

Income surveys need completed

Easy money is hard to come by, but for the John Day and Canyon City communities, it may simply require filling out a simple survey.

Portland State University has sent income surveys to 312 randomly selected wastewater customers from the communities to determine if they would qualify for a Community Development Block Grant that could potentially provide about \$2 million toward a new wastewater treatment facility.

As of last week, only 72 surveys had been returned. That's only 23 percent. To complete the study, 90 percent must be returned.

If the required number is returned, Portland State will use the data to determine whether the communities' average income would be eligible for the federal grant funding. The impact is substantial.

Mt. Vernon and Seneca were recently awarded \$2 million and \$2.5 million block grants for major sewer projects. Without these grants, these projects would have been very costly for the cities.

John Day and Canyon City are in the same situation — while knowing the permit for the current wastewater treatment facility expired in 2007 and will not be renewed.

A new facility must be built. Using grant funding from a program designed to help communities with improvements such as infrastructure would dramatically reduce the burden on the residents.

To qualify, the surveys must be returned.

If you are one of the 312 John Day and Canyon City residents who received a survey, please complete it and return it as soon as possible. It's that easy.

THE BACKROADS

County should be proud of local athletes

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle



Sean Hart

With all of the great sports accomplishments recently, we've been having a problem here at the Eagle: finding enough space to get it all in print.

But it's a problem we'll gladly take, and we hope all our local teams continue to compete, for their dominance and for the inches on our pages.

It's been great to see so many athletes do so well from such a small community.

Grant Union's Drew Lusco won his first state wrestling title, and he's only a sophomore.

The boys and girls basketball teams from Grant Union both finished the regular season atop the 2A Wapiti League, and both finished off strong by winning the championship games at the district tournaments. As they head into this week's state playoffs, the boys are seeded eighth, and the girls are seeded fourth.

In 1A action, the Prairie City boys and girls basketball teams both made it to the state level. The boys won the district tournament and are seeded seventh going into

the playoffs. The girls placed third at the district tourney, keeping their season alive.

Congratulations to everyone, and keep up the good work!

As in life, winning in sports requires hard work and dedication. And these young athletes will take the lessons they've learned with them as they venture from the high school halls into the world.

Thanks to hours and hours of commitment from coaches, officials, volunteers, administrators, parents and families, we think these lessons will serve them well.

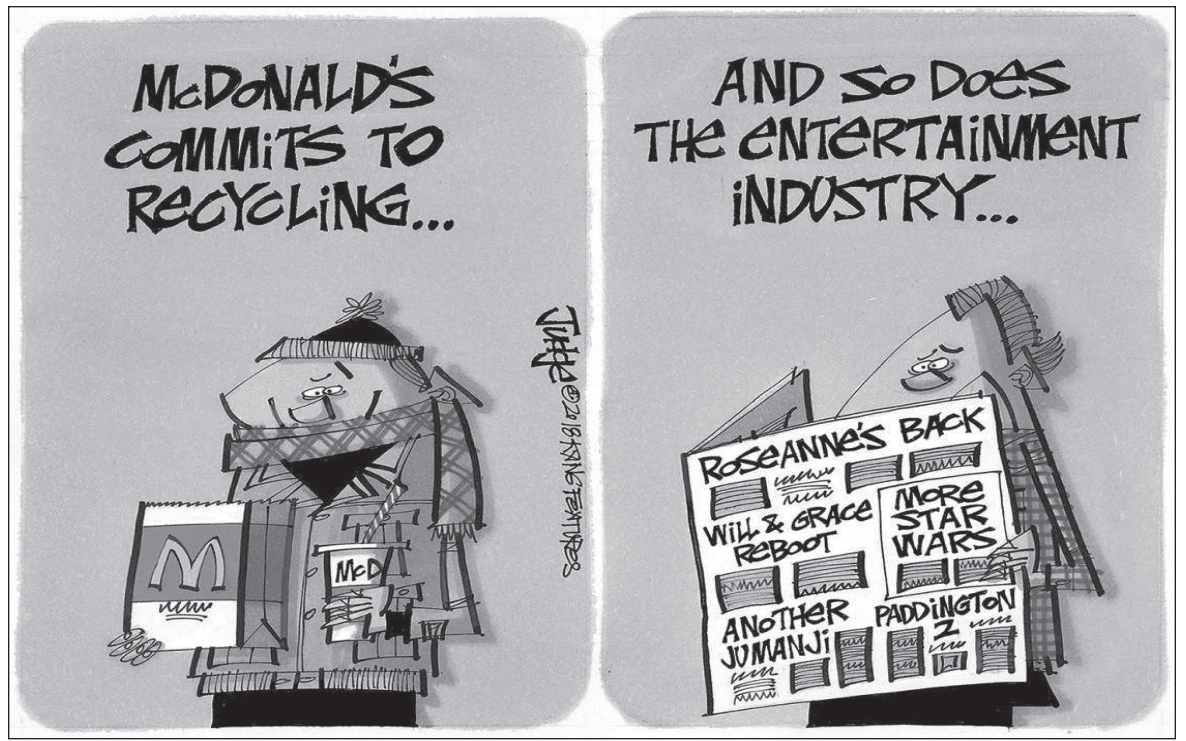
And that goes for all the athletes and teams, not just those continuing on to the next round.

So to everyone who has helped shape this future generation, thank you. Your contributions do not go unnoticed.

And to the athletes moving on, good luck. Win or lose, you've already made Grant County proud.

Of course, we'd love to see you on the front page again next week.

Sean Hart is the editor of the Blue Mountain Eagle.



GUEST COMMENT

Firefighting costs limit other work

By Steve Beverlin, Jeff Tomac and Tom Montoya
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Across the nation, the 2017 wild-fire season was unprecedented in terms of dollars spent, acres burned and the increased duration of wildfires. Even now, months later, we're still feeling the impacts from these fires, especially financially.

As wildfires grow more severe — and costly — the USDA Forest Service is struggling to adequately fund projects that are important to our communities because of soaring firefighting costs.

Each year, firefighting costs consume more and more of the USDA Forest Service's budget. In 1995, firefighting costs accounted for 15 percent of the Forest Service budget. In 2017, it was 57 percent. At the rate things are going, firefighting will consume 67 percent of our budget by 2021. This means less money for other priority USDA Forest Service programs and services, including recreation, visitor services and much-needed fire prevention work that reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfires in the first place.

The Forest Service is the only federal agency that is required to fund its entire emergency management program through its regular

appropriations. This includes wildfires that are truly natural disasters — lightning starts rapidly driven by wind that burn faster and more intensely than firefighters can control.

In the Pacific Northwest, this funding model means that projects designed to actually decrease the severity of wildfire are being delayed, deferred maintenance is growing for recreation sites and critical infrastructure and damaged roads from fire or storms are going unrepaired.

This means that trash at campgrounds goes unemptied, toilets uncleaned and we are forced to make hard decisions on whether we can safely keep roads and recreation sites open. The funding challenges directly impact our ability to provide excellent and safe visitor experiences.

With an enhancement to the way wildfire suppression efforts are funded in the Blue Mountains, the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests could focus funding on managing the land toward more resilient conditions by completing important restoration and thinning projects, such as implementation of some of our recently completed projects including the Malheur Ten Year Stewardship Contract, the Ten Cent Community Wildfire Protection

Project and the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project. Additionally, we could focus on opportunities to increase the pace and scale of restoration in those watersheds that have been identified as most at risk to wildfires and insect and disease outbreaks.

USDA is dedicated to fostering the productive and sustainable use of your national forests and grasslands. If you can't use and enjoy your public lands to the fullest, that's a problem.

While the Forest Service is working more closely with partners and volunteers to leverage resources and accomplish more than we could by ourselves, our current fiscal path is simply unsustainable.

We deeply appreciate the ongoing work of Congress to pass new legislation to reform the way wildfire suppression is funded. A commonsense approach would let us get back to the work we care about most — meeting the many different needs of the communities we serve, for the benefit of generations to come.

Steve Beverlin is the supervisor for the Malheur National Forest, Jeff Tomac is the acting supervisor for the Umatilla National Forest and Tom Montoya is the supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

FARMER'S FATE

The procrastination tree

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

The early bird may get the worm — but it's the second mouse that gets the cheese. A motto I have often repeated to myself when I seem to be getting behind — with life.

It was in November when I looked up at the Christmas tree that had tormented my psyche all last year. Last January, it begged to stay up a little longer. In February, it joked that at least its ornaments and ribbon were red. It made green St. Paddy's jokes in March and asked for Easter ornaments in April.

Thankfully, by May, it was time to be back in the seat of my tractor, and I didn't have to look at it anymore. Occasionally during the summer, I would glance up in the loft and see the Christmas tree branches drooping farther and farther down. Many times I thought, "Tomorrow, I might have some extra time to take it down."

Funny thing about tomorrow, though. Although it is a noun, it's really a mystical place where 99 percent of all human production, motivation and achievement are stored — and you need the correct "open sesame" password to get in.

October arrived, and I am pretty sure I could hear that Christmas tree snort with laughter as I packed in two pumpkins for jack-o-lanterns.

"Hey, these decorations are different!" I shouted to the tree in my head. Regrettably, the tree was right. The pumpkins are still on my porch — uncarved. "It's just been a busy year!" my inner dialogue justified to the accusing Christmas tree.

Every time I walked through the kitchen, I could feel the procrasti-

nation jokes falling like needles from the dead and brittle Christmas tree.

"You say procrastination, I say ingenious avoidance. Either way, you aren't coming down until later. I'm too busy," I'd retort to the tree in my imaginary guilt exchange.

"It's November," the tree gloated. "You usually put up a tree the day after Thanksgiving. What are you going to do this year? Have a changing of the guard, er, tree?"

"I'm taking care of my procrastination issues. Just you wait!" I'd threaten back. And the tree would only laugh — in my mind, in my sleep, in my dreams. Have you ever had so much to do you became overwhelmed? I've learned, at those moments, you can just lay down on the floor — for a really long time — and if anyone disturbs you, call it meditating!

Suddenly, it was December. And I still had last year's tree up — fully decorated. Which wouldn't have been entirely bad — if it hadn't started as a live tree. Although in all honesty, I don't think it had been alive for a really long time.

A fresh Christmas tree was cut and stood up in the living room. I packed the boxes of Christmas decorations up from the basement and felt a wave of guilt as I walked under the loft where the dead tree still sported his star.

"I'll get to you next!" I thought. "Right!" he chortled, "I've heard that for nearly a year now, procrastinator!"

"I don't procrastinate. I just put

it off till the last second because then I'll be older and therefore wiser, and can do the job better!" I defended myself senselessly against the insults in my own mind attributed to the dead tree.

One morning, my husband and I were planning our Christmas party. One of the games we were playing required the participants to decorate a Christmas tree, despite the many hurdles and challenges we were planning to throw at them. Like losing their Christmas tree. Only one team, we had decided, would actually get a real tree to decorate, one group would have a wooden pallet tree, and another group would have a DIY tree — a tall smooth log, a pile of loose pine branches — and a drill. But we were still one challenge short — or we were until I glanced up into the loft. Suddenly, my procrastination had found a purpose!

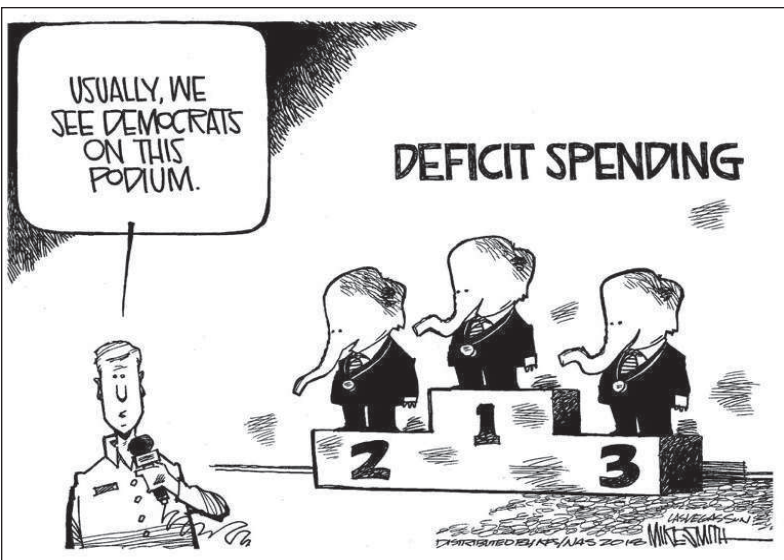
During the party, one of the ladies came up and complimented me on such organization and planning. I smiled and was just starting to thank her, when she continued, "I mean, to have the foresight to keep last year's Christmas tree? That is real planning!"

I walked over to the dead tree, now decorated in plastic Easter eggs and paper ribbon. "Ya hear that, killjoy? Foresight and planning!"

The tree made one last crack at my procrastination, but with my guilt gone, I barely could hear him. I put the pro in procrastination.

I must say I no longer feel bad about keeping my current tree up through Valentine's Day.

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



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