

County court calls for more forest management

Letter to be sent to federal, state officials

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Forest Service needs to act now to prevent wildfires by changing how it manages the Malheur National Forest, the Grant County Court stated in a letter to federal and state officials.



Jim Hamsher

Commissioner Jim Hamsher drafted the letter with help from administrative assistant Laurie Wright. It will be sent to President Donald Trump, the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture, the regional forester in Portland, Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, Rep. Greg Walden and other officials.

The letter emphasizes the importance of agriculture and timber to the local economy, but it also points



Grant County Judge Scott Myers, center, welcomes Commissioner Sam Palmer to the county court, with Commissioner Jim Hamsher watching at right.

out how important both are to wildfire prevention.

"Cattle grazing should be looked upon as a tool in forest management to reduce fine fuels and thus

reduce wildfire risk," the Jan. 9 letter states.

Keeping forest roads open is not only important for economic and recreational reasons but also

for emergencies.

"A policy that any road that is not deemed open is closed endangers public safety, economic access and recreation in the forest," the

letter states. "We cannot afford more wilderness and roadless areas. Policies of limited or no access make it almost impossible to fight forest fires effectively."

The letter cited the last- ing community impacts of the Canyon Creek Complex fire in 2015 and the recent tragedy in Paradise, California.

"Nearly a hundred lives lost and thousands of homes lost," the letter states. "The financial losses are staggering, and the dollar amount will truly never be known."

A revised forest plan for the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests was made public in June 2018. An objection period and a resolution period followed. Objectors met with Forest Service reviewing officers in John Day, Pendleton, Wallowa and Baker City in November.

In a Dec. 14 op-ed piece, Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Glenn Casamassa said reviewing officers will study their notes, reflect on what they heard at the objector meetings and work with Forest Service officials in Washington, D.C., regarding scheduling another round of meetings.

Creating a vision for Innovation Gateway

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Self-reliant and independent, resilient and pragmatic, a family-focused community with rural values — those are some of the key words that will guide initial planning for the Innovation Gateway project in John Day.

Representatives from the Walker Macy landscape architecture firm in Portland took feedback from city staff and two city advisory committees and at an open house on Jan. 8.

The 83-acre project will integrate several city infrastructure needs with a long-term vision to promote economic development.

Key elements include developing the former Oregon Pine mill site with a new sewer treatment plant, greenhouses that will meet community demand for garden vegetables, along with a farmers market and community gathering place.

Riverfront trails will connect the mill site to the Seventh Street Complex, a possible future aquatics facility, the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site and downtown shops and restaurants.

John Day City Manager Nick Green characterized the project as a unique opportunity that involved 18 months of work piecing together brownfield sites and undeveloped lands across the city. The overall goal is to "keep what is great about our community and enhance it," he said.

According to the city, the guiding principles for the Innovation Gateway project should include creating a destination for visitors, attracting investment and jobs, honoring John Day's identity and character, promoting community, creating opportunities for walking and biking, restoring public access to the John Day River and



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Sherrie Rininger, left, and Shannon Adair listen to a presentation about the Innovation Gateway project in John Day given by Walker Macy landscape architects at the Grant County Regional Airport on Jan. 8.



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

John Day City Council member Dave Holland, left, discusses the Innovation Gateway project in John Day with visitors at the Grant County Regional Airport on Jan. 8.

Canyon Creek, supporting innovation in conservation and efficiently using public resources and land.

Funded by a state Transportation Growth Management grant, Walker Macy will work closely with Interfluve, a river and restoration firm that has been involved in fish habitat projects on the North Fork of the John Day River, designer Aaron Maples said. Much of the Innovation Gateway project area was impacted by historical dredge mining, he said.

Kirsten Kibler of JLA Public Involvement said members of the two advisory committees talked

about how locals learned to get around the riverfront after legacy trails had weathered away, where children put in and took out inner tubes along the river and what the river is like at high flow.

Among the comments made during the open house at Grant County Regional Airport were the need to improve riverfront trails with signage and the need for a community meeting place on the valley floor rather than on top of a hill at the airport.

Walker Macy's work overlaps an economic development study by ECONorthwest and marketing work by Bell + Funk, which is funded by federal and state grants.

Walker Macy will hold an online open house March 12 and then join ECONorthwest and the city's advisory committees for a regional summit May 14. Walker Macy will present a final report in August.

The city asks residents to complete an online survey to provide input for the Innovation Gateway project at surveymonkey.com/r/XXL62RV. More information about the project is available on the city website.

Federal shutdown impacts rural Northwest

By Katy Nesbitt
For the Capital Press

As the partial federal government shutdown continues into its fifth week, some rural Northwest communities are feeling the pinch.

In western Oregon wolves are under federal protection, but federal employees assigned to monitoring them with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and USDA Wildlife Services are on furlough. Steve Niemela, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife district fish biologist in Central Point, said his office is feeling the added pressure.

"It has an impact on us," Niemela said. "We can't coordinate effectively — U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead agency in wolf management."

He said state and federal biologists follow a "good set of guidelines," but the furlough makes it challenging.

Niemela said much of the habitat restoration planning for Oregon's fish and wildlife is also on hold as many of the projects are on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

"Just about everything we do, there is some sort of federal nexus," Niemela said.

In northeastern Oregon, federal funding to pay employees of the Tri-County Weed Management Area hasn't been received, according to Susan Roberts, Wallowa County Commission chairwoman, so Baker, Union and Wallowa county leaders are looking for supplemental money, possibly in the form of a bridge loan.

"We are finding a way around the federal reimbursements to keep our folks paid," Roberts said. "They still have bills to pay, but we can't get reimbursed."

Ongoing talks regard-



Katy Nesbitt/For the Capital Press

The Forest Service office in Joseph has a discreet sign explaining the current federal budget impasse.

ing the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision with Glenn Casamassa, U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest regional forester, are also on hold. Roberts had hoped to talk to him during the Association of Oregon Counties meeting Monday in Salem regarding the plan's progress, but he was unable to attend because of the furlough.

While most Forest Service grazing allotment permittees are not running cattle on public land in January, Rod Childers, who ranches in northern Wallowa County, said he normally has had his annual operating instruction meeting by now.

"I get mine done first part of January so I don't have to deal with it before calving, but that isn't going to happen," Childers said. "Now I'm concerned about getting it done in time for turnout in the spring."

With calving season on his mind, Childers said he also worries about the Wildlife Services field agents who control predators being furloughed at his cattle's most vulnerable time.

As of Thursday, there appeared to be no end in sight to the shutdown. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., said he agrees with the president's case for increased border security, but he didn't

support shutting down natural resource agencies.

"I don't agree that it makes sense to furlough the people working on the biological opinion in the Klamath Basin, forest fuels reductions in central Oregon, or grazing permits in eastern Oregon," Walden said. "How does a nearly month-long work stoppage benefit taxpayers who are waiting for decisions and plans and permits?"

Walden isn't the only Oregon representative concerned about the shutdown's effects on natural resource agencies. Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley were two of the signers on a letter sent to the president Jan. 14 urging him to fund the agencies responsible for wildfire suppression.

The letter, signed by 12 senators said, "The failure to reopen the government puts peoples' lives at risk by undermining their ability to respond to wildfires and will only serve to delay critical forest restoration and safety projects. These young men and women put their lives on the line to protect the nation's natural resources and other public and private property, and they deserve to have the best training possible in preparation for increasingly difficult fire seasons."

Robbins Farm Equipment

3850 10th St. Baker City 541-523-6377
62302 Pierce Rd. La Grande 541-963-6577
1160 S Egan Burns 541-573-6377
86812 Christmas Valley Hwy. Christmas Valley 541-576-2160

99996

JUNIPER ARTS COUNCIL/GRANT COUNTY CULTURAL COALITION IS SEEKING GRANT PROPOSALS FOR OREGON CULTURAL TRUST GRANT AWARDS

The coalition has \$7,000 from the Oregon Cultural Trust to distribute in Grant County to organizations for projects relating to culture. Projects may be related to the visual or performing arts, heritage, and/or humanities.

Applications are available from Karin Barntish, 131 W. Main Street, John Day or call Kris Beal at 541-932-4892 for more information or an application.

Grant applications will be accepted until February 8, 2019 at 5:00 pm.