

Gas

Continued from Page A1

Russian suppliers, or approximately 600,000-800,000 barrels per day, according to J.P. Morgan. In comparison, the U.S. produces nearly 12 million barrels per day domestically, according to the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers trade association. Still, the U.S. is a net importer of oil.

It has left many at the pump wondering why exactly gas prices have risen so dramatically.

"The U.S. does not get a lot of oil from Russia," said Marie Dodds, director of government

and public affairs at AAA Oregon/Idaho. "Only about 3% of our imported oil (8% of our imported oil and refined products) last year came from Russia, but Europe gets a lot of oil from Russia, roughly 25%, so any time you take a big chunk of supplies away, it sends prices higher. It's basically supply and demand, as we learned back in Economics 101. When you have a major global producer of oil, Russia, and its product is taken off the global markets, all of the sudden you have to look around and figure out where that oil is going to come from."

Two records, two years
At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, oil prices fell to

their lowest level in history, reaching negative values in April 2020. That spurred producers to cut output as oil tankers sat outside ports, unable to offload their oil shipments. In the U.S., thousands of oil workers were laid off, and the number of active drilling rigs plummeted from 700 in January 2020 to approximately 200, according to reporting by The New York Times.

Prices for gas in spring 2020 went down drastically, with gas prices falling below \$2 a gallon nationally for the first time in decades.

"In the spring of 2020 it was incredible; we saw demand for oil and gas fall to dramatically low levels that we hadn't

seen since the 1960s," Dodds said. "And now here we are, two years later, and people are returning to their normal routines, going back to work, going back to school. We are consuming more gas around the globe, but the production is not back where it was pre-pandemic. Production hasn't kept up, so that's the main driver of higher prices."

As the price of gas rises, manufacturing businesses are faced with the tough choice of having to increase prices to offset transportation costs. Patrick Raimondo, plant manager for a few weeks to decide how to handle the cost increases.

"As of right now we're holding off on doing any surcharges for our customers," Raimondo said. "As these prices increase, it is going to affect us down the road, just from the additional costs. We're just trying to see how it goes over the next couple of weeks and having conversations and open communications with our customers just to make sure we're all on the same page."

A global economy
The U.S. has continued to bring oil rigs back online. By January 2021, 374 rotary rigs were operating in the United States, according to the EIA. By Dec. 31, in response to rising prices, that number rose to 586. That's still a far cry

from the 700 rigs operating pre-pandemic.

In Russia, ongoing sanctions have locked the country out of foreign banks and goods and have caused the Russian ruble to plummet to nearly half its value at the beginning of this February.

According to J.P. Morgan, almost 70% of Russian oil is struggling to find buyers even though it is being offered at a record \$20-per-barrel discount in comparison to national oil suppliers, as of March 8.

"What happens halfway around the world can and does also have an impact on oil prices," Dodds said. "There's much more at play than just what's happening in the U.S."

Police

Continued from Page A1

whose \$450,000 annual budget outstripped the city's total property tax revenues (around \$300,000 a year) by a wide margin. A proposed local option levy to cover the funding gap failed at the ballot box last August when low voter turnout fell short of the election's double-majority requirement.

In October, the City Council voted unanimously to suspend the Police Department and offered to pay the county \$300,000 a year to hire three sheriff's deputies to provide law enforcement services in the city limits. The proposal also called on the county to give the city \$300,000 a year from its road fund to pay for street improvements to serve new housing developments in John Day, on the theory that housing starts in the city would broaden the tax base for the entire county.

While the County Court never formally deliberated on the city's proposal, court members made it clear that the idea of linking county road fund money to police services was a nonstarter.

In January, through its attorney, the county made a counteroffer that called for the city to pay \$371,000 a year for the county to hire three deputies to patrol the city. (The offer included a lower annual rate if the city was able to transfer the three-year, \$375,000 COPS grant to the county in partial payment.)

At the March 8 City Council meeting, councilors agreed that more law enforcement services were needed — since the John Day Police Department has been mothballed, the Grant County Sheriff's Office has been patrolling the entire county with just four deputies.

"It's not getting any better," Rookstool said. "It's only going to get worse, because people are going to start taking it into their hands — because they have to."

Rookstool advocated for finding a way to provide the same level of service John Day residents had before, but the prevailing sentiment among the City Council was strongly opposed to a straight fee-for-services model.

Several councilors pointed out that other Grant County communities had previously dissolved their police departments and that no city is currently paying the Sheriff's Office for law enforcement coverage. (Prairie City had such an arrangement until recently but is no longer paying for sheriff's patrols. Canyon City halted such payments years ago.)



John Day City Councilor Heather Rookstool talks about police funding while fellow Councilor Dave Holland, center, and Grant County Commissioner Sam Palmer, left, listen during a March 8, 2022, council meeting.

"I don't want to see our entire tax base being spent that way anymore," Councilor Dave Holland said.

"We're willing to help, we're willing to participate, we just don't want to pay for two or three officers by ourselves," he added.

Instead, there was general support for increasing the sheriff's budget through a countywide funding mechanism.

"I've stated my position from the beginning," Mayor Ron Lundbom said. "I believe it should be countywide and everyone should pay for it."

A county bond measure would be one way to spread out the cost of law enforcement funding, Palmer said, but he expressed concern that many voters might not be able to afford the added property tax payment.

"If we pass it countywide, it's less of a burden on everybody," Palmer said. "But it's still a burden."

Rookstool argued that city and county leaders need to stop sniping at one another and come to the bargaining table to resolve the issue.

"It might be time to refresh and sit down and see if we can (partner) together because we're all one community," she said. "We need to bridge this gap. We need to work together."

The discussion got testy when City Manager Nick Green interjected that the lack of funding for law enforcement is a result of long-term population declines, which have prevented property tax revenues from keeping pace with rising costs.

"I'd like to know what's the county's plan" for addressing that issue, he said.

"I don't know if the county has a plan," Palmer responded.

"You're a commissioner," Green shot back. "You're elected to have a plan."

Councilor Shannon Adair stepped in at that point.

"Rehashing all this is not really helping," she said.

But Adair also made it clear that she thinks the County Court needs to take stronger steps to address the law enforcement funding issue.

"I want the county to get serious ... about coming up with a plan that involves everyone in the county," she said.

In a follow-up interview, Palmer said he planned to put the law enforcement funding issue on the agenda for the next County Court meeting but added that the best place for the county to address it might be in budget discussions.

He also called Green's conduct at the City Council meeting unprofessional.

"That's part of the reason we don't have a good working relationship with the city," Palmer said.

In other action at the March 8 meeting, the council:

- Appointed Chris Labhart to fill the Position 1 City Council seat left open by the resignation of Paul Smith in January (see full story on Page A3).

- Voted to apply for a \$200,000 grant to make a variety of improvements to Main Street businesses and allocate up to \$200,000 in city funds from the Kam Wah Chung grant for additional improvements along Main Street.

- Voted to approve a design for the Pit Stop property at the intersection of Main and Canton streets that would include 11 parking spaces for normal-sized vehicles (no oversize parking), bike lockers, a public gathering space with a fire pit and seating, and a covered area that would have picnic tables and room for food carts or other private vendors.

Meeting as the board of the city's urban renewal agency, the council also approved spending \$218,000 to buy pipe for infrastructure improvements at URA-funded housing developments.

As part of the same motion, the council approved taking out a \$1.85 million loan from the state to fund infrastructure improvements intended to get the housing developments off the ground, with the money to be repaid from additional property tax revenues created by the construction of up to 100 new homes in the urban renewal area.

The improvements would include the east end extension of Charolais Heights and Holmstrom Road, plus the expansion of streets and utilities for two housing developments, The Ridge and Ironwood Estates Phase 2.

Cattle

Continued from Page A1

According to Carter, with no evidence or leads to follow up for law enforcement, the incident remains a mystery.

This was not the first cow mutilation on his ranch, Carter added.

Several years ago, Carter said, he was almost sure one of his cows had been mutilated. However, he added, there was no way to say with certainty because he did not get to the carcass quickly enough before flies and other scavengers made it impossible to determine what happened.

He said a similar situation occurred in August of 2020, which is why he tries to inspect cattle deaths closely when they occur.

Indeed, Carter's situation is not unique. According to FBI records, since the 1970s, thousands of unexplained killings and mutilations of cattle have happened across the U.S.

Last year Wheeler County had five cases while Harney County has had four in four years, with the previous two occurring in May and June.

The cases, according to the FBI reports, are similar to Carter's case, where a cow or a bull was found dead in a remote area with no signs of how someone could have made it into the area or onto private property undetected. In most cases, authorities have not found footprints, tire tracks, or fingerprints. There is little — if any — spilled blood, and there are no visible puncture wounds, bullet holes or strangulation marks.

In the thousands of cattle mutilations that have occurred since the 1970s, a culprit has yet to be caught, according to FBI records.

The bizarre nature of the mutilation and complete lack of evidence in last month's case make it all the more baffling and frustrating for Carter.

The mutilations simply do not make sense.

"It's really odd," Carter said. "There's just no logical explanation."

It's in your inbox before your mailbox

In these uncertain times, be certain you can read your newspaper

Sign up for free digital access

Subscribers can receive daily email updates and uninterrupted digital delivery on a computer, tablet and smartphone.

Call 800-781-3214

The Blue Mountain
EAGLE

BlueMountainEagle.com/newsletters

