



Contributed photo  
Tanni Wenger Photography  
**Graduates from Prairie  
City School toss their caps  
in the air at their May 29  
graduation ceremony.**

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# EOC overspends \$125,000 budget by almost \$75,000

**Treasurer: Budget transfer needed to pay current bills, get through fiscal year for COVID-19 response**

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Emergency Operations Center Grant County established amid the COVID-19 pandemic has over-



**Julie Ellison**

spent its \$125,000 budget by almost \$75,000. The Grant County Court approved \$125,000 in funding for the EOC in March, and the EOC has obligated \$197,019 in payouts through May, according to information presented in Grant County Court May 27 by EOC Incident Commander Dave Dobler.



**Dave Dobler**

Grant County Treasurer Julie Ellison said at the meeting the EOC will need another budget transfer to make payroll and pay current invoices to make it through the fiscal year through June. In a document Dobler presented in court, he details \$60,000 of unexpected expenses — \$35,000 for federal reimbursement tracking soft-

ware, \$12,000 for rent at the airport, \$9,500 for wifi and \$3,000 for non-EOC expenditures — but the document also claims the EOC is within its budget.

When Dobler originally requested funding for the EOC, he requested \$250,120 for 90 days, but the Grant County Court authorized only \$125,060 with the plan to reassess in 45 days. The document Dobler presented in court appears to be working from the \$250,120 figure that was not approved by the court.

“I went through my county commissioner for requests, and did the best I could, and that’s really, really where we’re at,” Dobler told the Eagle. “So if the court has an issue with that, I guess we’ll deal with that at one particular time or another.”

**Moving money**

Ellison said the county transferred the \$125,000 from the General Fund Contingency to the Relief Help

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# Forest Service considers changing 21-inch harvest rule

By George Plaven  
EO Media Group

The U.S. Forest Service is considering whether to amend a 25-year-old rule that prohibits logging large trees across six national forests in Central and Eastern Oregon.

Known as the “Eastside screens,” the policy was originally adopted in 1995 and included a ban on harvesting any trees with a diameter greater than 21 inches east of the Cascades to protect old-growth forests, water quality and wildlife habitat.

Though the 21-inch standard was supposed to be temporary at the time, it has remained in effect for all or parts of the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur, Ochoco, Deschutes and Fremont-Winema national forests, which together add up to nearly 10 million acres of federally owned land.

Forest managers, however, may finally be ready to make changes based on advances in science and a better understanding of the different landscapes.

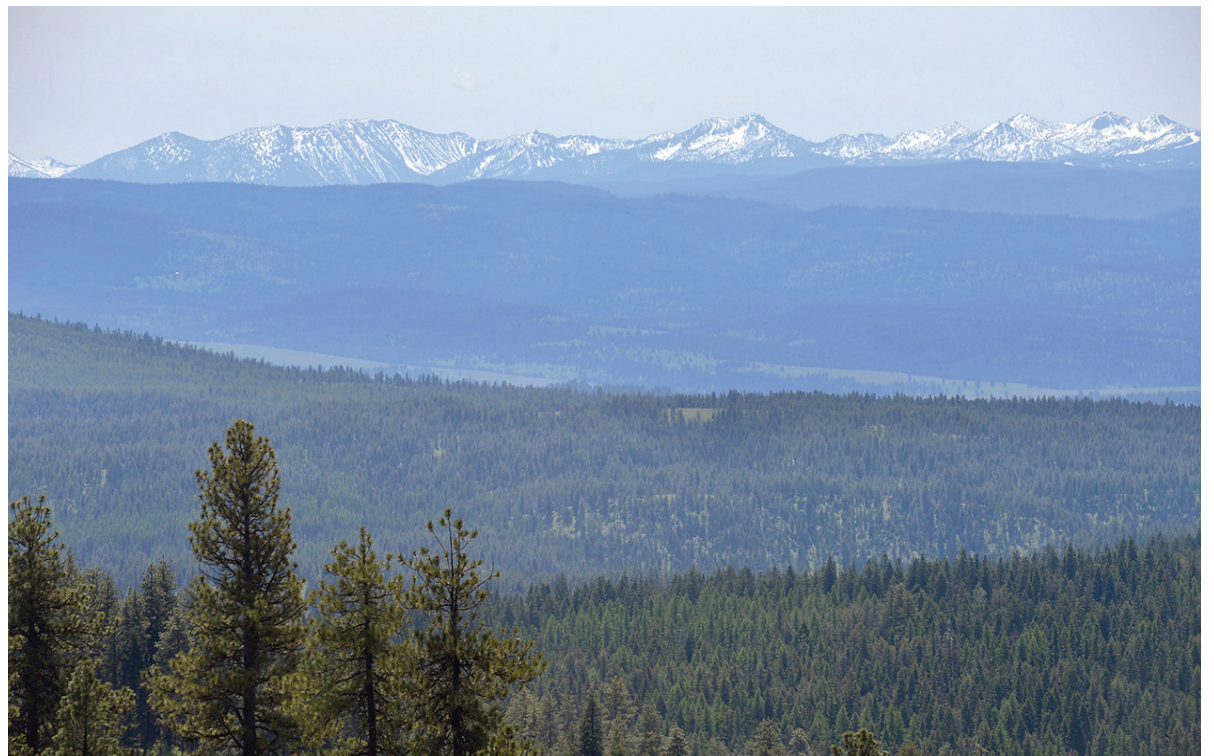
The Forest Service’s Pacific Northwest Research Station issued a report in February, stating that removing some 21-inch-diameter trees — especially those that are large, young and thrive in shade — may actually be desirable for forest restoration goals.

A nine-member interdisciplinary team is now leading the planning effort. The team held a series of virtual workshops May 11, 13 and 15 to gather feedback from partner cities, tribes and agencies, and plans to host additional public hearings later this summer.

Project leaders hope to issue a formalized decision on modifying the Eastside Screens by spring 2021.

At least one timber industry trade group, the American Forest Resource Council, supports amending the rule, calling it flawed, unscientific and outdated and that it stunted forest restoration and accelerated job losses in historically timber-dependent communities.

“It’s actually been pretty devastating,” said Irene Jerome, a forester and



File photo

See Rule, Page A12 The U.S. Forest Service has formed an intergovernmental council to discuss management of the Blue Mountains.

# City, chamber moving forward after heated discussion

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Officials from the city of John Day and Grant County Chamber of Commerce say they are making amends after a heated discussion at a recent meeting.

Thirteen minutes into a study session between the two groups over transient room tax distribution May 21, representatives from both sides raised their voices and criticized each other, and the meeting ended in tension.

But representatives from the groups met the following week amid a call for working together, and they are moving past the disagreement.

**Cause for tension**

Chamber Office Manager Tammy Bremner told the Eagle May 28 that the tension between the chamber and the city began near the end of the May 12 John Day City Council meeting. She said she felt City Manager Nick Green was unfair in his assessment that the city could do a better job of promoting tourism in John Day with the transient room tax funds than the chamber, which receives much of its funding from the county tax on hotel and RV park users.



Eagle file photo

The John Day City Council listens to a question from the community about the Fourth Street repairs March 10.

“That is what kind of what started the main tension, and I hate to throw that in (Green’s) face because he has backed off, and I really don’t want to start another fight with him or any of the city council, but that’s where it came from,” Bremner said.

At the beginning of the TRT meeting on May 21, chamber President Jerry Franklin began by thanking the council for setting up the meeting, but then shared what had been concerning him.

“It’s been kind of disturbing myself hearing rumors lately that we’re not effectively promoting the county and John Day’s best interest, which we firmly disagree with,” Franklin said. “And your comments and your memos tend to lead in that direction.”

John Day Mayor Ron Lundbom quickly clarified that it was not the city’s intent to discount the work the chamber has done.

“It wasn’t our intention to bash the county (chamber). It’s not the case,” Lundbom said.

Green added it was not their intent to criticize the chamber’s work.

**The transient room tax**

The county’s transient room tax ordinance calls for the collection of 8% of what hotel and RV park operators charge for one night, paid by the temporary visitor. The tax administration office keeps a small fee, and about 25% goes into a fund for grant funding through the chamber and the remaining amount is given to

the chamber.

The chamber is supposed to use the funds “for encouragement of entrepreneurial development and on the promotion, acquisition, construction, operation and maintenance of recreational, cultural and tourist related services and facilities intended to bring tourists and visitors to Grant County” and encourage residents to make use of the same.

According to the agenda for the TRT meeting, the county’s transient room tax generated \$191,749 countywide from all operators last year. Operators in John Day generated \$111,495.

“I would like to see that money (generated from John Day) invested in John Day, and I’d like to see it used for tourism promotion and community development projects in John Day,” Green said during a city council meeting on May 12. “Those hotels exist here because of the infrastructure investment that we’ve made as a city and the city taxpayers. I think that money should stay in our community.”

The city discussed implementing its own additional TRT tax or implementing a city TRT tax in place of the county’s.

“Neither option precludes our ability

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