

Psilocybin

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The Baker City Council has also decided to put a psilocybin-banning measure on the Nov. 8 ballot. Councilors made that decision on July 12, and they're slated to review the text of a ballot measure during their July 26 meeting.

County commissioners had a public hearing prior to their decision on Wednesday.

Dan Garrick spoke in favor of the proposed ban in unincorporated parts of the county.

"I'm definitely in favor of banning this," said Garrick, who will run against Shane Alderson in the Nov. 8 election for the county commission chairman position.

"I don't see any good that can come out of this," Garrick told commissioners. "Marijuana has already proved that it's a bad deal and all these people that claim that it heals anything and everything is a bunch of baloney."

County Counsel Kim Mosier told com-



Bennett



Harvey



Nichols

missioners that although the state's new psilocybin rules are similar to medical marijuana statutes, a significant difference is that retail sale of psilocybin is not allowed. People 21 and older, who don't need a prescription, can ingest psilocybin only at a state-licensed center. The state expects to start taking applications for service centers, as well as psilocybin production and processing facilities, in 2023.

Mosier said the Oregon Health Authority is working on rules to regulate psilocybin. The agency is set to release a new draft of the proposed rules in September.

"So, we don't have rules that tell us even how this would be regulated if we were to not opt out," Mosier told commissioners.

Commissioner Bruce Nichols said he has received emails from people in support of Measure 109.

But he said that doesn't mean he endorses its use.

"They say there's a lot of medical need for it and it works. Now, whether that's true or not, I don't know," Nichols said.

He said he spoke with Shari Selander, chief executive officer at New Directions Northwest, and she told him she needs more time to review the research.

"There is an option, from what I understand, that we can put a moratorium on this for up to two years before we refer it to the voters," Nichols said.

Mosier said the county could propose a moratorium for any period, but that, like an outright ban, would need to be approved by voters. She said the concept behind a two-year mor-

atorium is that it would give cities and counties time to see how the OHA rules are working.

Mosier also told commissioners that the new law allows county commissioners to repeal a voter-approved ban.

"If you were to go ahead with the ordinance as it's drafted and send it to the electors and the electors were to approve it and then it becomes permanent, the statute allows a repeal of the opt out ordinance without an election," she said.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said that if the voters overwhelmingly approve a ban on psilocybin in November, he would not be inclined to later reverse their decision.

Commissioner Mark Bennett said that countries that have legalized psilocybin, including the Netherlands, have been "reining back" their laws due to harmful effects of legalization.

Commissioners will have another public hearing on the subject at their next regular meeting, Aug. 3 at 9:30 a.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

Watershed

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Fire risk

Discussions among Forest Service and city officials about the potential for a major fire in the watershed date back more than a quarter century.

Although lightning has sparked several fires inside the watershed during that period, firefighters have quickly doused all of those blazes.

But Cikanek said there hasn't been a large blaze in the watershed since the 1880s. And based on a study of fire scars on old trees in the area done by researchers from the University of Washington in the mid 1990s, such a blaze, based on historical intervals, likely is overdue.

The city gets most of its water from a dozen springs and streams in the watershed, which spans an area from Elk Creek at the south end to Goodrich Creek at the north.

Major sources of water include Salmon, Mill, Marble and Goodrich creeks, as well as several springs.

Those sources produce exceptionally clean water. The city is one of just a few in Oregon that doesn't have to filter its surface water sources to meet federal clarity standards.

But city officials fear that a large fire in the watershed would foul streams with mud and ash washing off denuded slopes during rainstorms following the blaze.

Such a blaze could force the city to rely on alternate sources of water — the city has one well now and a second well is expected to come online this fall — and likely lead to the city needing to build a water filtration plant, which officials estimate would cost more than \$10 million.

The basic concept behind the watershed project, Cikanek said, is two-fold.

First, through a combination of cutting trees and lighting prescribed fires, the project is designed to reduce the fuel loads and make it less likely that a fire starting outside, but near, the watershed would burn into the watershed.

The project area covers almost 23,000 acres — more than half of that outside the watershed. Most of the land outside the watershed is to the south or east, areas where, based on past fires and prevailing summer winds, the risk is higher for a fire to



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald, File

Baker City's watershed covers 10,000 acres on the east slopes of the Elkhorn Mountains west of Baker City, ranging from near Elkhorn Peak, the highest point at far right in the photo, south (left) for several miles.

burn into the watershed, Cikanek said.

Second, inside the watershed the project calls for similar work — cutting and piling trees less than 10 inches in diameter, burning the piles and lighting prescribed fires. This work would be similar to what crews have done over the past few years in the northern Elkhorns, including along the Anthony Lakes Highway, but would be more "aggressive" in reducing the number of trees, Cikanek said.

The goal, he said, is to create fuel breaks, primarily along the several major ridges that extend from the Elkhorn crest east toward Baker Valley, where the relative lack of fuel would in theory deprive a fire of momentum.

These fuel breaks would constitute a series of "defensible spaces" that fire crews could use as anchor points in their effort to corral a wildfire. Limiting the effects of a fire to one or two streams could allow the city to continue to divert enough water, from unburned streams and springs, to meet residents' needs, Cikanek said.

The scoping letter describes fuel breaks as a "location that a wildfire would not be able to carry through the overstory canopy, would have

limited ladder fuels to create crown fires, and surface fuel loadings would produce fire intensities that would be generally confined to a surface fire where firefighters would have a high likelihood of stopping the fire spread safely."

Arvid Andersen, a former Baker City Council member, said he's gratified that the Forest Service has progressed from discussing the watershed to designing a large-scale project.

"Kendall has definitely addressed the issues very carefully, very professionally," he said, referring to Cikanek.

Andersen, who is a professional forestry consultant, made protecting the watershed from fire a priority during his four-year term as a councilor, which ended Dec. 31, 2020.

Andersen called the proposed project a "really valid strategy," and he credited Cikanek with "finally getting some traction" on the effort to protect the watershed.

Andersen said he believes the potential cost of building a filtration plant would be an excessive burden on city residents, and one that can be avoided by reducing the amount of fuel, including trees weakened or killed by bark beetles and other insects.

Open house scheduled

A public open house for the Baker City watershed project is set for Aug. 17 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Baker County Events Center, 2600 East St. in Baker City.

Training

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The Karolskis object to aspects of the training that their daughter, Sheylin, who recently turned 16, attended.

Bryan Karolski said Sheylin was one of eight students, ages 15 to 18 and including boys and girls, who attended the class at Baker High School as part of the school district's Youth Transition Program (YTP), which provides job skill opportunities for students with special educational needs.

Students are selling ice cream from an insulated cooler attached to a special bicycle.

The personal hygiene training was one of the courses students took before starting work. The health department didn't charge the district for the presentation.

Bryan Karolski said he assumed that personal hygiene would focus on such things as proper handwashing and the importance of showering before coming to work.

But Karolski, who was not present during the event, said his daughter told him the health department employee gave detailed descriptions of sexual activity.

He said his daughter was "really upset" and "embarrassed and ashamed" about the episode, particularly about being around boys.

"As a parent, I just about flipped out," Karolski said. "This was really traumatic for my child."

He said he and his wife have "reached out to a couple of local attorneys and are waiting to hear back from them" regarding a potential lawsuit.

Karolski said he has talked with parents of some of the other students who attended the presentation, and that they are also upset about what happened.

Chancey, who also did not attend the presentation, said the former health department employee, who she

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— Bryan Karolski, whose daughter, Sheylin, 16, attended July 7 presentation

didn't name, was expecting, based on the request from the school district, a group with an age range of 18 to 20.

Chancey said there was "a brief moment when family planning services" were discussed, but that the employee ceased presenting that topic when an adult attending the presentation made that request.

Karolski said his daughter told him that the instructor talked about vaginas and penises, and about how to clean the tip of the penis prior to sexual intercourse.

He said his daughter also told him that the instructor asked the students whether any of them was sexually active.

Karolski said the health department employee brought condoms, and offered to bring a wooden model of a penis to demonstrate how to put on a condom, although there were no models or other props at the presentation.

Chancey said the employee did have condoms, but did not distribute them to the students.

She said the employee did hand out hygiene products such as soap, shampoo and toothbrushes.

Lindsey McDowell, public information and communications coordinator for the Baker School District, said the sexual nature of some of the training was "inappropriate" given that the sole purpose of the presentation was personal hygiene.

"The topic that came up should never have been covered," McDowell said.

Dispute about what led to discussion

There is a discrepancy between the health department and the school district about what might have led to the incident.

Bennett said his understanding, after talking with Chancey, is that a district employee, in requesting the personal hygiene presentation, said something along the lines of also expanding the discussion.

But Janie Radinovich-Brose, who is one of the school district's youth transition specialists and is helping to oversee the Youth Transition Program, said she was present when a district employee phoned the health department to request the presentation.

Radinovich-Brose said the district employee made no mention of sexual education topics or anything other than basic personal hygiene.

Bennett said Chancey sent to the school district a draft version of a letter apologizing for the incident, with the intention that the district forward the letter to students who attended the July 7 presentation.

But McDowell said district officials disagree with some aspects of the letter, related to the question of whether the incident resulted from a misunderstanding stemming from the district's initial request for the presentation.

McDowell said "my understanding is there wasn't a misunderstanding."

She said a discussion of sexual topics should not have happened during a personal hygiene course, regardless of the age of the participants.

McDowell said district officials didn't think it was appropriate to send the county's letter, in its draft form, to students and their parents.

Neither the district nor the county would provide a copy of the draft letter. Bennett said he decided to with-

draw the letter and instead make a formal apology, through an interview with the Herald, to the students and parents.

Bennett said the situation is "difficult to sort out" in part because the former health department employee can't be compelled to talk about the incident.

He said Chancey talked to the employee after the July 7 presentation, but because Chancey hadn't yet heard about the Karolskis' concerns, she didn't broach the matter of what the employee had discussed during the presentation.

"We're truly sorry that it happened. We believe strongly that reproductive education is the province of the parent. I want the community to know this is a one-off event. The health department cares about the community and respects parental rights."

— Mark Bennett, Baker County commissioner

Radinovich-Brose said a district employee who attended the presentation was "caught off guard" when the health department employee started talking about sexual topics.

The presenter stopped that discussion when the district employee asked her to do so, Radinovich-Brose said.

She said she supports the health department and has always been pleased with its presentations, which is why she suggested the district ask the agency to do the personal hygiene

Pass Road, that is not designated as roadless, and commercial logging is proposed in that corridor, Cikanek said.

The project also calls for a reconstruction of the Marble Creek Pass Road, which would make it easier for trucks to haul logs, as well as improving access for the public to the pass, which is the southern terminus for the Elkhorn Crest National Recreation Trail.

The current road is rocky and rough, and better suited to high-clearance vehicles. Crews did make some improvements to the road last fall, however, and it's in better shape now than it has been for decades.

Proposed schedule

Cikanek said Wallowa-Whitman employees will be working on the draft environmental assessment through 2022.

He expects to make a final decision on the project in the late winter or early spring of 2023, and work could start on the ground in the summer of 2023.

Cikanek said that although the Forest Service is leading the watershed project, its progress is a tribute to cooperation among multiple officials and agencies, including Michelle Owen, director of the Baker City public works department, Doni Bruland of Baker County's natural resources department, the Oregon Department of Forestry, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service and the OSU Extension Service.

Earlier this year, Owen, in response to the Forest Service's announcement that it was working on a watershed project, said: "The Baker City watershed is a major asset to the City of Baker City and our community. We are partnering with the U.S. Forest Service to make the watershed less susceptible to a catastrophic wildfire. Removing excessive fuels and providing for fire breaks along the pipeline road are really the City's top priorities and in line with the City Council's goals. This type of a project has been discussed for many years and it's great that there is finally some real progress being made."

Cikanek also noted that Oregon's congressional delegation has supported, and continues to support, the effort to reduce the risk of fire in the watershed.

training.

"It's very unfortunate that this happened," Radinovich-Brose said. "We've learned from this."

Health department administrator writing new policy

To ensure a similar mistake doesn't happen again, Bennett said Chancey is writing a policy that will include, among other things, the requirement that requests, from the school district or other organizations, for health department training be made in writing.

The goal, Bennett said, is to ensure that the requester's expectations are clear. The written request must also include participants' ages, so health department employees can ensure the presentation is appropriate, he said.

The county's attorney will review the proposed policy and forward it to commissioners for final approval, Bennett said.

Parent pleased with summer work program

Bryan Karolski said that although he's angry about the incident, and believes the health department should be held accountable, he's very happy with the school district program and that Sheylin is able to participate.

"Other than (the training) it's a positive experience, and she absolutely loves it," he said. "She's learning a lot. It's done my daughter a world of good."

Both school district and county officials said they believe the agencies continue to have a good relationship.

"We really value our partnership with the health department," McDowell said.

Bennett said he hopes the single incident doesn't diminish the health department's reputation, particularly after its extensive work during the pandemic, or its connection with the school district and the community.

"We value our partnership with the school district," Bennett said.