

ISSUES

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“We try to see it all,” Ferguson said.

Despite only being on the job for two years, Ferguson said he’s developed good relationships with ranchers around the area. He knows most of his permittees on a first-name basis, and they meet regularly in the field to review grazing plans and check forage conditions.

It’s around this time of year when Ferguson said he meets with ranchers to set grazing schedules and add up fees for the coming season. The BLM uses what are known as animal unit months, or AUMs, to determine its grazing fees. AUMs are measured by the amount of forage animals need for one month, and Ferguson said the limits are very strict.

“You can’t authorize more AUMs without (environmental) analysis,” he said.

The BLM recently adjusted its fees to \$2.11 per AUM. The Forest Service, which is under the Department of Agriculture as opposed to the Department of the Interior, charges \$1.69 per month per cow-calf pair.

Ranchers must also follow specific conditions laid out in their permits, which might include rotating pastures, maintaining fences and protecting vegetative cover for sensitive



File photo

Pickers stand outside of the John Day Senior Center Jan. 26 before a meeting where refuge occupiers were expected to speak before being arrested en route. One of the picketers said a militia member from outside the county tried to prevent local picketers from entering the meeting.

species like sage grouse.

“Orderly management of the range is our goal,” Ferguson said.

Local control

The problem, according to Mark Mackenzie, is not with local rangeland managers like Ferguson. Rather, it’s mismanagement and political pressure up the chain of command.

Mackenzie, who runs 900 head of cattle south of Jordan Valley, is largely dependent on federal AUMs. But with so many layers of new protections, he said local land management is becoming cumbersome. And when a change is needed on the range, he said the agency will likely be taken to court.

“It’s all driven by special interest groups,” Mackenzie said.

“We’ve let the management of these resources become commandeered by the courts.”

Mackenzie figures grazing has fallen by about 40 percent since 1960 in the Vale District. Those losses create an economic ripple in small towns like Jordan Valley — population 180 — that threatens their very existence.

Grazing is also a management tool itself, Mackenzie said. Without grazing, grasses can become overgrown and increase the fuel load for large wildfires — like the Soda Fire that spilled over into Oregon from Idaho last year.

The occupation of the wildlife refuge was unfortunate, Mackenzie said, but the militants’ message of local control resonates strongly.

“We need the control of natural resources management back at the local level,” he said.

“Let local people have a say in what goes on in their communities and counties.”

Ferguson did say the BLM is trying to be more proactive with fighting rangeland fires in the West. Oregon, Idaho and Nevada are collaborating on a program creating strategic fuel breaks where firefighters can safely fight fires before they get too big and destructive.

“The whole goal is to reduce the size of these fires,” he said.

No flexibility

Andy Bentz, a former Malheur County sheriff and owner of Bentz Solutions in Ontario, agrees the BLM doesn’t have enough flexibility to do proper management. He pointed to lawsuits from environmental groups as what’s hobbling the agency.

“Yelling at the BLM is like yelling at a fireman when your house is on fire,” Bentz said. “They can’t make on-the-ground annual changes, because it opens them up to challenges and litigation.”

Bentz, whose family has ranches in southeast Oregon since 1916, said there is enough local expertise to manage the lands for multiple use. But when the agency tries to adapt to Mother Nature, adjusting seasons or stocking rates, Bentz said they face another lawsuit. He blamed the Equal Access to Justice Act, which compensates attorney fees if groups can prove their litigation is justified.

“They have to find a way to get flexibility back into management,” Bentz said. “The land continues to deteriorate because

the land managers don’t have the flexibility to manage it properly.”

George Wuerthner, Oregon state director for the Western Watersheds Project, said most environmental groups don’t actually have a lot of money to spend on lawsuits, and therefore only the most egregious violations are challenged in court. Just as many others are left ignored, he said.

Wuerthner, who previously worked with the BLM as a botanist in Idaho, said many public lands are negatively impacted by domestic livestock. Water is limited in the desert country of southeast Oregon, yet cattle gravitate toward springs and streams, harming the ecosystem for other animals and fish.

Summer grazing can also put stress on native grasses and allow invasive species like cheat grass to take over, Wuerthner said.

“That’s one of the things squeezing ranchers, in fact,” he said.

Wuerthner said the BLM actually depends on some of these lawsuits to ensure they are following the laws passed by Congress, and not overly influenced by local pressure.

“They’re keeping the agencies honest,” he said.

Working together

The Umatilla and Walla-Walla-Whitman national forests have just shy of 2 million acres of rangeland deemed suitable for grazing. Those forests are also in the midst of 15-year updates to their respective land management plans.

Maura Laverty, range program manager for the two forests, said they have 135 active grazing allotments. She said they have good relationships with their permittees that have helped them come a long way in managing the land responsibly.

“We don’t graze like we used to,” she said. “We’re a lot more conscientious now.”

Currently, the forests are working on environmental reviews for each allotment, which they hope to finish by 2025. They must take into account endangered fish on each site, as well as wolves which are becoming increasingly established in the northeast corner of the state.

Karl Jensen, a Pilot Rock rancher, runs about 80 of his 300 head of cattle on the Umatilla forest near Ukiah. He said the biggest challenge he’s faced is fencing off his cows away from nearby Five Mile Creek and Sugarbowl Creek, which are home to endangered bull trout and salmon.

Jensen said the Forest Service has been great to work with in both Heppner and Ukiah.

“There’s always regulations that come down from higher up,” he said. “We’re able to work those out and come up with a good management plan.”

O’Keeffe, president of the cattlemen’s association, said good rangeland management must include adequate grazing and a stable supply of forage. Funding and workload remain huge challenges for the BLM. The whole issue has him on edge.

SPEAK

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Ritter resident Kay Steele protested against the militia in John Day where occupiers were expected to speak Jan. 26 when the leaders were arrested en route. She said one of the militia members from out of the county tried to prevent her and other local residents opposed to the occupation from entering the meeting.

Steele said it was important “to send a very strong message that we will not tolerate, welcome, accept any kind of militia input in our county.”

Beth McKrola Spell, who protested with Steele, said after they were allowed into the

meeting, she was told at least three times she would be escorted from the room if she caused any problems. She said she was afraid to attend the County Court meeting because of the militia and their “jackbooted techniques.”

“Defend us from this anarchy and make a vote for civility,” she said. “We do not need this kind of disruption in our county.”

Adele Cerny, Bear Valley, said she and several others from Grant County traveled to Burns to participate in a counter-protest to the pro-militia crowd. She said she carried a sign stating Grant County supported Harney County, and the militia supporters continually tried to incite those opposed.

“A man leaned out of a car,

yelling at my sign about Grant County and says, ‘You’re next. Grant County is next, and I hope your son, your daughter, your family all die for this cause,’” she said.

John Day resident Jim Sproul said the Grant County meetings were peaceful and that nobody was threatened. He said the resolution mentioned state and federal laws but failed to mention the Constitution.

“The First Amendment allows free speech, redress of grievances and the right to peaceably assemble,” he said. “... What is going is way bigger than what’s in Grant County and in Harney County. Nobody wants to have lawlessness — not like what happened in Harney County in Grant County. I don’t think it’s coming here. I have no intention of ever seeing it come here. We’re a nation of laws, and we need to follow those laws.”

Former County Judge Mark Webb said the Constitution provides a robust method to

redress grievances through the court system. He said the refuge occupation was “illegal, unethical, socially inappropriate” and that it tore the community apart.

Linda Gingrich, a retired local teacher, said her son-in-law worked at the refuge, and their family with two young children was instructed by law enforcement to leave their home soon after the occupation began. She said they stayed with her for several days, and her granddaughter in the second grade wrote in a journal, “Grandma, I’m sad. I can’t go home because there’s bad guys at daddy’s work, and there’s bad guys that have come into our yard at our house. I can’t even be there and go outside and play, or play with my toys.”

“I really want you to support this (resolution),” Gingrich said, “and I want you to keep it out of Grant County, because there’s other families that would be put in this same crosshair.”

TEAM

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The corrections staff contacts people on their caseload, sometimes weekly, and helps hold them accountable. McKinley said duties include a large volume of documentation and paperwork, plus home visits and, as necessary, issuing detainers.

Volunteers and contract staff assist the five full-time corrections staff members.

McManus said what he enjoys most about this job is having the opportunity to help people change their lives and watching them do so. He said the job is personality-based and one that not just anybody could do.

He enjoys the other members on the corrections team.

“I think we have a good office crew,” McManus said. “Everyone works well together.”

McKinley said the most satisfying part about working at Community Corrections is being able to see lives change for the better and being part of that.

He said his law enforcement career prepared him well for his new job.

“I have had the pleasure of working with some very good people and found that you can learn anything from anyone — that being either what to do, or what not to do,” McKinley said.

Grant County Community Corrections is located on South Humboldt Street behind the Grant County Courthouse.

For more information, call 541-575-1743.

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Grant County Chamber Monthly Newsletter

Help Support Your Grant County Chamber of Commerce

Our Mission

To promote and support the business environment of Grant County through membership, participation and leadership that fosters economic growth and community involvement. The Chamber is planning a membership drive which we haven’t had for quite some time. Any organization is only as strong as its members. We have around 150 members and would like to see that number grow. With that growth comes new ideas and county wide support. For there are things that are important to all of us. I have included some benefits of becoming a member and the fees. Our newest members are Ed’s Fast Break in Canyon City and West Hwy. 26 in John Day. Welcome aboard!

Benefits of Chamber membership:

- Chamber is the #1 contact point on the web, email, by phone or visiting in person to gain information about an area.
- Chamber members are listed on our website at gcoregonlive.com
- The Chamber offers its members opportunities to promote their business or services
- Public trusts and looks for businesses that are members of the Chamber of Commerce
- As a member, you are welcome to attend our meetings, work on Chamber projects and get involved as a board member
- All new members will receive a membership plaque and four 30 second spots on KJDY. Your business will also be mentioned in the Chamber newsletter.

Annual Membership Costs

Ranches, Clubs, Service & Fraternal Organizations - \$50
Sole Proprietorships - \$85
Businesses with 1-4 Employees - \$150
Businesses with 5+ Employees - \$250
More than 1 business with the same owner - Full price plus sole proprietorship.
Sole proprietorships - Full Price Plus \$50

If you would like a membership application, call the Chamber office at 541-575-0547 or ask a member.

Our guest speaker for our 12:00 pm meeting on Feb. 18, at the outpost, will be Rachel Cobb, who is the fire weather program leader for the National Weather Service. Hope to see you there.

Jerry Franklin
Chamber President

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Grant County Road Department

On February 1, 2016, the Grant County Road Department will begin a Culvert Replacement Project, located on Canyon Creek Lane, County Road 65, south of 395S. It is anticipated this project will last for approximately 2-3 weeks. There will be one-lane traffic with flaggers 24/7.

For further information, contact the Grant County Road Department at 541-575-3783, or 541-575-0138. Monday-Friday, 7am-3:30 pm.

The Outpost
Breakfast Lunch & Dinner
201 W. Main
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