

Educators, reps talk equity for rural schools

Four state legislators hear out constituents

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

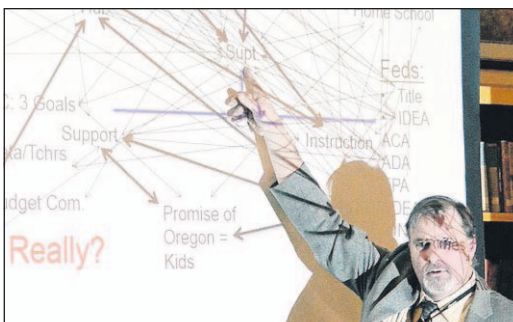
JOHN DAY – Educators emphasized the needs of rural schools at an Education Forum that drew four state legislators to John Day last week.

It was the first meeting of its kind to be held at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School.

State Sen. Ted Ferrioli and Reps. Cliff Bentz, John Huffman and Greg Barreto were on hand to gather information about the needs of small schools in Eastern Oregon.

Packed into the Grant Union library,

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Baker School District Superintendent Walt Wegener shows his views of what happens when local control of school is lost as he spoke at the Education Forum.

The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

Court leaves fate of HR job to budget panel

Commissioners grapple with cost, liability

By Scotta Callister
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY – The Grant County Court has agreed to pencil a full-time human resources officer into the county's 2015-16 budget proposal, but it's far from a done deal.

At its Jan. 21 meeting, the Court voted 2-1 to have Treasurer Kathy Smith put the job in the budget draft, and then let the county budget committee make the final call on funding the position. The committee, which includes the three Court members and three citizen members, is expected to begin its deliberations in March.

"If it's pared down in the budget discussion, so be it," said County Judge Scott Myers.

Commissioner Boyd Britton cast the dissenting vote, saying the county can do without a full-time "bureaucrat."

"We can't afford this right now," he said of the estimated \$79,000 job.

"We have CityCounty Insurance helping us. We have Mr. Whitford helping us," he added, referring to the city's insurance company and Trent Whitford, the labor lawyer who has worked on county union disputes in the past.

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Amy Benson, USGS photo

The European ear snail gets its name from the ear-like shell in which it lives.

Snail slips into JD River system

So far the snail is just invasive, not noxious

By Scotta Callister
Blue Mountain Eagle

LONG CREEK – A laboratory recently confirmed that a new foreign visitor – the European ear snail – has made its way into the John Day River system.

The North Fork John Day Watershed Council, announcing the find this month, said the snail was collected during regular monitoring work on the Middle Fork John Day River on Sept. 24.

Valeen Madden, the council's project coordinator, found the snail in a drift net that had been set out near Bear Creek. Such nets are put in the current for six-hour periods to collect insects and crustaceans. The collected invertebrates are sent to a lab for identification and evaluation.

Rithron Laboratories of Missoula, Mont., provided

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EO file photo

The U.S. Forest Service's proposed management plan for the Blue Mountain National Forest has drawn concerns for forest advocacy groups throughout the region.

FS regroups with public on Blue Mountains plan

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

When the U.S. Forest Service unveiled its proposed, revised land management plan for the Blue Mountains National Forests early last year, the agency received more than 1,100 comments from concerned groups and individuals.

Most of the feedback was less than positive.

Consider, for example, the sharp rebuke from Forest Access for All, which panned the proposal as "a recipe for failure," or the Eastern Oregon Counties Association, which rejected each of six plan alternatives as "unfounded."

"Folks weren't really happy with where we were," said Kevin Martin, supervisor on the Umatilla National Forest. "The question is: 'Where do we go, and how do we get there?'"

With support from the Pacific Northwest Region Office, the Forest Service is taking a step back to re-engage with Eastern Oregonians before moving

forward on a new plan that will guide land management on the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur forests for the next 10-15 years.

About 40 people attended a recent meeting at the Umatilla forest headquarters in Pendleton to discuss how they can reconcile the multitude of interests – everything from conservation to timber and recreation – and come up with a balanced solution that works for everyone.

That's no easy task. All together, the Blue Mountains National Forests make up 4.9 million acres of prime hunting, fishing and hiking trails, while also providing logs for the local mills and habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Yet officials and advocates left the meeting on Jan. 8 with a newfound sense of optimism. Grant County Commissioner Boyd Britton even issued a rare compliment to the Forest Service.

"I think we really plowed through some new ground," Britton said following the meeting. "We have the opportunity

to have a really, really big-time impact on our plan."

What comes next, Martin said, is still up in the air. It could mean modifying one of the agency's alternatives, or crafting an entirely new proposal.

The Forest Service was on schedule to select its final plan by April 2016. Instead, it will continue reaching out for ideas on how to solve difficult issues.

"As long as we're moving in a positive direction, I think we'll get the time," Martin said.

The forest plan does not make any project-level decisions. Rather, it is a strategic document that identifies desired conditions and objectives. It must also follow federal laws, such as the Wilderness Act and Clean Water Act.

The goals of the plan are three-fold: to promote social, economic and ecological well-being.

"There's a variety of ways you can lay out a plan," Martin said. "We want people to work with us, be creative and work together."

Social well-being

The Blue Mountains are an integral part of the lifestyle in rural Eastern Oregon. Outdoor recreation is a major draw, not only for residents but for visitors from across the country.

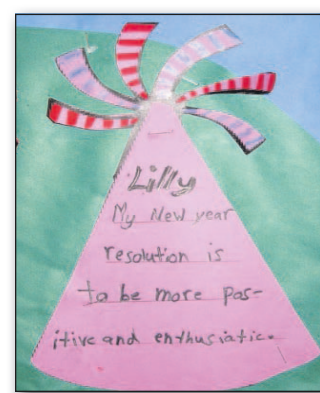
According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, 196,000 people hunt in Oregon every year. Of those, 15,000 come from outside the state. All together, they spend \$248 million annually, supporting 3,700 jobs.

One of the top concerns in the forests is maintaining a road system that provides access while protecting sensitive habitats. In its proposed plan, the Forest Service claims the current road system is not sustainable, given the level of funding and growing backlog of maintenance needs.

Art Waugh, a member of the John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council representing recreation interests, said the proposal appears to set

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STUDENT ART



Lilly Walczyk
Grade 5
Humbolt Elementary

Word on the Street

Are you pumped up about next Sunday's Super Bowl?



Eagle file photos

"Yes, because the Seahawks are going to win it two years in a row."

Brenda Percy
Canyon City



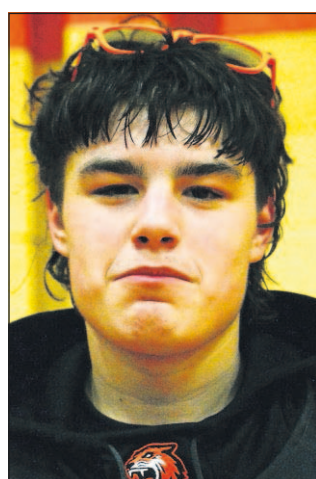
"Yes, because my favorite team is the Seattle Seahawks, and I'm hoping they beat the Patriots – and the Patriots use balls that are correctly inflated."

Tyler Moodenbaugh
Long Creek



"No, I haven't watched the Super Bowl in years."

Shannon Springer
Prairie City



"Yes, I think Tom Brady is going to pull out the W for the Patriots."

Tanner Walczyk
Dayville



"I'm pretty excited about it because I don't have to work that day, and I plan to go to a Super Bowl party with lots of great food. Go Seahawks!"

Stevie Porter
John Day

