



Eagle file photo

Magone Lake is one of many attractions on the Malheur National Forest. A culvert replacement project is planned near the lake this summer.

Great American Outdoors Act to fund forest projects

Deferred maintenance to be completed on roads, culverts

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Projects in the North Fork John Day Ranger District and Malheur National Forest will be underway.

The United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service announced on March 9 that they plan to invest up to \$40 million for 29 projects on national forests in Oregon and Washington through the Great American Outdoors Act. The press release from Umatilla National Forest states that the projects will address critical deferred maintenance and improve transportation and recreation infrastructure.

The Blue Mountain Scenic Byway Chip Seal project in the North Fork John Day Ranger District is one of the 29 projects close to Grant County. This project in the Umatilla National Forest plans to repair 33.6 miles of existing road on

a 145-mile route that travels from near Arlington to Granite.

The deferred maintenance on this portion of the road will reduce risk to public safety and extend the life of the route for 10-20 years, according to the release.

A culvert replacement project in the Malheur National Forest will also benefit from the money allocated from the Great American Outdoors Act.

Responses from Chase Bloom, the Engineering, Minerals & Fleet staff officer, and Lindsay Davies, the Fisheries Program manager, for the Malheur National Forest, state that the forest will be replacing five culverts to reduce deferred maintenance, improve flood flow capacity and aquatic organism passage during the summer of 2021.

"This new funding source provides an incredible boost in our ability to reduce deferred maintenance across the forest, promote the longevity of transportation and access across public lands, and restore the connectivity of fisheries habitat for native fish," their

response states.

They said local companies, through existing contracts, will complete the work, which will generally begin around June 15 and be completed by Oct. 15.

Two culverts are being replaced on Middle Fork Wolf Creek, on Forest Road 15 and 1500-028 on the Emigrant Creek Ranger District.

On the Blue Mountain Ranger District, projects include one culvert at the Summit Creek crossing on Forest Road 1940-281 east of Austin Junction and north of Highway 26; one culvert at the East Fork Beech Creek crossing on Forest Road 3600-052; and implementing one culvert in partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife at the Tinker Creek crossing on Forest Road 3620 near Magone Lake.

"We are looking forward to continued opportunities to make targeted, strategic investments in our infrastructure over the entire five-year life of the Great American Outdoors Act," Bloom and Davies said.

John Day proposes establishing city transient room tax

Rate would apply on top of state and county taxes

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

The city of John Day is proposing to establish its own transient room tax.

The new tax for motel and RV park guests, which would be levied on top of the state and county rates, would only apply in the city limits.

The meeting agenda states that, to pursue this approach, the city would need to pass an ordinance, which includes establishing a local TRT rate, and enter into the agreement with the Oregon Department of Revenue.

The department would then administer the tax and handle the city's tax by reviewing the ordinance, collecting the tax, providing financial auditing and then remitting the tax directly to the city.

Grant 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 the remaining amount is given to the Grant County Chamber of Commerce.

"The purpose of this tax is to raise revenues to be used for tourism promotion and tourism related facilities in the county," according to Ordinance No. 2012-04.

The current transient rates in the county include a 1.5% state rate and the 8% county rate.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said he wouldn't recommend less than a 3% rate. He said there aren't enough rooms and the city's occupancy rate is too low for a lower tax rate to be effective.

Malin Patel, who owns the



Eagle file photo

Grant County Fairgrounds Manager Mindy Winegar says she would have to possibly raise her rates to accommodate for the city's transient room tax.

Best Western and America's Best Value in John Day, said he feels this is a regressive tax to the lodging businesses in John Day.

"Someone wants to spend \$100 on a room, and they're looking at a flat budget of \$100," Patel said. "By adding a 1.5% tax, that's taking more money from our customers."

Patel asked why the city is not pursuing a share of the county's tax that's already collected.

Councilor Dave Holland said he is not convinced that a \$1.50 tax on a \$100 room is significant enough for somebody to avoid lodging at a hotel. He added that the city council tried to work with the chamber and county to get a piece of the currently collected taxes but to no success.

Green said the additional funds from the tax could be

used for tourism in John Day and help organize events to attract tourist to the area.

Grant County Fairgrounds Manager Mindy Winegar said she would have to possibly raise her rates to accommodate for the city's transient room tax.

Holland said it's not the businesses being taxed but the out-of-town guests.

"In the long run, we are trying to increase tourism to our city, and it gives us a way to have an income from the people who want to visit here and not from our local residents," Councilor Shannon Adair said. "It's an outside source of revenue that we can use."

Five city council members said they were in favor implementing a city tax, while two said they were against it.

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Hello Grant County, Well, it seems that Spring has sprung in Grant County! I love this time of year! We would like to welcome the Grant County Education Service District (ESD) our newest Chamber member.

With the beautiful (off and on) weather, we also seem to be experiencing another outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. The 1188 Brewing Company and The Outpost Pizza Pub and Grill have voluntarily closed for the protection of their employees and the community until things settle down again. Let's show them our support when they open back up!

Our Greenback program is still going strong! We have had some large purchases from Humbolt School, the Blue Mountain Hospital, the Blue Mountain Federation of Teachers # 3466, and Community Counseling Solutions. Thank you for supporting our local businesses and keeping your dollars in Grant County!

You may have noticed some work around our pond area. Thanks to board member Bruce Ward for removing trees and shrubs and filling the pond in, in preparation for the longhorn steer. Stay tuned, there will surely be more added.

We are gearing up for our tourist season which officially starts May 1st. We are expecting a year similar to last year but with more out of town visitors. I am hearing that reservations are being made, and many of our lodging facilities are going to be seeing a lot of summer visitors. Outdoor recreation is going to be big again this year!

The Chamber Board's monthly business meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 15th. The board meets at 10:30 AM at the Chamber office.

I hope you enjoy the beautiful warm days and springtime activities. Stay well Grant County! Tammy Bremner Chamber Manager

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