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The Eagle/Rylan Boggs  
U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden speaks about health care during a town hall meeting at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School Tuesday, April 18.

## Wyden addresses health care, privacy at meeting

By Rylan Boggs  
Blue Mountain Eagle

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) fielded a variety of questions from residents, including Grant Union students, during a town hall meeting in John Day April 18.

He addressed issues ranging from health care to infrastructure and committed to making a bipartisan effort to repair failing infrastructure in Oregon.

Grant Union students asked questions about future NASA funding, foster care and tax reform. Wyden said he was in favor of increased NASA funding and opposed to tax reform that would only benefit the upper class.

He told students about the Family Stability and Kinship Care Act which he introduced to expand services and resources available to keep children at home or with another family member instead of in foster care.

Susan Christensen, the executive director of the Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation, called on Wyden to address failing infrastructure, for the continuation of EPA grants and state loan programs benefiting rural communities and to streamline regulatory requirements so her office can spend more time working and less time dealing with regulations.

Wyden said improving roads, bridges and broadband connectivity was a top priority of his and said, "Big league quality of life needs big league infrastructure." He urged Christensen to contact him with specific examples of government regulations that made her job harder so he could work to streamline the process.

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# RAPPELLERS DESCEND ON JOHN DAY



A rappeller descends from a 50-foot tower at the John Day Airbase as part of a training exercise on April 19.

## Over 100 firefighters from five states visit for recertification

By Rylan Boggs  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The John Day Airbase hosted over 100 veteran rappellers during a weeklong training last week.

The training ensured firefighters from five states in the northwest were familiar with rappelling procedures by running a number of drills and live rappels from helicopters.

John Day rappeller Darin Toy said it was his first year at the recertification training and that it seemed less intense than the initial training. Rappellers are expected to come with a base knowledge of fundamentals.

Toy said he was attracted to rappelling because of the independence it offers.

"Usually we're on more remote fires. The helicopter inserts you, and you're kind of just on your own at that point," he said, adding it's also "just a really cool way to get to the fire."

Toy said the trial runs in the helicopter were just like the real thing. To stay certified, rappellers had to rappel once every two weeks.

Toy said he's rappelled onto two fires in his career, one on the Ansel Adams Wilderness and one on the Crater Lake National Park.

Rappellers typically go into a fire with food and water for three days, as well as chainsaws and other survival and maintenance gear.

The mandatory recertification training determines whether or not rappellers will work during the coming fire season.

"With experience comes confidence, so part of this training is to instill confidence in the equipment so that when we go out and staff fires in the summer everything is fluid and practiced and precise," Jeremy McIntosh, equipment program manager at the John Day Airbase, said.

Everyone is held to the same standard during the training.

"Part of what they're doing is building muscle memories based on hand signals given from the spotter to the pilot," he said.

Rappellers start on either a 50-foot tower or a decommissioned UH1 helicopter.

The tower is used to practice rappelling from a fixed position, while the helicopter hull is used to practice the use of hand signals with a spotter who communicates between the pilot and rappellers.

Once rappellers have successfully completed both portions, they must complete three helicopter descents from as high as 250 feet.

Idaho rappeller Ben Mouser described being in the helicopter as "peaceful," and rappeller Chandler Melton said "flying around in a helicopter just feels like riding around in the back seat of a school bus."

Melton admitted his first time rappelling was a little scary, but he grew used to it fairly quickly.

"It's a lot of fun and a great opportunity," Melton said. "It's good training, so I'm glad to be here."



Colby Richmond watches a rappeller adjust his gear inside the hull of a retired UH1 helicopter during a simulation at the John Day Airbase on Tuesday, April 18. The simulation was part of a recertification class for firefighting rappellers.



Rappellers coil rope after a successful descent from a helicopter as part of a Forest Service training exercise.

## Commission reviewing state's wolf management draft plan

By Eric Mortenson  
EO Media Group

Oregon's wolf management plan is up for public review as the ODFW Commission once again attempts to balance the restoration of an apex predator with the havoc they can cause in rural areas.

The commission took comments on a draft conservation and management plan during an April 21 meeting in Klamath Falls, and will repeat the process May 19 in Portland. The commission eventually will adopt a five-year management plan; no date is set yet.

Russ Morgan, ODFW's wolf program manager, said the draft management plan builds on what wildlife biologists have learned over the years. When the first management plan was adopted in 2005, there were no documented wolves in Oregon. The first pups were discovered in 2008, and by the end of 2011 there were 29 confirmed wolves in Oregon. The state documented 64 wolves at the end of 2013, and a minimum of 112 by the end of 2016, including 11 packs and eight breeding pairs.

Morgan said the plan couples state data with "tons of research" that's been done on wolves in Oregon and elsewhere over the years.

"This plan still maintains a very active conservation approach, it doesn't change in that regard," Morgan said.

Oregon classifies wolves as a "special status game animal." The draft plan allows ODFW to authorize hunters and trappers to kill wolves in two specific "controlled take" situations: Chronic livestock depredation in a localized area, and declines in wild ungulate populations, principally deer and elk. The draft plan does not allow a general hunting season, a prohibition that would hold for five years after the plan is adopted.

"I can't predict what will happen to wolf management years and years out, but during this planning cycle, absolutely not," Morgan said of a possible sport hunting season on wolves.

Livestock producers and wildlife activists don't like aspects of the draft plan.

The Oregon Farm Bureau and Oregon Cattlemen's Association said it makes it harder for ranchers to protect their animals because it increases the number of confirmed attacks required before allowing lethal control of wolves.

The draft plan requires three confirmed depredations or one confirmed and four "probable" attacks within a 12 month period. The previous standard was two confirmed depredations or one confirmed and three attempted attacks, with no time period set.



Contributed photo

**OR42, the breeding female of the Pack in northern Wallowa County in February.**



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