impact statement released last week by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest:

- AC, placer, 11 acres, Cracker Creek
- Amigo Mines, placer, 4 acres, Elk Creek
- Anchor 1/Old Crow/Peerless, placer, 20 acres, Elk Creek
- Bald Mountain Mine, lode and ponds, 1 acre, McCully Creek
- Barbara 1, lode, 2 acres, Lake Creek
- Blue Jay, placer, 2 acres, Cracker Creek
- Buster 1, placer, 10 acres, Blue Canyon
- Buster 3, placer, 2 acres, Blue Canyon
- California Gulch, 5 acres, processing with hand tools, possible suction dredging
- David No. 1, placer, 3.5 acres, Cracker Creek
- Dead Horse, placer, 9 acres, Buck Gulch
- Fine Gold, 3 acres, processing in existing pond, Cracker Creek
- High Bar No. 1, placer, 22 acres, possible suction dredging, Cracker Creek
- J&J, placer, 1 acre, Blue Canyon
- Medic, placers, 5 acres, McCully Creek
- Native Spirit, placer, 3 acres, McCully Creek
- Pardners Group, placer/lode, 2 acres, Poker Gulch
- Return Placer Group, placer, 44 acres, Deer Creek
- Salmon Creek, placer, 1 acre
- Slow Poke, placer, 15 acres, Buck Gulch
- Struggler Lode and French Gulch, placer/lode, 12.5 acres, French Gulch
- Tough Luck Charley, placer, 11 acres, Bridge Creek west of Auburn

cies to study the potential environmental effects of projects on public land, such as mining or logging, and to give the public a chance to comment about such proposals.

The draft EIS and associated documents, as well as instructions on commenting, are available at www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45945.

“We look forward to receiving public comments and expect they will help us to enhance the draft environmental impact statement,” said Kendall Cikanek, ranger for the Whitman District. “After we finalize the environmental impact statement and publish the Record of Decision, those who submitted substantive public comments will have another opportunity to engage during the objection and resolution process.”

Alexander said she doesn’t expect any mining will take place until 2023 at the earliest, since the final EIS and Record of Decision are still pending.

Alexander said the claims involved in the draft EIS have all been mined in the past, some dating back more than a century.

Today’s miners are either picking through the remnants left by historic miners, or looking for deposits on parts of claims that weren’t mined before, she said.

“We don’t have those rich deposits just lying there,” Alexander said.

Report: Majority of state’s dirtiest power plants are in area counties

BY ANTONIO ARREDONDO

East Oregonian
PENDLETON — Two Oregon environmental groups on Thursday, June 16, posted their findings for the state’s most climate-polluting power plants, and the results look grim for plants in Umatilla and Morrow counties — at least for now.

Six of the top 10 dirtiest plants in the entire state are in the two counties, according to research from the Environment Oregon Research & Policy Center and Oregon State Public Interest Research Group Foundation.

“Climate change is here and already impacting lives,” said Celeste Meiffren-Swango, state director at Environment Oregon. “We need to do everything we can to move away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy.”

That action already has taken place in Boardman, where Portland General Electric Co. in 2021 dismantled the final coal-powered plant in the state. The pair of environmental groups rated it the dirtiest plant in Oregon in 2020.

The two sister groups



Michael Durham/Contributed Photo, File

Portland General Electric’s Carty Generating Station in Boardman came in at No. 3 on a list Thursday, June 16, 2022, detailing Oregon’s top 10 climate-polluting power plants.

looked at data from the Environmental Protection Agency’s eGRID, a comprehensive database that shows the environmental characteristics of nearly all of the nation’s power plants.

According to the report, Oregon’s top 10 most climate-polluting plants in 2020 were responsible for 98.4% of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from the power sector while generating 32.2% of total electricity. The total emissions of Oregon’s top 10 power

plants are 9.7 million metric tons, which is equivalent to 2 million cars on the road for a year.

While none of Oregon’s power plants fell in the top 100 dirtiest in the country, this doesn’t mean the power plants weren’t in the clear. The top operating plant, Calpine Corporation’s Hermiston Power Plant in Hermiston, produces more than 1.56 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

With coal plants out of the picture, next up could be nat-

ural gas plants. These plants, mostly operated by Portland General Electric, also are changing.

“Our natural gas plants constitute a part of our generation fleet that is changing, and will continue to do so,” Allison Dobscha, a spokesperson for PGE, said. “These plants will serve a different purpose in the future than they do today, serving more as capacity resources that can provide flexibility and reliability when needed.”

The remaining nine plants on the list use methane gas, and the proposed shift away from gas to cleaner energy is something Meiffren-Swango is hopeful for.

“This list underscores how methane is an extremely potent gas,” the Environment Oregon director said. “We will figure out better ways to power our lives before it’s too late.”

With Oregon Gov. Kate Brown signing a clean energy bill that promises 100% renewable energy for electricity by 2040, Meiffren-Swango said she believes that change is coming, and soon.

Biden approves raise for federal firefighters

BY AAMER MADHANI

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has signed off on giving federal wildland firefighters a hefty raise for the next two fiscal years, a move that affects more than 16,000 firefighters and comes as much of the West braces for a difficult wildfire season.

Pay raises for the federal firefighters had been included in last year’s \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, but they had been held up as Biden administration officials studied recruitment and retention data to decide where to deliver them.

The White House said

the move announced Tuesday, June 21 is intended to set “federal agencies on a path to continue working with stakeholders towards an updated, competitive, and equitable pay structure, along with a support system that will address the many challenges that have plagued our wildland firefighter workforce for decades.”

The legislation stipulated that the \$600 million in the infrastructure bill to increase pay for wildland firefighters should go to all those firefighters provided that they are “located within a specified geographic area in which it is difficult to recruit or retain a federal wildland firefighter.”

The Biden administration in the end decided on a raise for all the federal wildland firefighters over the next two years, according to a senior administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity ahead of the formal announcement. The official said the infrastructure bill offered enough money to provide across-the-board raises but the administration was looking to work with Congress to provide a long-term fix on the firefighters’ pay.

“I will do everything in my power, including working with Congress to secure long-term funding, to make sure these heroes keep earning the

paychecks — and dignity — they deserve,” Biden said in a statement.

The infrastructure law also authorized agencies to increase the base salary of federal wildland firefighters by \$20,000 per year or 50% of their current base salary, whichever is lower, through 2023. The firefighters will receive back pay for the raises, dating to October 2021.

The National Federation of Federal Employees union had been urging the Biden administration to interpret the statute as broadly as possible, as firefighters across the country were struggling to make ends meet.

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