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From left, Brazil Moon and her daughter Sophia, 3, dressed as a cowgirl, and son, Billy, 5, a cowboy, drop by the John Day Elks Lodge Saturday for candy.

The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

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Feds announce final rule to delist wolves in Lower 48 states



'One of the greatest comebacks for an animal in U.S. conservation history'

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

The Trump administration is moving forward with a controversial decision to lift endangered species protections for gray wolves across the Lower 48 states.

Interior Secretary David Bernhardt made the announcement Thursday at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Western ranchers have long advocated taking gray wolves off the list of species protected under the Endangered Species Act. They say delisting the wolves will make it easier to manage wolves and protect their livestock.

Environmental groups, meanwhile, are already planning a lawsuit, arguing the decision is premature and will hinder wolf recovery.

Gray wolves were driven to near-extinction in the early 20th century due to hunting, trapping and government-funded extermination efforts. Certain subspecies and regional populations of wolves were originally listed under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, then under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

In 1978, wolves were reclassified as endangered throughout the contiguous U.S. and Mexico. At the time, the population numbered just 1,000 wolves out-

side Alaska and Canada. Today, there are more than 6,000 wolves across the Lower 48 states.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued its latest delisting proposal in March 2019, calling wolf recovery "one of the greatest comebacks for an animal in U.S. conservation history."

"After more than 45 years as a listed species, the gray wolf has exceeded all conservation goals for recovery," Bernhardt said. "Today's announcement simply reflects the determination that this species is neither a threatened nor endangered species based on the specific factors Congress has laid out in law."

Thomason serves on election committee for 40 years

Longtime worker says election process is secure

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As the country headed into one of the most anticipated elections in history, election worker Lenora Thomason, 83, followed through on her promise to work the polls, as she has done for the last four decades.

Thomason, Grant County's longest-serving election worker, said that despite the pandemic and some health issues she has dealt with the past couple of years, she was happy to be working another election.

"Just being with the girls and being out of the house is making me feel better," she said.

Like the rest of the election committee, Thomason had to sit out the primaries in May due to COVID-19.

"I did not want to take the risk with any of my election workers," County Clerk Brenda Percy said.

Dedicated and loyal to the process, Thomason said she felt like she should have been there.

Thomason said that people who are concerned about election security need not worry.

"If all of them people would work on the election once, they would see that everything is on the up and up," she said.

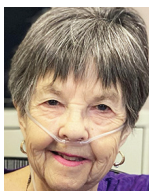
According to Percy, the election committee, on which Thomason serves, is comprised of both Republicans and Democrats.

Thomason, a Democrat, said her husband, Jim, who was a Republican at the time, told her that she should continue to stay registered as a Democrat.

"He told me, you better sign up as a Democrat so you can cancel my vote," she said.

Thomason said Percy is the third county clerk she has worked with during her career.

"Her dedication and experience deserves to be recognized," Percy said.



Lenora Thomason



Eagle file photo

Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett said Grant County's public records policy adds the unneeded extra step of referring the request to the county court.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Grant County Clerk Brenda Percy said the county should allow department heads to release records within the scope of their office.



Eagle file photo

Grant County Planning Director Shannon Springer said the mechanics of the county's public records policy are not clear.

PUBLIC RECORDS?

Department heads say county policy lacks clarity, consistency and is mostly unnecessary

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County's public records policy is not popular among county employees.

Department heads said the year-old policy — requiring approval from the county court before any county department can release any records — lacks clarity, consistency and is mostly unnecessary.

'Public records should not be this complicated'

Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett said, while she is not in an administrative position and steeped in the policies like the court members are, the policy adds an extra step they do not need.

She said the policy does not hinder her from carrying out the county's business because the court is set up to be transparent.

"Public records should not be this complicated," she said. "Some elected officials might

use this (public records request policy) to duck and dodge."

'Allow department heads to decide what they release'

County Clerk Brenda Percy said her office has always fulfilled allowable requests for voter registration records, such as mailing lists, and she said because of state mandates, she will never send those requests to the court for approval.

She said deed records, commissioner journals, county court meeting minutes and resolutions all require public records requests and fees that vary depending on the number of documents requested.

However, Percy said, they do not need to go to the county court for approval.

Percy said the kinds of records requests she sends to the court have to do with contentious topics the commissioners are involved with or sensitive issues.

Roughly two months ago, Commissioner

Sam Palmer, the COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center's public information officer, told Percy requests for EOC records should go to him as they may need to be redacted or approved by the county's lawyer.

"(The commissioners) need to allow department heads to decide what they release from within the spectrum of the duties of their office," Percy said. "My impression of the new policy is it's too stringent, and the spectrum of it is too wide."

'It's very unusual'

Ellen Osoinach, a staff lawyer with the Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press, said it is odd to have the custodian of a particular record forward the record to the executive of the government, even one that needs to be redacted.

"It may be a permissible process, but it's very unusual," she said.

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"IT MAY BE A PERMISSIBLE PROCESS, BUT IT'S VERY UNUSUAL."

"... IT IS NOT IN THE SPIRIT OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS LAW, WHICH IS ALL ABOUT TRYING TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION IN A TIMELY WAY WITHOUT ADDING UNNECESSARY STEPS TO THE PROCESS WHEN IT'S NOT CALLED FOR."

—Ellen Osoinach, staff lawyer for the Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press

