

## Convoy

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online auction and drove to Oklahoma to pick it up, which earned the bus the nickname "Sooner."

Her brother, Kenny Adams, had already been collecting military memorabilia, including vehicles, for about 50 years, a collection that started with their father's mementoes from the Navy.

Their vehicles are two of the largest in the current convoy.

Because of the trip's extended length and the bus' small gas tank, Ann has to fill up with diesel every night, which can be quite the process when her brother has to fill his two-and-a-half-ton 1951 M35 Command Center vehicle from the Korean War at the same time.

Each one takes up the space of two pumps, and both garnered compliments and second glances from those filling civilian vehicles when the rigs lumbered into the Maverik station on Wednesday afternoon.

## Mine

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The area is one of Baker County's historic mining districts, and includes the former town of Clarksville, founded in the early 1860s.

K&E Excavation has a permit that authorizes miners to store water in three settling ponds, but not to allow water to flow into Clarks Creek, which is close by, according to DEQ.

"The mine is permitted to discharge wastewater to a closed-loop three-pond system," Laura Gleim, a public affairs specialist at DEQ's Eastern Region office in Bend, wrote in an email to the Herald.

"What our inspectors discovered when they went out there is that the mine had created two additional unpermitted wastewater ponds, which are connected to both groundwater and surface water," Gleim wrote.

"The mine was pumping wastewater from its permitted ponds (which are supposed to be self-contained, closed-loop ponds) to the 'east wastewater groundwater pond/infiltration pond,' then through an unpermitted conveyance ditch to the 'west wastewater groundwater pond,' which is fed by groundwater and so is a water of the state. Wastewater then overflows from that west pond into conveyances that reach Clarks Creek."

According to the violation notice, a representative from K&E Excavating sent multiple engineering reports in the winter and spring of 2022 showing the closed-loop system with three ponds. None of those showed that a pump had been installed in one of the ponds "to discharge overflow water" into the creek.

DEQ officials inspected the mine on May 11, 2022, and according to the violation notice, they found that water was flowing from one pond, "through a series of wetlands, channels and other conveyances associated with Clarks Creek before eventually discharging to Clarks Creek."

Kerry Kuenzi, president of K&E Excavating, had not returned a phone message by press time on Friday, Aug. 26.

The DEQ notice breaks down the total fine based on several types of violations.

- Exceeding the pH limit in settling ponds based on reports the company submitted to DEQ. There were 14 violations between Aug. 16, 2021, and Dec. 8, 2021, according to DEQ. The total fine is \$5,400.
- Discharging wastewater without a permit, for a fine of \$16,800.
- Discharging stormwater without a permit, for a fine of \$23,187.
- Making "false representations on documents required to be submitted to DEQ," a reference to the engineering plans that didn't show the use of a pump. The fine is \$12,000.

### Company's second DEQ fine in 2 years

In May 2021 the DEQ issued an \$8,400 fine to K&E Excavating for releasing about 2,000 gallons of wastewater from a pond at a different mine in Baker County in December 2020.

The water flowed into the Burnt River, according to DEQ. That incident happened at the High Bar mine along Pine Creek about 6 miles northeast of Hereford. The area is several miles northwest of the Buckland mine.

The company reached an agreement in which it paid a \$4,200 fine, according to DEQ.



A tanker drops retardant ahead of the Crockets Knob fire, on the Malheur National Forest north of Prairie City, on Thursday, Aug. 25, 2022.

# Blaze on Malheur forest grows rapidly

## Smoke from Crockets Knob fire drifted over Baker County Thursday evening

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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Baker County hasn't had much in the way of wildfires over the past week but on Thursday evening, Aug. 25, the county got some smoke.

A plume from a lightning-sparked fire more than 30 miles away in Grant County, near the Middle Fork John Day River, partially blotted the sun as it sank below the Elkhorn Mountains.

The Crockets Knob fire in the Greenhorn Mountains grew from about 225 acres on Thursday morning to an estimated 1,000 acres by 7 p.m. that day, said Courtney Wood, a public information officer at the fire camp.

The fire was spurred by gusty west and north winds, Wood said.

Although the blaze grew substantially, Wood said fire behavior was moderate rather than extreme. That's mainly because

the fire is burning not in a mature forest but in an area that was scorched by the Summit fire in 1996.

That blaze killed most of the mature trees, and in the ensuing quarter century a dense forest of young lodgepole pine has colonized the area, interspersed with clumps of snowbrush up to 10 feet tall, Wood said.

The snowbrush, which can be all but impenetrable, has made it difficult for firefighters to reach parts of the blaze, Wood said.

Crews on the ground have been helped, though, by a variety of aerial resources, including a pair of heavy air tankers that dropped retardant Thursday along the fire's south flank, where the blaze was spreading, Wood said.

The fire is in a remote area and is not threatening any structures, Wood said.

A larger incident command team has been ordered to take over from the current team, she said.

The Forest Service has instituted an area closure due to the fire which includes about 5,100 acres, as well as sections of several roads and trails. A map and other details are available at [www.fs.usda.gov/malheur](http://www.fs.usda.gov/malheur).

## Fire district tries again to get tax levy

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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The Baker Rural Fire Protection District, which came just short of passing a 5-year property tax levy in the May election, will try again Nov. 8.

But this time the district is asking voters for less money.

The May levy would have boosted property taxes within the district, which covers much of Baker Valley between Haines and Baker City, but not either city, by \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

The measure failed by 362 votes to 329.

The most common concern district officials heard this spring was that the levy would cost property owners too much, said Collin Kaseberg, a member of the district's board of directors.

The measure on the Nov. 8 ballot reflects the financial complaints, Kaseberg said.

This version calls for boosting property taxes by 75 cents for \$1,000 of assessed value.

For the owner of a property with an assessed value of \$250,000 (assessed value is different from real market value, the latter typically a higher figure), the new levy would boost taxes by \$187.50 per year during the levy's 5-year duration.

That's \$62.50 less per year than the levy that failed in May — a difference of \$312.50 over the life of the levy.

Kaseberg said the board, after reviewing the May elec-

tion results and considering the concerns district residents cited, decided it was necessary to trim the amount requested through the levy.

He said the new levy is a "bare bones" request, raising just enough to keep the district operating as it is.

Reducing the tax increase, and thus cutting the revenue the levy would raise, any more wouldn't solve the district's budget issues, Kaseberg said.

The failed May levy would have boosted the district's budget by an estimated \$182,000 the first year, with amounts projected to increase, due to rising property values, to \$187,500, \$193,000, \$199,000 and \$204,500 for the four subsequent years — a total of \$966,000.

The new, smaller levy would produce an estimated \$726,000 over 5 years — \$240,000 less.

### District's budget issues

Kaseberg said the district, since it was formed in 1983, has relied almost solely on a permanent property tax levy of 67 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

That levy, which has never been increased and would continue even if voters approve the new 5-year levy, yields about \$125,000 per year now, although Kaseberg said after reductions for people who pay early and other factors, the district actually receives a little more than \$100,000.

## Fish

Continued from A1

Lemanski sent several fish carcasses to ODFW's fish pathology lab for examination. He said he hopes to have results within a couple weeks.

There are several potential causes, he said, any of which alone, or a combination, could have killed the trout, which were released in the 22-acre lake on July 26.

Possibilities include accidental injuries during loading, transporting, and releasing fish, mechanical failure of instrumentation on the transport trucks, shock from the difference in water temperature between the truck and the lake, and possible infection or disease exacerbated by any one of these factors.

"We're trying to piece it together," Lemanski said.

He said it might not be possible to pinpoint the

cause of the fish deaths.

Lemanski said there is no evidence, however, that the problem is not solely with the lake conditions, or any mechanical failures or issues during transport — the dieoff seems to have been limited to some of the fish released July 26, and is likely a combination of a few factors.

He said ODFW didn't receive any reports of dead fish following a release of 2,000 trophy rainbow trout in Anthony Lake, from the same hatchery, three weeks earlier, on July 5.

Nor were there any reports of dead fish at nearby Grande Ronde Lake, where rainbow trout were also released during July.

Anglers have continued to catch fish in Anthony Lake, Lemanski said, and he said the lake remains a good place to hook rainbow or brook trout.

Lemanski said ODFW began to get reports from

anglers soon after the July 26 release, including one report from a Forest Service employee who took photos of dead fish.

The dead trout were concentrated near the boat ramp at the southeast corner of the lake — which is where the hatchery truck discharges its load of rainbow trout.

Lemanski said it doesn't appear that a large number of fish were dead before they were released, however, since there were no reports of dead fish floating near the boat ramp during or immediately after the release.

He suspects most of the fish died within a day or less, based on the timing of the reports.

Lemanski encouraged anglers and others who see more than a few dead fish in one area to document the scene with photographs and a tally of the fish, then report the incident to ODFW by calling 541-963-2138.

## School

Continued from A1

"There is a lot of passion about getting that building done," Lair said on Thursday, Aug. 25.

The school board voted March 3 to hire Lair, a 2004 Baker High School graduate and former math and language arts teacher at Baker Middle School.

She started her new job earlier this summer.

A priority for the district is hiring a contractor to build the 5,000-square-foot cafeteria/multipurpose building at the middle school, which lacks a cafeteria. The project also includes upgrades to the school's heating and ventilation system, and improvements to the building's security.

The district estimated the total cost at about \$4.5 million.

But the one bid the school board considered during its Aug. 18 meeting, from Sid Johnson & Co. of Baker City, was for \$9.1 million, more than double the district's projected cost and budget.

Accepting that bid would have left the district unable to do most of the other work that officials pledged to do when they asked voters to approve the bond measure, Lair said.

The board voted unanimously to reject the lone bid.

Lindsey McDowell, the district's public information and communications coordinator, emphasized on Thursday that district officials believe Sid Johnson & Co.'s bid was a realistic reflection of the current construction market, one that takes in supply chain issues, rising costs and uncertain availability of both materials and labor.

"The economic climate is to blame for a lot of this," McDowell said.

Julie Huntington, chair of the Baker School Board, said the \$9.1 million bid "caught us all off guard."

Huntington agreed with McDowell that the bid, though fair, dramatically demonstrated the escalating costs of construction.

"It reminded us of just how dramatically COVID affected all areas of our world, including the incredibly rising costs," Huntington said on Friday, Aug. 26. "We are in a different world than the world when we passed the bond. We can't forget that."

Receiving the bid, Huntington said, has forced the district and the board to "stop and regroup."

She said the board's goal is to ensure that the district does the work, including the middle school cafeteria, that the district outlined when it promoted the bond measure.

"As a board we know what the intent of the bond was, and what people are hoping to see out of it," Huntington said. "Clearly (the cafeteria) is still part of what we want to see happen. It is near and dear to our hearts. But so are the safety and security issues. I think in some way we're going to get what we wanted. It may not be quite what we envisioned."

### District plans to try new strategy

The \$4 million bond was the first voter-approved measure for district capital improvements since 1948.

Although the cafeteria/multipurpose building at the middle school is the most expensive single project on the list, the district also plans to replace the heating, air conditioning and ventilation systems, and upgrade security, at all schools, and replace the roof at South Baker Intermediate.

Lair said the district's new strategy, which will be unveiled during a public forum as part of a special board meeting set for Sept. 12 at noon at the district office, 2090 Fourth St. and by Zoom, is what's known as a construction manager/general contractor approach.

Rather than put out the project for bids, as the district did earlier this summer, the idea is to hire a contractor that can work with the district to come up with an affordable proposal for the middle school project that also meets the district's goals, Lair said.

McDowell said she believes that changing to a construction manager/general contractor method will help the district devise an affordable plan for the middle school project.

"This shift will allow us to work with the construction manager/general contractor as a team partner during the pre-construction period," McDowell wrote in an email to the Herald. "It should also give us more predictability on construction costs and flexibility on choosing scope based on market conditions and subcontractor availability and interest."

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The cafeteria and other projects are separate from the work that's been happening this summer at the middle school to make the gym more able to withstand the effects of earthquakes. The seismic upgrades are not part of the bond measure.

### Bond revenue combined with other sources

The \$4 million from the taxpayer-approved bond is less than half the district's total budget for building improvements.

The district also has a \$4 million grant from the state, \$2 million from its capital projects budget, \$2 million from the state Student Investment Act, \$1.5 million from federal COVID-19 aid, and \$1 million from another state program earmarked for work at the Baker Early Learning Center (BELC), which is in the former North Baker School building.

The \$2 million from the Student Investment Act will help to pay for security upgrades at schools, including new entry vestibules at South Baker and at Brooklyn Primary, McDowell said.

The federal COVID-19 aid will be used for the new HVAC systems, as improving ventilation to reduce the spread of infectious diseases is one of the goals of federal legislation during the pandemic.

Although district officials and the school board are focusing on the middle school cafeteria and other work, current cost estimates for other bond projects as of Aug. 1 also exceed by a considerable amount the district's original budget.

Work at South Baker, for instance, was budgeted at \$1.8 million, but the current cost estimate is \$3 million.

The budget for work at Baker Early Learning Center (BELC), in the former North Baker School, was \$1.1 million, but the estimated cost is slightly more than \$2 million. The budget for that building is \$1.4 million.

The bond oversight committee, whose 11 members were appointed by the school board in June 2021, reviewed the new cost estimates recently and made the following recommendations:

- The middle school cafeteria should be the first priority.
- Look at reducing the scope of work for the HVAC system at Baker Early Learning Center to stay within the \$1.4 million budget.
- Install safety/security projects at all buildings.
- District to evaluate additional funding resources available to complete as many bond projects as possible.
- Baker High School gym/auditorium HVAC is lowest priority.
- District is reviewing available funds for replacing roofs at BELC, Keating, and Haines, which were not in the original bond scope.

pany did not have any comment on the matter.

The fires were investigated by the Bureau of Land Management with assistance from the U.S. Forest Service.

The U.S. was represented in the civil complaint against Idaho Power by assistant U.S. Attorneys Carla McClurg and Alexis Lien for the U.S. Attorney's Office in the District of Oregon.



Huntington



Lair