

Oregon lawmakers discuss groundwater problems

Groundwater depletion likely to spark policy proposals

By Mateusz Perkowski
Capital Bureau



EO Media Group

An irrigation pivot in Eastern Oregon. Legislators will likely look at groundwater pumping issues in the next session in January.

Groundwater depletion problems in Oregon discussed during a recent legislative hearing in Salem potentially foreshadow policy proposals during the upcoming 2017 legislative session.

While participants in the "legislative days" informational session did not address the recent newspaper series by name, the Oregonian's "Draining Oregon" package obviously loomed over the hearing.

Stacks of the series, which was printed last month, sat

on a table near the entrance during the Sept. 21 hearing.

The newspaper's allegations that state regulators are allowing farmers to over-pump groundwater were also clearly on the minds of lawmakers on the House Interim Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water

— as well as those of Oregon Water Resources Department staff called to testify.

Committee chairman Brian Clem, D-Salem, said the topic will likely be a source of conversations during the next series of "legislative days" in November and during next year's legislative session.

To avoid "brutal neighbor-on-neighbor warfare," lawmakers should try to find a collaborative approach for water conservation, he said.

With the caveat that he didn't want to attack journalists who "buy ink by the barrel," Clem said he was concerned about loaded terms that imply farmers are greedy and wasteful.

"Farmers don't become farmers to become rich," he said. "There are much easier ways of getting rich."

The basic thesis of "Draining Oregon" was that OWRD had insufficient information about groundwater levels across much of the state but nonetheless freely allowed well drilling, depleting aquifers.

Tom Byler, OWRD's director, conceded that over-pumping in past decades had led to several critical groundwater

areas across the state, which led the agency to restrict uses.

"We haven't done as good a job as we should on that item," he said.

Byler said groundwater is tough to manage given the complex geology of underground aquifers and because farmers have become more reliant on this irrigation source when surface waters dwindle during the dry months.

Since 1955, when legislators passed a law requiring groundwater regulations, the number of wells across the state has increased from 4,660 to 256,800, said Justin Iverson, groundwater section manager for OWRD.

Agricultural wells — which require permitting — make up roughly 10 percent of the total number, but they represent about 90 percent of total groundwater usage in Oregon, Iverson said.

While domestic users must only report the location of new wells, drillers of agricultural wells must also provide information about water levels and irrigators must report their usage, he said.

OWRD also monitors groundwater with more than 1,200 observation wells, Iverson said.

Rep. Ken Helm, questioned whether water regulators were "driving in the dark" in regard to well-drilling and the effects of climate change on water availability.

"Does that change the paradigm under which we should be operating?" Helm said.

He also asked if the OWRD is simply short of funding to robustly study groundwater, or if policy changes are also needed.

Byler replied that the agency already has many regulatory tools but is always open to looking at new ones.

New York firm gets \$1 million contract to review ODOT

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

The state has awarded a nearly \$1 million contract to New York-based McKinsey & Company to conduct a long-awaited management review of the Oregon Department of Transportation before lawmakers approve a transportation package in 2017.

State officials in late July nixed a previous contract with John L. Craig after revelations about his close ties with ODOT and an unearthed email showing he had sought to replace the agency's director.

Lawmakers have said they want an independent, third party review to ensure that ODOT is operating

efficiently before they approve a transportation package in 2017. That legislation — one of Gov. Kate Brown's priorities as governor — could hike gas taxes and fees on drivers and funnel hundreds of millions of dollars in additional funding to the agency.

In an effort to get a review finished in time for the 2017 session, the Department of Administrative Services launched an emergency process for selecting a new contractor.

Brown selected McKinsey based on the recommendations of a DAS procurement team, said Bryan Hockaday, a press secretary in Brown's office.

"McKinsey had the most re-

sponsive proposal, and they are a national company recommended for their expertise," Hockaday said.

McKinsey has 25 days to deliver its work plan for the review and until the end of February to submit a final product, Hockaday said.

DAS reached out to several firms with experience in management reviews and received proposals from McKinsey and Boston Consulting Group, Hockaday said.

Craig, who won the original \$350,000 contract to do the review, oversaw the agency's \$1.3 billion outsourced bridge repair and replacement program for six years. He stepped down as program manager of Oregon Bridge Development Partners just 15 months ago.

After questions arose whether Craig's connections with ODOT employees presented a conflict of interest, a transportation commissioner dug up an old email from Craig in which he appeared to be seeking agency Director Matt Garrett's job.

Tammy Baney, chairwoman of the Oregon Transportation Commission, received the job solicitation email from Craig in January.

She said she didn't read the entirety of its contents until after Craig landed the contract for the ODOT review, when she recalled he had previously reached out to her. After reading the email in July, she recommended that state officials revoke his contract.



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A long-awaited review of the Oregon Department of Transportation will be conducted by a New York company that Thursday received a \$1 million contract.

Church Services In Grant County

GRACE CHAPEL
Evangelical Methodist
154 E. Williams St.,
Prairie City • 541-820-4437
gracechpl@ortelco.net
Pastor Michael Harvey
Early Worship 8:45 a.m.
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Worship 11 a.m.
Evening Worship 6:30 p.m.
WEDNESDAY
Prayer 8 a.m.
THURSDAY
Bible Study 6:30 p.m.

Seventh-Day Adventist Church
SATURDAY SERVICES
JOHN DAY
110 Valley View Dr. - 541-575-1216
Head Elder.....541-575-2914
Bible Classes (all ages).....9:30 am
Worship.....11 am
LONG CREEK
E. Main Street - 541-421-3033
Head Elder.....421-3468
Bible Classes (all ages).....2 pm
Worship.....3 pm
Tune into
3 ANGELS BROADCASTING
KSPL 98.1 FM
Blue Mountain Cable, Channel 2
Antenna; Digital Channel 15
& UHF Channel 8

Cornerstone Christian Fellowship
139 N.E. DAYTON STREET, JOHN DAY
541-575-2180
Sunday Worship Service
10 am
Pastor Levi Manitsas
cornerstonejohnday@gmail.com

John Day Valley Mennonite Church
Meeting every Sunday
at Mt. Vernon Grange Hall
Sunday School.....9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship.....10:50 a.m.
Pastor Leland Smucker
Everyone Welcome • 541-575-5507

St. Thomas Episcopal Church
Morning Prayer.....10 am
(1st, 3rd, 5th Sundays)
Eucharist & Sunday School.....10 am
(2nd & 4th Sundays)
139 S. Washington,
Canyon City
541-620-1436

New Life Bible Church
2 Corinthians 5:17
Every Sunday in the L.C.
Community Center
(Corner of Second & Allen)
Begins at 4:10pm
Contact Pastor Ed Studtmann at
541-421-3888

MT. VERNON PRESBYTERIAN Community Church
SUNDAY SERVICE.....9 am
SUNDAY SCHOOL.....9 am
541-932-4800
EVERYONE WELCOME

Prairie Baptist Church
238 N. McHaley St.
Prairie City
Pastor David Hoeffner
541-820-3696
www.prairie-baptist-church.com
Sunday School for all ages 9:00 am
Sunday morning worship 10:30 am
Awana (Oct-Apr.) 3:00 pm
Youth Group 5:30 pm

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A Bible-believing Church
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Junior Church 11:00 am • Sunday Evenings 3:30 pm
Wednesday Bible Study & Master Club 7:00 pm
Saturday Men's Prayer Meeting 7:00 pm
108 S. Washington Street, Canyon City
541-575-2688 or 541-575-0844

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church
Corner of S Canyon Blvd and SW 2nd
Mon. - Fri. Mass - 12:05 pm
Saturday Mass - 5:00 pm
Sunday Mass - 9:00 am
Confession: Saturday 3:30-4:30 pm
Anytime by appointment 541-575-1459

St. Anne St. Katherine
Monument - Sunday at 12:30 pm
Dale
1st & 3rd Sundays at 2:30 pm
Office Hours
Monday - Friday 9 am - 12 Noon

Living Word Christian Center
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Sundays 5:30pm
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Midweek Bible Study
Thursdays 6:30pm
Youth: 0-6th grade
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Saturday's 8:00am
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A Christ Centered, 12 Step
Recovery Support Group
Pastor Sharon Miller
541-932-4910
www.livingwordcc.com

JOHN DAY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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126 NW Canton, John Day
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Church Services.....11:00 am
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1st & 3rd Sunday Worship10 am
& Communion9:30 am
2nd, 4th & 5th Sunday Worship10 am
Wednesday Evening Bible Study.....6 pm
For information: 541-575-2348

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School.....10 am
Church.....11 am
Afternoon Service.....1 pm
No Mid-week Services
Pastor Ray Isenberger
300 W. Main, John Day
541-575-1355

Strawberry Mountain CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship
Sunday Services10 am
Midweek Services also available
170 SE Dayton, John Day
2nd & Ave. D, Seneca
541-620-0976

St. Anne St. Katherine
Monday - Friday 9 am - 12 Noon

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
Sunday School.....9:30 am
Sunday Worship Service.....10:45 am
Sunday Evening Service.....6:00 pm
Children & Teen Activities
SMALL GROUPS CALL FOR MORE INFO
Weekdays: Sunshine Christian School
521 E. Main • John Day • 541-575-1895
www.johndaynazarene.com

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday School.....9:45 am
Sunday Worship.....11 am
Sunday Evening Bible talk.....6:30 pm
Saturday Men's Study.....7 pm
Full Gospel- Come Grow With Us
541-575-1202 Church
311 NE Dayton St, John Day
Pastor Al Altnow
www.fccjohnday.com