

# The Blue Mountain EAGLE

Grant County's newspaper since 1868

Wednesday, January 5, 2022 154th Year • No. 1 • 18 Pages • \$1.50



MyEagleNews.com



Richard Hanners/Blue Mountain Eagle, File

Raw logs ready to be milled at Iron Triangle's post and pole plant in Seneca. The plant is one example of investments made by the company to carry out its 10-year stewardship contract with the Malheur National Forest.

## Talks on police funding begin

By BENNETT HALL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — After a two-month stalemate, discussions have finally begun between city and county officials about how to fill the void left by the shutdown of the John Day Police Department in mid-October.

A day after the City Council's Oct. 12 vote to suspend operations of the financially strapped police department, City Manager Nick Green went to a session of the Grant County Court to propose a fund exchange: The city would give the county \$300,000 a year from its general fund for law enforcement services if the county would give the city an equal amount from its road fund for street improvements in John Day.

To date, there has been no formal response from the county, while the Grant County Sheriff's Office bears the burden of policing John Day with no budget support to hire additional staff. Meanwhile, the issue of law enforcement funding has continued to fester. It came up again at the Dec. 14 meeting of the City Council, which must decide whether to accept a \$375,000 federal policing grant and reconstitute the city's police force or, if the grant terms allow, pass the money on to the Sheriff's Office.

A number of councilors voiced their frustration with the county's silence on the fund exchange proposal, while Sheriff Todd McKinley urged both sides to come to the table and discuss how to pay for law enforcement services going forward.

"I think these two bodies are going to have to solve it," McKinley told the council, "and that's what they were elected to do."

Shortly after the meeting, the sheriff reached out to the county's elected leadership. "I sent an email to the commissioners and the judge and just said, 'Come on, guys, we've got to get moving on this,'" McKinley told the Eagle. Some city and county officials, it appears, were already thinking along the same lines. The day after the Dec. 14 council meeting, County Commissioner Sam Palmer had a conversation with his old friend Gregg Haberly, a city councilor. "(Haberly) said, 'Look, we've got to do something,'" Palmer recalled.

That got the ball rolling. At Palmer's request, McKinley put together a preliminary funding plan to provide law enforcement services to the city of John Day in addition to patrolling the rest of Grant County — a 4,500-square-mile area that the Sheriff's Office covers with just four patrol deputies.



Todd McKinley



Sam Palmer



Gregg Haberly

# STEWARDS OF THE LAND

With a long-term stewardship contract set to expire next year, Malheur National Forest officials are weighing what comes next

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The 10-year stewardship contract between the Malheur National Forest and Iron Triangle is widely credited with saving John Day's last surviving lumber mill, creating hundreds of jobs and improving forest health.

But it has also prompted criticism from some who feel the John Day-based logging company has profited at the expense of smaller rivals.

Now, with the contract set to expire early next year, federal forest managers are trying to decide what form stewardship contracting on the forest should take in the future.

### A different approach

Stewardship contracts are fundamentally different from traditional timber sale contracts.

According to Roy Walker, a program manager with the Forest Service, the federal agency awards timber contracts by identifying an area with commercially marketable trees, marking the boundaries of the proposed timber sale and estimating the amount of merchantable wood in the sale area.

Then, he said, the agency evaluates the fair market value of the timber and opens up a bidding process to companies that can meet bonding and other requirements.



Richard Hanners/Blue Mountain Eagle, File

Finished product ready to be shipped at Iron Triangle's post and pole plant in Seneca.

As the Forest Service expanded its forest restoration, fuels reduction and thinning activities, Walker said, it melded forest management work, which often lacks commercial value, with timber sales.

Stewardship brings the two together, allowing the Forest Service to award the commercial value that loggers would ordinarily bid on to finance restoration work on national forest land.

In 2013, faced with the imminent closure of Malheur Lumber, Grant County's lone sawmill and largest private employer, due to an inconsistent and unreliable supply of timber, Malheur National Forest officials decided to award a long-term stewardship contract to a single operator in a bid to stabilize the situation.

The 10-year, \$69 million contract went to Iron Triangle, the winner in a competitive bidding process.

The contract, which was significantly more long-term and broader in scope than most stewardship deals, accelerated timber sales and increased the pace of restoration work on the Malheur.

Universally regarded as a success in stabilizing the local economy, the unusual contract has won praise at the national level. Its overarching goals were to promote ecological restoration and reduce wildfire risk on 180,000 to 500,000 acres of forest land while improving economic vitality in Grant and Harney counties.

See Land, Page A18

### STEWARDSHIP BY THE NUMBERS

Since winning a 10-year contract with the Malheur National Forest in 2013, Iron Triangle has completed stewardship projects on more than 150,000 acres of forest lands.

The work includes:

- 12,000 acres of pre-commercial thinning
- 10,000 acres of slash piled
- 1,000 acres of aspen treatment
- 2,000 acres of soil stability treatment
- 3,000 acres of mastication, a fuel reduction process to reduce the risk of wildfire
- 1,100 miles of road maintenance
- 1.2 million tons of total biomass removed

## Owens bill limits emergency powers

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

CRANE — A state lawmaker from Eastern Oregon will look to trim the powers of state government during an emergency when the Legislature meets for a short session next month.

A bill written by Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, would amend Oregon's Constitution to spell out when governors can declare emergencies, what powers they can exercise and, more importantly, how long they can unilaterally keep them in place.

Oregon has been under a state of emergency since March 8, 2020, when Gov. Kate Brown declared her intention to take extraordinary measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Brown has extended the state of emergency several times since then.

Under Owens' proposal, known as Legislative Concept No. 49 until it is



Blue Mountain Eagle, File

State Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, speaks during a meet-and-greet with constituents on Nov. 10, 2021, at the Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck in John Day.

assigned a bill number, the governor, when making a declaration of emergency, must specify each county where the emergency exists and list reasons why local jurisdictions should be under a state of emergency.

According to the proposed legislation, the declarations cannot exceed increments of 30 days. After 30 days, the decision to extend a state of emergency would go to a local governing body for a vote. County and city governing bodies could then create a hybrid of emergency restrictions if they choose to do so regarding such measures as masking, school closures and vaccine requirements, Owens explained in an interview.

Additionally, the legislative concept states that a governor may not retaliate against a county whose governing body has determined not to fully continue a declaration of emergency beyond the initial 30 days of the order. Owens said this includes threats to pull state funding, fines against local businesses and other types of state sanctions.

Under current Oregon law, the

See Owens, Page A18

See Funding, Page A18

