



The Blue Mountain EAGLE

Grant County's newspaper since 1868



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2018

• No. 49

• 18 PAGES

• \$1.00

www.MyEagleNews.com

Cold case murder could be subject of TV show



Sheriff Glenn Palmer

Remains found in Vance Creek 20 years ago

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

A 20-year-old cold case considered a homicide in Grant County is getting new attention and new funding.

Sheriff Glenn Palmer advised the Grant County Court Nov. 28 that the History Chan-

nel was interested in the case and will pay for additional analysis in an effort to confirm the identity of the victim.

Human remains were initially found in the Vance Creek drainage about a mile and a half west of Highway 395 and south of John Day by Chad Holliday in 1997, Palmer said. Additional remains were found by Ted Ferrioli the next year in the same area.

The sheriff's office has spent a lot of time and effort on the cold case and reached a stand-

still because of funding issues, Palmer said. The new analysis might identify the victim within a short period of time, and if so, the sheriff's office would have another homicide case on its hands, he said.

"I am not sure as to what they are using to identify this person and haven't been in contact with them as of yet," Palmer told the Eagle.

As part of the arrangement with the History Channel, the sheriff's office would be a willing participant in a show about

the case, he said.

"There are several other cases across Oregon that they will also be looking at," Palmer said.

Grim discoveries

Chad Holliday was gathering cattle on horseback near Fall Mountain in fall 1997 when he spotted what appeared to be part of a human skull.

"I've seen most every skull this county has to offer," he told the Eagle at the time. "There is nothing as big as a human brain."

He left the skull fragment where he found it and only briefly scanned the area for additional remains. He wasn't sure he wanted to find any more.

"It was kind of eerie," he said.

Holliday reported his finding to the sheriff's office, and the next day he escorted Sheriff Fred Reusser, John Day dentist Curtis Hansford, John Day Police Chief Swede Larson and Cpl. Julie Armistead to the site.

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OBJECTION!

Locals express issues with Forest Plan

Congress directed the U.S. Forest Service to develop plans for its national forests with the National Forest Management Act in 1976, but the process has become cumbersome and slow. Development of a 15-year plan to replace the 1990 plans for the Blue Mountains region began in earnest in 2004, with a draft issued 10 years later. Facing strong public criticism — more than 1,000 letters with more than 4,000 comments — the Forest Service opted to re-engage the public in 2015-2016.

A new revised plan was released June 29 for the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests — which will be separated into three forest-specific plans providing guidance for future project and activity decision-making. Its publication kicked off a 60-day period for people to object to the plan, followed by a 90-day period in which the Forest Service would attempt to address those objections. To accommodate in-person discussions with the large number of objectors and issues, the Forest Service arranged public meetings in John Day, Pendleton, Wallowa and Baker City. The timber and vegetation management and forest access sessions were well attended at the John Day meeting.

Forest Plan objectors confront officials on road closures

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Objectors and interested persons had a chance to meet with Forest Service reviewing officers for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan at the Grant County Fairgrounds on Nov. 27.

The session on access drew a crowd, and facilitator Mary Farnsworth reminded everyone that it wasn't likely anything would be resolved that day.

Chris French, the reviewing officer from the Forest Service office in Washington, D.C., noted that access had struck a nerve for people in Grant County. Issues in the Malheur National Forest included off-road motorized use, safety reasons such as fire and emergency response, access to private

lands and protecting historical and recreational uses. On top of all that was a concern about a travel management plan that could follow the forest plan.

Past closures

Numerous objectors noted that the Forest Service didn't need to close roads — they close on their own from lack of use. The public maintained many forest roads as they used them, the objectors said.

Locals were witness to forest roads closing over the years project by project, Billy Jo George said — and then they saw the Forest Plan. The Malheur National Forest was head-

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The Eagle/Richard Hanners

From left, Harney County Commissioner Mark Owens, Rex Storm from the Associated Oregon Loggers, King Williams of Iron Triangle Logging and Mark Webb of Blue Mountains Forest Partners participate in a Forest Plan objectors meeting at the Grant County Fairgrounds on Nov. 27.



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Left to right, Forest Service reviewing officer Allen Rowley and Malheur National Forest Acting Supervisor Craig Trulock listen to people objecting to the revised Forest Plan.

Objectors want accelerated forest management

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

When it came to timber and vegetation, objections to the Blue Mountains Forest Plan raised at the Nov. 27 meeting at the Grant County Fairgrounds were technical and detailed, but the objectors appeared well informed and clear about their disagreements.

Allen Rowley, from the Forest Service office in Washington, D.C., served as the reviewing officer for the meeting, and Earl Stewart, from the Tongass National Forest, facilitated the meeting.

Based on what he had read, Rowley noted that many comments were for or against increasing the allowable sale quantity for commercial timber harvesting or choosing more aggressive forest management over an ecological approach. This meeting offered objectors an opportunity to speak in person to explain

their case, he said.

Plan restrictions

Harney County Commissioner Mark Owens noted that timber harvest numbers had increased very little from the 2014 draft forest plan, which the county opposed, to the 2018 revised plan. More timber management was needed to help prevent wildfires, he said.

Regional Forester Jim Peña had described 60 percent of the Malheur National Forest as being in fire condition, Owens said, but that situation will not improve at the rate of forest management called for in the forest plan.

Owens wanted accelerated forest management without additional National Environmental Policy Act review, adding if timber managers didn't do it, nature would. He

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Broadband coalition not awarded big grant

Additional grant opportunities will be targeted

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

After all the hard work and news coverage, officials in Grant County received bad news about the immediate future for improved internet access here.

"Unfortunately, we were not one of the recipients of the 2018 Community Connect grant," John Day City Manager Nick Green told the Eagle.

John Day, on behalf of the Grant County Digital Network Coalition, had applied



Nick Green

for a \$2.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture with plans to expand broadband coverage south from the

John Day Fire Hall to Seneca, with laterals and fiber-to-home service along the way.

The \$450,000 match for the grant would have come from the \$1.8 million appropriation the city of John Day received from the legislature in 2017. The goal was to leverage the state money as match funding for grants.

Phase 2 would continue the trunk line to Burns, and Phase 3 would involve running fiber



Dan Becker

laterals east into the John Day Valley.

The coalition also used the state money to hire Commstructure Consulting for infrastructure design and project management. All told, the coalition spent about \$93,000 developing the USDA grant application, Green told Rep. Greg Walden Oct. 31.

A total of 124 project applications were submitted, and 19 projects were awarded. The winners included nine telephone companies, two electrical cooperatives, two telephone cooperatives and

the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma.

The 19 projects will benefit more than 27,000 businesses and households in 12 states, not including Oregon. USDA Rural Development awarded \$33 million in grants and \$58 million in loans for the projects.

"I expect we will talk with USDA in the coming weeks regarding our application and how to make it stronger if we reapply next spring," Green told the Eagle.

Congress recently made available \$600 million in additional funding to help small rural communities improve internet access, and the Federal Communications Commission's Connect America

Fund Phase II auction allocated \$1.4 billion to support broadband expansion in underserved communities in 45 states over the next decade.

Coalition board member Dan Becker was upbeat about the future for broadband in Grant County.

"We have a high-quality package to go after other grants," he told the Eagle. "We learned a lot."

Possibilities for funding include grants to improve rural health care and the U.S. Department of Transportation BUILD discretionary grant program, which has \$1.5 billion focused on improving rural highways for autonomous vehicles, Becker said.

