

# Grant County Budget Committee begins difficult process

Forest patrol, predator control positions among early discussions

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County's Budget Committee held its first meetings to make difficult decisions to balance this year's budget.

After Grant County Treasurer Julie Ellison said in the budget message that the only way the county could avoid perpetual shortfalls would be to cut positions, the committee heard from justice court, the sheriff's office and revisited its predator control position.

## Predator control

The committee deliberated on whether it should hire a full-time animal control officer after the county lost its federal animal control officer in December when Nick Lulay accepted a full-time position in Wallowa County.

In December, USDA Wildlife Services District Supervisor Shane Koyle asked the county if it could put in more than \$35,000 it had previously contributed for the job. He said he could get a better quality applicant if they advertise it as a full-time position.

Budget Committee member Amy Kreger said, when she "steps



Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett addresses the Court May 27.

aside" from her role as a committee member and looks at the program from a property owner's position, it is a position that 100% benefits tax-paying property owners.

She said the county has a badger and coyote problem and that Lulay would come out and take care of them in the past.

"This is the one thing that every edge of the county benefits from," she said. "Maybe one year they don't need it, maybe one year they do."

Koyle said he believes it looks good on USDA's side that they could get funding. However, he said, that is a small portion. He said USDA also relies on funding from the Oregon Department of Fish and

Wildlife and counties.

Bob Quinton, Budget Committee president, said the county is just getting into the budget and cannot promise anything yet.

Ellison asked rancher Jim Dovenburg if he had collected donations from any of the ranchers. He said he had in the past, but he can no longer do so.

## Sheriff's office

Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley said he could not speak to why full-time Deputy Dave Dobler had been patrolling the forest when the position was initially supposed to be a part-time job, budgeted at \$14 per hour with no benefits. However, he said, Dobler puts in "yeoman's



Eagle file photo

Grant County Sheriff's Deputy Dave Dobler.

work" into the job and should not be punished.

Dobler puts in 30 hours a week and, with benefits, earns roughly \$50 per hour. Ellison said he is one of the most expensive deputies within the sheriff's office.

McKinley said he would like to see \$20,000 from the general fund be transferred to the forest patrol fund. McKinley said he would also like to see COVID-19 stimulus money put toward that fund to get back into the black.

Emergency Manager Paul Gray told the Eagle Friday that he proposed the county put \$100,000 of COVID-19 stimulus money into the sheriff's office to cover the office's budget holes.

Additionally, McKinley said the Forest Service opened up \$8,000 that was not expended in the previous year to kick into this year's budget cycle.

McKinley said forest patrol is funded entirely through the Forest Service's contract. However, he said, Secure Rural Schools Title III funds will also pay for forest patrol, but the hours cannot be charged to both the Forest Service and Title III.

He said part of the reason why there is such a shortfall within the sheriff's office budget is that the office had not been billing Title III correctly for Dobler's position. McKinley again emphasized that that none of this was Dobler's fault.

McKinley said he would like to get the hole fixed in this budget cycle because this occurred in the past cycles.

## Justice Court

Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett said cutting a position in her office would inhibit the county's ability to collect revenue from traffic tickets and other court fines. Quinton said the county is left paying out more than the county is bringing in.

"We're back to paying \$2,525 a month, and we're collecting \$1,600," he said. "I'm not picking on you, but that seems to be the reoccurring theme when we look at all of these recurring budgets and general funds."

# High cases, low vaccinations risk Grant County summer events

Motorcycle rally canceled, other events in limbo

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County risks missing out on summer events again this year with the highest COVID-19 infections per capita in Oregon and the state's worst vaccination rate.

Grant County Fair Manager Mindy Winegar said in an email Thursday that the BMW Riders of Oregon's Chief Joseph Rally, scheduled in June to take place at the Grant County Fairgrounds, has already canceled.

Winegar said the Grant County Fair, scheduled for August, is being planned as usual.

"I am still planning as normal," she said. "I hope we will get this all under control, and we can move forward."

Steve Schulz, executive director of Cycle Oregon, said they put out a "save the date" for the event, which was tentatively scheduled Sept. 11-18,



Eagle file photo

The Whiskey Gulch Gang fires off shots from their float during the 2017 '62 Days Parade in Canyon City.

and are in a "wait and see" mode for now.

Schulz said Cycle Oregon very much wants to have the event, but all of the counties they go through have to be "on the same page" when it comes to rates of infection and vaccination rates.

"All the counties are different," he said. "Grant County doesn't seem to want to get vaccinated."

He said Cycle Oregon

would decide by late May or early June whether the event will go on or not.

Meanwhile, Colby Farrell of the Whiskey Gulch Gang, which organizes the '62 Days Celebration in Canyon City, said some people in Grant County — no matter what — are not going to get the vaccine.

Farrell said, if the vaccine is available to anyone who wants it, people should be allowed to choose for themselves whether



Contributed photo/Cycle Oregon

Cycle Oregon will decide by May or June whether to hold a large event in Grant County this year.

they should attend large gatherings.

"To me, it seems like it should be about personal responsibility and choice at that point," he said. "Not everybody is going to get the vaccine, no

matter how much some people may want that. It's just not reality."

Farrell, 45, has lived in Grant County his whole life. He said he had seen community events come and go by the

wayside over the years. From Monument's Grasshopper Festival to Kam Wah Chung Days in John Day, community events have gone away under normal circumstances.

"We don't want to lose these events," he said, "especially ones that are unique like '62 Days and the demolition derby you won't really see anywhere else."

Farrell said he rolled up his sleeve to get the vaccine when it was his turn. He said getting the vaccine is a "personal choice" that people need to make for themselves.

Farrell said what drove his decision in getting the shot was so that Grant County "could move forward and get back to a sense of normalcy."

"Getting the vaccine — so that we can get back to getting things going like they need to be — outweighed my fear of it," he said.

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Teresa Aasness ffdta@gmail.com or Katrina Randleas fthvkat@gmail.com