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## Hamsher talks natural resources in Washington, D.C.



Contributed photo  
**Grant County Commissioner Jim Hamsher traveled to Washington, D.C., on March 1-7 where he attended a National Association of Counties committee meeting and met with numerous government officials about natural resource issues.**

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

A recent whirlwind trip to Washington, D.C., by Grant County Commissioner Jim Hamsher and four other Eastern Oregon county commissioners focused on natural resource issues, including forest management.

"It was a very worthwhile trip," Hamsher told the Eagle, noting that Chris French, the Forest Service's acting deputy chief and reviewing officer for forest plans, contacted the group a week later to see if they had any more questions.

"He's a good gentleman," Hamsher said, adding that he believes "a lot of the head butting will come to an end" over forest management disputes.

Hamsher joined Harney County Commissioner Mark Owens, Wallowa County Commissioner Todd Nash, Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey and Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage for the March 1-7 trip to the nation's capital.

The primary reason for the trip was to talk with Forest Service officials about exempting the counties from

the Forest Service's travel management plan, Hamsher said.

"We're still awaiting word on that," he told the Eagle.

Hamsher, Nash and Harvey, who serve on the National Association of Counties' Public Lands Steering Committee, attended the 2019 legislative conference.

The list of officials Hamsher met with included Agriculture Undersecretary James Hubbard, Agriculture Acting Deputy Undersecretary Daniel Jiron, Forest Service Legislative

Affairs Director Doug Crandall, Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen, Agriculture Undersecretary Senior Advisor Debbie Pressman, Interior Deputy Director of External Affairs Tim Williams, Interior Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Andrea Travnicek and Interior Deputy Solicitor for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Karen Budd-Falen.

Hamsher also met with Sen. Ron Wyden's advisor for energy and natural resources and took part in a news conference with Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merk-

ley where Secure Rural Schools and payment-in-lieu-of-taxes funding was discussed.

The busy visit also included attending a speech by Kellyanne Conway and receiving updates from Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and HUD Secretary Ben Carson about how counties can plan for a future economy.

Hamsher said he spoke with officials about how the Forest Service should coordinate its management plans with county governments.

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# DATA SHARING

## Students share research at Grant Union Science Fair

### Floyd, Blood earn gold in contest

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Twenty Grant Union high school students shared the hypotheses and conclusions of their research during the school's March 14 science fair.

Grant Union teachers Sonna Smith and Randy Hennen's students took part in the competition.

Smith said her chemistry students were required to take part in the fair. Smith, who has taught at the school since 2002, also teaches physics and health.

She said the students who met their benchmarks since September had the most in-depth projects.

"Some of the ideas they came up with were beyond our ability to test," she said. "The hardest part is picking a project."

The two gold winners were junior Samantha Floyd and senior Kade Blood.

Floyd won best of fair with her project titled "Perceived Recognition Memory vs. Actual Recognition Memory."

She said she had some surprises along the way in the project that she developed to help her 12

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Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter



**ABOVE: Grant Union Science Fair judge Neil Bauer visits with junior Samantha Floyd about her project, titled "Perceived Recognition Memory vs. Actual Recognition Memory." Floyd won first place and Best of Fair.**

**LEFT: Kade Blood stands next to his winning research project display titled "How does Armillaria Fungi Impact Forest Vegetation Growth and Composition?" at the Grant Union Science Fair.**

## Teen survey looks at social wellness

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

While few 11th-grade students in Grant County said in a 2018 survey they didn't go to school because of safety concerns, more than half said they skipped school in the past four weeks.

Those are just two results from the anonymous and voluntary Oregon Student Wellness Survey of students in grades 6, 8 and 11 conducted in spring 2018.

The survey is designed to assess a wide range of topics, ranging from school climate, positive youth development, mental health and physical health to substance abuse, problem gambling, fighting, harassment and other social problems.

Results for Grant County were presented to the Grant School District 3 board of directors at their Feb. 20 meeting.

The 113-page tabulation of county-wide survey results also compare results from the state for the reporting years from 2012-2018.

Alcohol use or bingeing by 11th graders in the past 30 days has trended slightly downward for both the county and state. In 2018, nearly a quarter of Grant County 11th graders

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## January unemployment spike related to shutdown

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

A larger-than-expected uptick in Grant County unemployment numbers for the month of January resulted from the partial government shutdown that ran from Dec. 22 to Jan. 25.

The unemployment rate, which had been steadily dropping from 14.2 percent in September 2012 to a low of 6.2 percent in July 2018, rose quickly to 8.5 percent in January 2019.

That was the highest January unemployment rate of any county in Oregon, according to the Oregon Employment Department's seasonally adjusted figures based on estimates from household surveys.

Unemployment rates in many



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

**With about 12 percent of Grant County workers employed by the federal government, including the Forest Service, the partial government shutdown in December and January increased the unemployment rate.**

Eastern Oregon counties typically increase in winter as there is less work available in the timber and tourism businesses. But the unusually higher increase this winter was

related to federal furloughs, according to regional economist Christopher Rich in La Grande.

About 45 percent of non-farm workers in Grant County

are employed by schools and city, county, state or federal governments. About 11.6 percent are federal workers.

The figure is similar in Harney County, which also saw a sharp increase in the unemployment rate in January. Other Eastern Oregon counties with a smaller percentage of federal workers, such as Morrow and Union counties, saw a smaller impact from the government shutdown, Rich said.

"Furloughed federal employees were classified as unemployed on temporary layoff under household survey definitions used to calculate labor force statistics, such as the unemployment rate and the number of unemployed," Rich said. "These

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