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DECRIMINALIZING DRUGS



Eagle file photo
Grant County Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay during a November session of county court.



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Downward case trend expected to lead to lower risk level

Grant County officials hopeful many restrictions will be lifted Friday

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County officials believe the county's downward trend of COVID-19 infections has the county on track to dropping down to a "low-risk" restriction level.

According to an Oregon Health Authority report on Monday, the county reported 24 new cases from Nov. 29 to Dec. 12. The state announced it would use the total case counts over this two-week period to determine the risk level, which determines what activities are allowed, for counties with 15,000 residents or fewer. The state is expected to announce the new risk levels this week to take effect Friday.

Sara Beaudrault, the state's public health lead, said OHA would post the metrics later in the day and that "these are the same data that will inform the county risk levels."

Grant County Health Department Administrator Kimberly Lindsay said, because the county saw less than 30 new infections in two weeks, she anticipates the county will move to the low-risk category.

Grant County Commissioner Jim Hamsher said he found out during his weekly call with Gov. Kate Brown's office that Grant County's downward trend in new cases was the best in the state.

"If that holds, we will be opening up on Friday the 18th," he said.

Grant County reported one new case Monday for a total of 157 cases.

Counties that keep their positive case count below 30 over two weeks qualify to be in the "low-risk" category.

- In the low-risk category:
- Restaurants can open up indoor dining, not to exceed 50% maximum occupancy.
 - Churches can increase indoor capacity to 75% occupancy. The state caps outdoor gatherings at 300.
 - Gyms and indoor recreation facilities can open to 50% capacity.
 - Long-term care facilities can allow inside and outside visitation.
 - Indoor social gatherings at home increased to 10 people and outdoor to 12.

State lawmakers seek Legislative Council opinion for a draft proposal to allow drugs to remain a crime in counties that voted down the measure

"WE HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME GETTING THE CURRENT PATIENT LOAD THAT WE HAVE IN TO INPATIENT TREATMENT AROUND THE STATE AND FINDING A BED AVAILABLE. I DON'T KNOW HOW IT'S GOING TO WORK WITH THE NUMBERS THAT I THINK THEY'RE GOING TO EXPECT TO BE PUSHED THAT DIRECTION."

— Grant County Sheriff-elect Todd McKinley

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Changes are coming to Oregon's drug laws after state voters decriminalized possession of small amounts with the approval of Measure 110 in November.

Although the law takes effect Feb. 1, 2021, Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter said in a press release his office would begin resolving cases with the new metrics in mind.

Carpenter said pending cases that would fall under Measure 110 would be made "a violation offer with a referral to a local drug treatment program." Incoming cases will be charged as violations as they would be under the new law, and pending and incoming cases that involve a mix of charges with some that would fall under Measure 110 will be charged and resolved "according to the applicable law at the time of the offense," he said.

State Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, said he is working with the Legislative Council to draft a proposal to take to the legislative session that

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MEASURE 110

Effective Feb. 1, possession of Schedule 1, 2 or 3 controlled substances is a class E violation, unless the possession is part of a commercial drug offense.

Possession of a controlled substance remains a misdemeanor with:

- 40 tabs or more of LSD
- 12 grams or more of psilocybin
- 40 pills or more of oxycodone
- one gram or more of heroin
- one gram, or five pills, or more of MDMA
- two grams or more of cocaine
- two grams or more of methamphetamine

Grant County losing predator control officer

Commissioners to consider increasing position to full time

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Federal animal damage control will end in Grant County in less than two weeks.

USDA Wildlife Services District Supervisor Shane Cowell, who took over for Patrick Smith at the La Grande office, said longtime animal control officer Nick Lulay accepted a full-time position in Wallowa.

Cowell said he could post the

open position, but he wanted to see if the county could put in more than the \$35,000 it contributed for the job.

He said he could get a better quality applicant if they advertise it as a full-time position.

Cowell said, if the county could come up with \$70,000, they could fund the full position time.

County Judge Scott Myers said that the county would meet in early spring to discuss increasing the funding to full time.

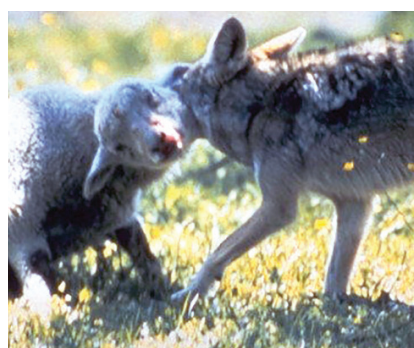
County Commissioner Sam Palmer said the Budget Committee cut the funding, and he does not expect the committee to double it.

The members of the court agreed on the value the position brings to the community, but they said there needs to be local "buy-in" from the community.

Myers said the situation with the mule deer population is "disastrous." "If things don't turn around here locally, ODFW is going to have to decrease buck tags," he said.

County Commissioner Jim Hamsher said the predator control program benefited the ranchers and the community as well.

Grant County did not have a federal animal damage control officer for nearly two decades before they joined the program in 2017.



EOMG file photo

The federal animal control program prevents depredation of livestock for ranchers. Grant County is losing its animal control officer to a full-time position elsewhere.