

Pilot Rock flood waters recede slowly

By Kathy Aney and Alex Castle
EO Media Group

Ray Arriola stood in the muddy middle of Main Street and watched water sluicing over a parking lot that sits between rushing East Birch Creek and a secondhand store called “Jer and Ter’s.”

He gestured toward a twisted length of metal safety fence at creekside that rushing water had flung aside during Wednesday’s flooding of downtown Pilot Rock.

“The power of water is amazing,” he said shaking his head, “but I think we’re over the hump now.”

Arriola lives on the other side of the creek. A row of sandbags did its job, keeping water out of his home.

Residents are still a bit shellshocked at how quickly the creek overflowed its banks and flooded Highway 395 where the road curls through the downtown core. Water had receded somewhat by Thursday morning, but the Pilot Rock Market parking lot was still a lake. The highway remained closed to through traffic.

On the west side of 395, sandbags were stacked high around J&D’s Food Mart, making an effective barrier that kept the store and the gas pump island relatively dry. The card slot of the store’s outdoor ATM machine blinked invitingly. Someone withdrawing money would have had a nice view of the highway and water rooster-tailing from the tires of passing emergency vehicles.

At nearby Coffee Station



The Pilot Rock Market remained closed on Thursday after being flooded the day before.

No. 1, patrons sipped the local brew and exchanged information about where the creek is jammed up and whose basements are flooded. At City Hall, Pilot Rock Police Chief Bill Caldera had been up almost 30 hours straight. He and his officers had knocked on doors to warn homeowners of rising water and helped wherever they were needed. He marveled at the esprit de corp of the city’s residents who flocked to two sandbagging stations at opposite ends of town. Caldera said the Red Cross took three evacuated families and put them up at Pendleton hotels.

Clint Young talked on his cell outside Jer and Ter’s, which belongs to his grandmother, Terry Arbogast. When he hung up, he said water had flooded the basement of the place, which is also Arbogast’s home. Family members

had worked to move valued items, such as a drum set that had belonged to his grandfather, to safer spots. But nothing could save the old Cadillac out back. Young said the vintage car, which he and his wife had driven away in after their wedding, was a mess.

Kristen Smith sat at her desk at Eastern Oregon Waste Management, right next door to the Pilot Rock market. Somehow the business had come away comparatively unscathed with only a little water damage. Smith, who is secretary at EOWM and the city clerk, joined the sandbag brigade yesterday, finally leaving at 10 p.m. Pilot Rock’s team spirit, she said, is inspiring.

“It was heartbreaking, yet heartwarming with everyone working together,” she said. “It’s an amazing place.”

The damage is still com-

ing to light. County Commissioner John Shafer said county road crews were out Thursday attempting to assess and work on the most impacted areas, though Pilot Rock appeared to have suffered the worst of the floods. There’s been no confirmed reports of bridges that have been washed out, but Shafer said the approach to one on West Birch Creek Road in Pilot Rock was impassable and some residents are currently unable to reach their homes in the area.

“Our road crews can’t get out there to work on it until the waters recede,” he said.

Butch Wilson of Pacific Power drove through Pilot Rock on Thursday morning on the way to Pearson Creek, where reportedly a power pole had fallen into the creek.

The flooding May 20-21 was the result of excessive rainfall throughout the region



An emergency vehicle sends up spray as it travels along Highway 395 through Pilot Rock on Thursday.

in recent days. The rainfall reached record levels for the Pendleton area May 20. According to the National Weather Service in Pendleton, the area received 1.11 inches of rain, shattering the previous record for May 20 that was set in 1894 at 0.79 inches.

The recent rainfall led to rising levels in rivers throughout the region and surrounding streams, including the Umatilla, Walla Walla, John Day, Grande Ronde and Imnaha rivers.

The Bureau of Reclamation attempted to manage levels at the McKay Creek Reservoir by increasing out-take levels to 1,400 cubic feet per second. Shafer said the reservoir reportedly peaked at an in-take level of about 5,000 cfs May 20, but those levels had dropped rapidly to 2,200 cfs by Thursday morning.

“The plan is to maintain the 1,400 cfs to allow for enough space in the reservoir to be established to protect against future rain events as well as

the impact on residents along McKay creek,” a release from the city of Pendleton stated Thursday.

According to the Northwest River Forecast Center, the Umatilla River near Pendleton was at 12.26 feet as of 11 a.m. Thursday, which is less than half an inch below its flood stage of 12.3 feet.

Road crews also responded to Nolin Grade Road near Echo on Thursday morning, Shafer said, and will be inspecting the Coombs Canyon area along the Umatilla River near Rieth.

Though it feels a bit like “Groundhog Day” after historic flooding ravaged the county in February, Shafer said initial reports indicate that county infrastructure damages won’t come close to the \$25 million dealt by floodwaters months ago.

“The peak is over, and we’re starting to see the end of it,” he said. “I think we’ll be all right as long as it stops raining.”

Head of Grant County Economic Development office steps down

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Allison Field announced her resignation as director of Grant County Economic Development after about a year on the job at a county court meeting May 19.

Field submitted her resignation May 12, and her last day was May 25, Human Resources Manager Laurie Wright said. The position is currently being advertised internally to county employees, and the county court has not yet appointed an interim director, she said.

Since early April, Field has been working within the COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center as part of the finance group, which includes Oregon RAIN, the Economic Development office and the EOC. The group collaborated on writing the county’s reopening application and on helping

businesses with loans and grant programs to soften the economic blow of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Field updated the court on the Economic Development office’s latest efforts.

She said the office sent out press releases through both the Blue Mountain Eagle and the radio to let businesses in the county know her office has attempted to contact them amid the crisis to let them know the office is available to them.

“We realize that it’s a big task to reach out to individual businesses, and know that, if they haven’t been contacted, it could be for several reasons, out-of-date contact information or closures,” Field said.

On May 15 the office posted on its Facebook page: “Please know that businesses have not been intentionally left out. We care about all businesses as they are crucial to Grant County.”



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Allison Field, Grant County Economic Development director, addresses Grant County Court May 19. Field stepped down as head of the department after more than a year in the position.

The post encouraged businesses in need of assistance to call Economic Development at 541-575-1555 or email info@grantcountyoregon.net or Stephanie LeQuieu with Oregon RAIN at 541-965-1598 or stephanie@oregonrain.org.

Field said the Economic

Development office, through GREAT, the local economic development nonprofit, applied for a grant from the Oregon Community Foundation for an emergency grant fund for small businesses.

GREAT applied for \$75,000, and the county put in a \$25,000

match for a total of \$100,000, she said.

Field also asked the court to allocate \$10,000 toward the project development portion of next year’s budget to continue Oregon RAIN.

She said the county has a two-year contract with the non-profit, and she wanted to put the money toward RAIN while still the director. County Commissioner Jim Hamsher praised LeQuieu, Grant County’s rural catalyst with Oregon RAIN, for the work she has been doing in the community.

Field said LeQuieu has been holding workshops online, hosting virtual meetups and helping businesses.

“She has been instrumental to our business community,” Field said.

Hamsher said LeQuieu should give the court a presentation of the work she has been doing in the community.

Grant County Judge Scott Myers suggested the court wait on obligating the money.

“I am just curious as to whether or not someone that might follow you in that position may or may not feel that is the best use of Economic Development money within that budget,” Myers said.

The court voted to wait on approving the funding.

The court thanked Field for her service to the county and wished her the best of luck in her endeavors.

In other Grant County Court news:

- The court decided to revisit reopening county offices until next week’s regular session.
- The court approved title III administrator Beth Simonson’s request to obligate 2019 funds and initiate 2020 funds. Myers said \$75,000 is obligated for 2019 and \$75,000 is initiated for the 2020 funds.

Arrests and citations in the Blue Mountain Eagle are taken from the logs of law enforcement agencies. Every effort is made to report the court disposition of arrest cases.

Grant County Sheriff

The Grant County Sheriff’s Office reported the following for the week of May 20:

Concealed handgun licenses: 11

Average inmates: 6

Bookings: 6

Releases: 5

Arrests: 0

Citations: 0

Fingerprints: 3

Civil papers: 17

Warrants processed: 0

Assistance/Welfare check: 0

Search and Rescue: 0

Dispatch

John Day dispatch worked 86 calls during the week of May 18-22, including:

- **John Day Police Department**

May 18: Cited Steven M. Warrington, 30, of John Day for driving while suspended and no insurance.

May 21: Krista Sheedy, 30, of John Day was cited for failure to obey traffic device on Fourth Street.

- **Oregon State Police**

May 18: Advised of pigs on Highway 26 near milepost 142.

May 21: Advised of a slide off on Highway 26 near Dixie Summit.

- **Grant County Sheriff’s Office**

May 18: Received a report of fraud on Ingle Street.

May 21: Received a report of shots fired on Highway 26 near milepost 178.

- **John Day ambulance**

May 18: Paged for a 78-year-old man on Southeast Hillcrest Road.

May 18: Responded to a 73-year-old woman on Northwest Canton Street.

May 19: Dispatched for a woman who was dizzy and

had difficulty standing on West Bench Road.

May 20: Responded for an 85-year-old man on Highway 26 near milepost 140.

May 20: Along with Oregon State Police and Seneca ambulance, dispatched for a single-vehicle rollover crash with injuries on Highway 395 near milepost 24.

May 22: Dispatched for a woman with a possible diabetic issue on West Main Street.

- **John Day fire**

May 20: Dispatched for a report of propane fumes on Southwest Brent Drive.

- **Long Creek ambulance**

May 19: Paged for a patient transport on East Main Street for an 81-year-old man with swelling/fluid retention.

- **Canyon City Fire**

May 22: Responded to a report of black smoke on Adam Drive.

- **Grant County Road Department**

May 20: Advised of flooding on County Road 20.

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