

## Green

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He proposed a number of innovative ideas aimed at upgrading public facilities, reinvigorating the local economy and rebuilding the population by making John Day attractive to outsiders.

Among the initiatives Green has taken a leading role in as city manager are these:

- A new wastewater treatment plant with a large-scale solar array and a system for reclaiming treated wastewater for agricultural and industrial use.

- Hydroponic greenhouses for growing produce.

- An urban renewal area to provide financial incentives for new home construction.

- The John Day Innovation Gateway, a project aimed at redeveloping roughly 100 acres of former industrial land on both sides of the John Day River for industrial, commercial and public use, with amenities such as hotels, restaurants, greenspace and a

community gathering area.

- An integrated park system with a trail network connecting residential neighborhoods with the riverfront and downtown.

- A plan to expand broadband internet access in John Day and extend it to smaller communities throughout Grant County.

- Plans for a new aquatic center at the Seventh Street Sports Complex to replace the aging Gleason Pool.

- A marketing campaign aimed at making John Day attractive to tourism and new residents.

### Target for criticism

While Green's proposals have generally enjoyed solid support from the City Council and praise from outside agencies, many have also attracted vocal criticism from individuals both within and outside the city limits.

Perhaps the most controversial issue Green has been involved with was the decision to suspend operations of the John Day Police Department. That decision – which was



Bennett Hall/Blue Mountain Eagle

**Nick Green works in his office on Monday, Jan. 24, 2022. Green, who has championed a number of innovative policies since becoming John Day city manager in 2016, has become a polarizing figure in local politics.**

unanimously approved by the City Council in October – came after years of budget shortfalls and the failure of a ballot measure for an operating levy.

He has also brought in \$26 million in grant funding for the city, but that, too, has been controversial, in part because his contract with the city allows him to keep 1% of the dollar value of many of those grants.

And his personal style, which Green has publicly

acknowledged can be abrasive, has sometimes strained relationships with county government, business owners and others.

“I don’t mind that as much. I think conflict is sometimes necessary on issues that matter, so politics are not so much a concern,” he said.

“But how to separate your public life and your private life in a small town – it’s just impossible.”

Green acknowledged that the drumbeat of criticism has been wearing on both him and his family. He said the personal attacks has sometimes gone to extremes, including more than one instance of doxxing, where his home address and other personal information have been publicized online as an intimidation tactic.

“That happens to a lot of public officials, so I’m not unique in that regard,” he said. “But I think it’s the lowest of lowbrow responses to policies you disagree with.”

He also said he’s been threatened several times.

“If you disagree with someone, figure out what the issues are you disagree with and address those,” he said. “Don’t target, threaten, say you’re going to run me out of the county.”

### Looking to the future

Green said he understands why some longtime John Day residents might see some of his ideas as a threat to the community’s established culture and way of life. But given the

city’s declining population and depressed economy, he thinks such steps are necessary if the city is to have any kind of future.

Ultimately, he said, the community needs to make a decision about the best course of action and come together to make it happen.

“Things were wonderful back then – we had 300 more residents and five operating lumber mills,” he said of the city’s heyday.

“But I don’t think you can re-create that (level of prosperity) unless you do what I’ve been advocating for: rebuild the economy, attract new residents and promote tourism.”

“There’s no going back,” he added. “If it’s not the vision I’ve been pushing for, someone else needs to come up with another one.”

Green, 42, said he and his family hope to stay in John Day, but he wasn’t sure what his next career move might be.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I haven’t decided, to be honest with you. I’m kind of just taking it one step at a time.”

## Plan

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According to commanding officer Bailey Frasch, the Guard members assist with non-critical duties such as sanitation and cleaning at both the hospital and Blue Mountain Care Center in Prairie City.

Frasch told the Eagle that Guard members would be in the county until April 1.

Frasch said before any of the medical staff comes in for the day, guardsmen sanitize both the hospital and the care center in Prairie City.

Meanwhile, Lori Lane, the hospital’s public information officer, said Strawberry Wilderness Clinic now separates sick visits from wellness appointments and has increased telehealth visits. The clinic is associated with a COVID-19 outbreak that has infected 15 employees, members of their household or other close contacts, according to Oregon Health Authority data.

According to Lane, the hospital currently has five beds in its COVID unit and, if needed, it can add more. As of last week, the hospital had one COVID-19 patient. The John Day hospital is licensed for 25 beds but is currently staffed for 16.

Overall, the Oregon Health Authority reported 94 hospitalizations on Monday in region seven, which Grant County shares with Deschutes, Harney, Klamath, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake and Wheeler counties.

According to Lane, the hospital takes other steps to get in front of the surge. She said that includes increasing the frequency of the county’s COVID-19 meetings to watch for the current state and national trends and monitor the county’s supply of personal protective equipment.

## Stewardship

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In 2013, faced with the imminent closure of Malheur Lumber, Grant County’s lone sawmill, 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.

Locally, however, some people have criticized the deal. By awarding a single long-term contract rather than multiple shorter-terms stewardship deals, critics say, the Forest Service in effect is picking economic winners and losers.

### Current contract

The Iron Triangle contract expires in March 2023, and, just like last time, any new contract will be awarded through a competitive bidding process open to all qualified operators.

But even though a decision is still a year out, Malheur National Forest Supervisor Craig Trulock said he’s already contemplating some changes in the next stewardship deal.

While he is leaning toward awarding another long-term contract, there will be less timber to go around this time. The agency expects a lower annual timber harvest target — down from 75 million board feet to between 50 and 55 million board feet per year.

Trulock said the next stewardship contract will likely have a lower percentage of the Malheur National Forest’s commercial timber volume. Instead of the current guaranteed 70%, he expects to decrease the share to between 30 and 50%, allowing annual adjustments.

One thing that Trulock said he appreciated about the senators’ letter to Casamassa was that they are not asking the Forest Service to simply roll over the contract to the same operator with the same terms.

“I appreciated that,” Trulock said, “because if we do another 10-year contract, we will definitely be wanting to

look at those lessons learned and figure out what we can do better.”

Trulock said it is not a foregone conclusion that the new contract would go to Iron Triangle or that the contract would be awarded for an additional 10 years.

Hank Stern, Wyden’s press secretary, said regarding the perception of a monopoly that, unlike traditional timber sales, the stewardship contract ensured a steady, stable supply of timber for the local mill while also requiring restoration and fire reduction treatments on the Malheur.

With 70% of the total volume of timber sales off the Malheur going to the stewardship program, that provides a high level of predictability for the contractor while also guaranteeing a steady supply of logs for Malheur Lumber’s John Day sawmill.

But it could also create a

problem for Malheur officials. With so much of their discretionary timber revenue committed to the stewardship contract, Trulock said, they could find themselves strapped for funds if unexpected circumstances arose, such as congressional budget cuts.

Stern said the economic health and well-being of rural communities is a top priority for Wyden.

“He has fought tirelessly to secure additional resources for the Forest Service to help reduce wildfire risks, end fire borrowing, and successfully included an additional \$6 billion for fire and healthy forest initiatives in the bipartisan infrastructure law,” Stern said.

“(Wyden) and his staff will continue their hard work to ensure that these resources are used to their full capacity to help rural communities in Oregon and innovative forestry solutions like stewardship contracting.”

## Cattle

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compared with those listed with the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Stein and Birkmaier agreed that they and other ranchers have been willing to help out.

“In Wallowa County, everybody needs to get along,” Stein said. “It looks bad for ranchers. People from the cities think, ‘Why are those cows out there?’”

Stein and Birkmaier said some of the cattle caught in the deep snows had recently calved and were trying to keep their calves alive.

“The nutritional requirements of a lactating cow with a 1-2-month-old calf are quite high,” Birkmaier said. “The protein and energy requirements are two times that of a cow that is not producing milk. This whole incident was made worse by that fact. The cows



Adam Stein/Contributed Photo

**This Sno-Cat with a trailer on skis was used to transport livestock back to where they could be transported by vehicle to safety in recent weeks.**

just had no fat reserves to draw from and with available forage covered in snow, they literally ‘milked themselves to death,’ in an attempt to provide for their calves. ... Those cows starved to death trying to feed their calves milk,” he said, adding that they got too weak to survive themselves. “They were putting all their nutrition into their milk.”

While a number of the lactating mother cows were lost, Birkmaier said, “fortunately, many of the 1-2-month-old calves were saved.”

### From the ranch

On Jan. 18, Warnock said by email that he put in his two-weeks’ notice Jan. 12.

Wallowa County Sheriff

Joel Fish, whose department is investigating for possible animal neglect, said the Deans brought in a new ranch manager, Katie Romero.

When contacted Jan. 24, Romero said she is from “out of state” and her boss, Bob Dean’s wife, Karen Dean, had instructed her to not answer questions from the press.

In a phone call right after that, Karen Dean also declined to comment, saying, “I don’t have anything to say to you,” before hanging up.

Fish referred questions to the Deans’ legal counsel, Joseph Law Firm of La Grande, but no comment was received after numerous emails and voicemails were left over the past two weeks.

Fish said his investigation is continuing and has not determined if charges will be brought.

### Wolves in the mix

Stein again overflowed the

area where the Dean cattle were and saw signs of wolf predation. He said Jan. 20 that what he saw so far were signs that wolves had dug up cattle that had been buried in the snow and were likely dead.

“I’m sure they were dead before” the wolves came, he said.

He did not see any evidence of wolves attacking live cattle. However, he and Birkmaier agreed giving wolves a taste of beef under such circumstances can whet their appetite for live cattle.

“I think it will have an impact,” Stein said. “Typically, when wolves start working cows over, (ranchers) will try to get rid of the wolves that are eating beef. ... Typically, when wolves start working on cattle, they won’t quit.”

Birkmaier agreed, saying adding beef to wolves’ diet indeed makes it more likely they’ll attack cattle.

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