

Coordinator announces establishment of new Firewise community

County appoints board members, recognizes long-term employees

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Court received an update on its Community Wildfire Protection Plan earlier this month.

Irene Jerome, the county's Firewise coordinator, said the CWFP is updated annually.

The program helps organizations and property owners reduce fire danger and has been funded by the Secure Rural Schools payments.

She said she had been the "go-to" about anything that has to do with fire prevention in Grant County.

In February, she said, Oregon Fire Prevention invited her to give a presentation about how Grant County has successfully established Firewise in various communities throughout the county. She said the group was impressed, given the challenges with being geographically spread out.

She said the Firewise program, like everything else in 2020, has been affected by the pandemic.

She said she worked with the National Resource Conservation Service and Grant Soil and Water Conservation District to apply for a fuel reduction grant program. Jerome said the grant would open significant funding for cleanup and other projects, but, she said, due to the pandemic, they have delayed putting in for the grant until next year.

"It's a lot of work, and as everyone knows with COVID, it's difficult," she said, "because you can't gather in person."

Jerome said the Grant-Harney Fire Prevention Cooperative was "really robust" until this year "disassembled." She said she attributed the reasons to both COVID-19 and the departure of Mark Howell, a fire prevention officer with Forest Service. Jerome said Howell could not get a promotion in the area, so he moved on.

"The loss of his assistance has been pretty devastating to the program," Jerome told the court.

Nonetheless, she said the community worked with the county's Search and Rescue coordinator Dave Dobler, conducting mock evacuations on Laycock Creek Road.

Jerome said evacuation plans are critical, especially in areas like Ritter and Middle Fork, where there is one



From left, Grant County Sheriff's Office Deputy Mike Alley and Civil Deputy Anna Marie Kuhn during a Dec. 9 session of Grant County Court. Both Alley and Kuhn were presented with certificates of appreciation for years of county employment.



Irene Jerome

road in and one route to get out.

"There are some alternative ways," Jerome said. "But you have people there that don't know the country, and they get in there, get trapped. Have they thought about evacuation? Do they know how to get out?"

She said helping communities establish those plans is what Firewise is there for, but community engagement is crucial.

She said Middle Fork and Ritter are starting to lose interest because of the lockdown orders. Jerome said virtual meetings are not an option because of sparse broadband.

Despite the difficulties this year, Jerome told the court she helped establish a Firewise community, Canyon Creek Lanes.

"I am very proud of that," she said. "They have their official designation."

She said there is "power of the group" with a Firewise community regarding fuel reductions.

Jerome said funding under the federal Title III Secure Rural Schools to protect homes and properties is only available Firewise communities.

Jerome said she also has ideas, such as seeing about an incentive-based fuel reduction program. She said she plans on attending a Natural Resource Advisory Committee meeting to talk about them.

Jerome stressed how community-driven Firewise is.

"The beauty of it (Firewise) is the communities do it together," she said. "The CWFP is the overarching document."

In other county news:

The court made the appointments to the following boards and committees:

Airport Commission Board

Robert Watt, reappointment, to expire Dec. 31, 2022.

Doug Baggett, reappointment, to expire Dec. 31, 2022.

Scott Myers, reappointment, to expire Dec. 31, 2022.

Doug Ferguson, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2022.

College Advisory Board
Didgette McCracken, reappointment, to expire Dec. 31, 2023.

Christie Moore, appointment, expires Dec. 31, 2023.

Sam Palmer seconded the appointment of Moore to the board, but with discussion. He said he did not see Moore's qualifications and did not know her personally. Myers said he did not know her personally, but nonetheless, she applied. Palmer said he would like to have a summary of an applicant's qualifications in the future.

4-H Extension Office Board

Beth Spell, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Fair Board

Doug Cox, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Courtney Montague, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Mental Health Advisory Board

Colleen Lindley, appointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Kathleen Hoffman, appointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Planning Commission

Margie Walton, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2024.

Senior Citizens Advisory Board

Karen Stubblefield, Dec. 31, 2023.

Susan Cavender, Dec. 31, 2021.

Southeast Area Commission of Transportation

Doug Ferguson, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Wildlife Advisory Board

John Morris, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Kenneth Moore, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Bob Pugh, appointment, Dec. 31, 2023.

Natural Resource Advisory Committee

Jim Bahrenburg, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2022.

Dan Becker, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2022.

Billie Jo George, reappointment, Dec. 31, 2022.

County Judge Scott Myers said the court would not fill

the other vacancies on the NRAC or budget committee until there was further discussion.

The budget committee has two vacancies.

At Thursday's NRAC meeting, the members discussed the four applicants for the committee's two vacancies. The members voted on recommending Brett Morris, a logging contractor, and Howard Geiger, who, according to NRAC member Billie Jo George, is active in Firewise.

Dan Becker, who was reappointed, said it is the county's role to appoint members.

Myers said the county extends the ability of boards and committees to recommend applicants. He said, for example, that he has asked Community Counseling Solutions Clinic Manager Thad Labhart to put the word out for new members for the Mental Health Board. He said he has done the same with the Planning Commission.

County Commissioner Jim Hamsher, NRAC's liaison, said the county's boards and committees have always recommended new members.

Employee appreciation certificates

The county carried on a year-old tradition of presenting employees with more than five years of service certificates of appreciation.

20 years of service

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer

Corrections Deputy Mike Alley

15 years of service
Planning Director Shannon Springer

County Assessor David Thunnel

10 years of service
Legal Assistant to the District Attorney Jamie McKay

Civil Deputy Anna Marie Kuhn

Five years of service
Road Department Lead Mechanic Joe Bennett

Fairgrounds Manager Mindy Winegar

Human Resources Manager Laurie Cates

Road Foreman John Harper

Three cities sign over \$55,000 to the county in COVID-19 relief money

Funds to be spent by the end of the year

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Three Grant County cities obligated \$55,000 in COVID-19 relief funds to go to the county.

County Judge Scott Myers said Canyon City signed over \$25,000 — the city's entire award amount — which the county put toward finishing the floors at the Grant County Fairgrounds pavilion.

Myers said Seneca also signed over its full amount, while Mt. Vernon handed over \$5,000.

Once the state sends an executed agreement, he said, the county would have an additional \$30,000 for coronavirus expenses.

He said the court had not decided how to use the remaining funds from Mt. Vernon and Seneca.

Myers said the COVID-19 relief money is subject to the U.S. Treasury's spending rules and are not specific to small business.

Along with John Day, Canyon City and the county have nearly completed improving broadband support at Humbolt Elementary School.

Canyon City Recorder Corry Rider said the city planned to improve broadband at Humbolt and did not see a reason to request reimbursement for their part of the project.

County Commissioner Jim Hamsher said the money spent at the fairgrounds benefits other cities beyond once a year for the county fair.

He said the fairgrounds renovation, once complete, will be ADA compliant and available as an Emergency Operations Center or a vaccination center for COVID-19.

Mt. Vernon

Mt. Vernon City Recorder Tami Kowing

said the city sent \$5,000 back to the county after the city purchased personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies for the city's businesses and laptops for each city council member and their city employee to meet remotely.

Seneca

Amanda Born, Seneca city manager, said the city decided to send the \$25,000 to the county due to a "lack" of what they could spend the money on by Dec. 31.

Born said they had discussed sending the money to the county if they could not spend the money by the end of the year.

"We tried," she said. "And we discussed it (sending the money to the county) from the get-go."

Long Creek

Long Creek Mayor Don Porter said the city had not made a final decision. He said they are leaning toward purchasing

personal protective equipment for first responders.

Still, he said the city is being careful on what they obligate the funding toward because they have to submit paperwork for reimbursement, and he wants to be sure the city will get their money back.

"We have to turn things in," he said. "We don't know if we'll get reimbursed, and if we put out \$9,000 and it doesn't get approved, then that's no good."

He said it is not like the timber money where cities and municipalities received a lump sum and had more autonomy on how they spent those funds.

Granite

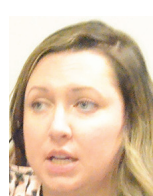
Hamsher said the county could receive additional relief funds from Granite. He said the county's Economic Development Director Tory Stinnett is working on reaching out to the city.



Don Porter



Jim Hamsher



Tory Stinnett



Kenny Delano

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.
from the Blue Mountain Eagle

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