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Eagle file photo

A new torrefaction plant run by Restoration Fuels LLC and partially funded by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities is planned at the Malheur Lumber mill site.



Sheriff Glenn Palmer

Sheriff Palmer sues county

Attorney fees sought for public records lawsuit

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer is suing Grant County for attorney fees related to a public records lawsuit filed in 2016.

Palmer and Civil Deputy Sally DeFord filed a complaint in Grant County Circuit Court March 16 against the county and the Grant County Court, asking a judge to declare that Palmer and DeFord are not liable for attorney fees from a lawsuit filed by The Oregonian newspaper, which first reported this story.

The Oregonian sued Palmer, DeFord and the sheriff's office to compel the disclosure of public records in May 2016. The suit was dismissed when the records were

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An Economic Boost

Torrefaction plant planned in John Day

Facility turns biomass into jobs and fuel

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Good economic news for Grant County is coming from the timber industry, with a new torrefaction plant in John Day expected to bring 13-17 full-time jobs, according to Matt Krumenauer, vice president for special projects for the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities.

"We've spent three years working on this project," he said. "The Endowment has invested a lot of money in trying to create markets for small-diameter material coming from stewardship projects in area forests."

According to a January 2016 report from the Oregon Employment Department, the total expected economic impact from a torrefaction plant of this size could be 39 jobs and \$6.8 million per year, including plant employment, business purchases and induced impacts through employee purchases. The total economic impact during the construction phase could be 63 jobs and \$9.1 million.

Torrefaction is a process in which biomass is baked into a fuel that resembles coal and can be used by utilities at electrical generating plants. A plan to use torrefied wood at the power plant in Boardman, however, fell through last year after Portland General Electric announced it would shut down the plant in 2020.

Krumenauer said construction of the torrefaction plant on the Malheur Lumber Co. mill site could start in July, with the plant beginning production under the name Restoration Fuels LLC in early 2019. Some of the plant's main components will be prefabricated and brought to John Day by truck, he said.

The Endowment board voted to invest in the 100,000-ton-per-year plant Tuesday. Created in 2006 using \$200 million from a U.S.-Canada timber settlement, the Endowment plans to pay half the cost of the \$15.5 million plant. Krumenauer said negotiations continue for the rest of the funding.

Small-diameter wood from thinning and other forest restoration projects will be chipped at the John Day plant and then dried in an 80- to 100-foot-long dryer heated by steam from a new boiler fired



Contributed photo/Oregon Torrefaction

In order to use as biomass, woody debris must undergo a process called torrefaction, described as a 'half-step below making charcoal.'



Contributed photo

Briquettes of torrefied biomass.

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911 User Board leans toward local dispatch

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

An informal vote by the 27 public entities attending the 911 User Board meeting held at the Oregon Department of Forestry building in John Day March 20 leaned in favor of keeping a local dispatch center.

A tally by John Day City Manager Nick Green counted about 16 in favor of maintaining a local dispatch center, with about six in favor of outsourcing dispatch service to Frontier Regional 911 in Condon.

Many representatives at the meeting from the county, eight cities, 11 city or rural fire departments, three law enforcement agencies, one state agency, two federal agencies and Blue Mountain Hospital said they needed to speak to their councils or boards before stating a definitive decision, and some were undecided.

The User Board will meet again at 6 p.m. Thursday, April 26. Green asked the representatives to come back with their decisions.

Rising 911 costs

The city of John Day is the lead agency for the John Day 911 Emergency

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School discipline policies questioned

Avoiding the 'pipeline to prison'

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Questions about suspension and expulsion policies were raised at the March 21 meeting of the Grant School District 3 Board of Directors, with claims that extreme disciplinary measures negatively impacted Grant Union High School students.

Baker City attorney Kyra Rohner-Ingram told the board she was hired to represent a student who was suspended from Grant Union High School following an Oct. 4 incident involving marijuana use and possession.

Rohner-Ingram said the student ended up being suspended for 70 days before being allowed to return to the high



Eagle file photo

Grant County School District No. 3 Superintendent Curt Shelley has been directed by the school board to review the district's disciplinary policies and present a report at the next school board meeting April 18.

school campus. Citing language in a 2014 House bill that says a student cannot be suspended for more than 10 days,

Rohner-Ingram said the school district's action constituted expulsion, which triggers rights of students to additional review.

She noted that the law, which is mandatory for schools in Oregon, states that school boards must ensure that disciplinary policies "provide opportunities for students to learn from their mistakes."

The revised law was enacted with the goal of keeping students in school and out of a "pipeline to prison," she said, where students who are removed from school end up heading in the wrong direction, with worse outcomes.

Grant Union High School Principal Ryan Gerry responded to Rohner-Ingram in a Jan. 9 letter. The student was only suspended for 10 days, he said. At the end of the 10-day suspension, it was

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