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# WOLVES AT THE DOOR



## Federal judge has redrawn map for managing wolves in West, and Grant County is at ground zero

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

A judge's decision to restore federal protections for gray wolves last month has put Grant County at ground zero for relisting the predators under the Endangered Species Act.

The decision drew a dividing line between wolf populations that can continue to be managed by state agencies and those that will once again be governed by more restrictive federal rules.

In most of Oregon, the dividing line is Highway 395, which runs right through the middle of Grant County.

While the ruling does not change anything for wolves in the easternmost part of the state, it does cover wolves in the western two-thirds of Oregon and puts them back on the federal endangered species list.

Before last month's ruling, wolves in Western Oregon had been under the first phase of the state wolf plan, which allowed for killing wolves in defense of livestock and guard animals in limited circumstances.

Specifically, wolves could be killed if caught chasing or biting livestock or in situations where the state could confirm that a pack had depredated four times in six months.

See Wolves, Page A10



### A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOLF RECOVERY

Gray wolves were once widespread in the United States but were trapped, hunted and poisoned until they were all but extirpated from the Lower 48 by the middle of the last century. The last native wolf in Oregon is believed to have been killed in the late 1940s.

In the mid-1990s, however, gray wolves were reintroduced in Central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park, and since then the species has expanded beyond expectations, both in population

and geographical area.

There are now more than 1,600 wolves in the Northern Rockies, including at least 173 in Oregon, according to recent estimates.

However, wolves were never deliberately reintroduced to Oregon. They came here on their own, dispersing from established packs in neighboring states.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife captured the first known returning wolf in Oregon in 1999 near the

Middle Fork of the John Day River and returned the radio-collared female, known as wolf B-45, to Idaho.

In 2011, Congress removed federal protections for the Northern Rocky Mountains wolf population, including Montana, Idaho and Eastern Oregon.

In 2015, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife removed wolves from the state endangered species list, although the federal Endan-

gered Species Act designation remained in the state's western two-thirds.

In 2020, the Trump administration removed federal Endangered Species Act protections from gray wolves across 44 states, including Western Oregon.

A coalition of environmental groups filed suit in early 2021 to have federal protections restored, and on Feb. 10 of this year, a U.S. district judge granted their request.

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group  
A gray and black steer grazes on a ranch along Airport Lane, La Grande, on Thursday, March 17, 2022.



## Animal rights measure won't make ballot

By ALEX WITTWER  
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — A controversial proposal on animal cruelty laws appears to be off the table, for now, but proponents of the initiative say their campaign isn't over yet.

"We just submitted the initiative for 2024 and are waiting for confirmation from the state," an organizer with the Yes on IP13

campaign said. "At this point, it does not look like we will gather enough for 2022. I believe the plan is to shift gears to the newly numbered initiative as soon as we have it."

Initiative Petition 13, otherwise known as the Abuse, Neglect and Assault Exemption Modification and Improvement Act, would remove exemptions to the Oregon animal abuse laws that protect hunters, farmers and anglers from abuse violations. That means

hunters could possibly be prosecuted for killing wild animals, as could farmers who send their livestock to slaughterhouses.

David Michelson, the author of the initiative and the lead organizer for the campaign, acknowledged the proposal's long road, and said that like other social justice reforms throughout history, it will take time.

See Ballot, Page A18

## Grant County agencies adjust to rising fuel costs

By JUSTIN DAVIS and STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Like everybody else, government agencies throughout Grant County have been adjusting to the sudden rise in fuel costs since the start of the war in Ukraine.

While the same contingency planning has helped them weather the sharp rise in prices so far, others say they may have made significant budget adjustments going forward. All of the agencies the newspaper spoke to, however, say they're continuing to operate normally and provide the services the public expects.

Over the past month, the average price of gasoline has risen from \$3.52 a gallon to \$4.27 a gallon nationally, according to the American Automobile Association. In Grant County the average is even higher, topping \$4.50 a gallon.

The Grant School District has been able to continue bus service despite steep increases in fuel prices over the past month. Assistant transportation manager Rachelle Simmons says the true financial impact of higher gas prices won't be known until the end of the budget month.

"We did budget higher fuel prices into the 2021-2022 school year budget," Sim-



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

A Humbolt Elementary School kindergarten student gets off the bus Dec. 15, 2021, at Valley View Assisted Living in John Day, where the students held their annual Christmas hat parade.

mons said. Superintendent Bret Uptmor says the timing of the

rise in fuel prices is helping schools better cope with the circumstances.

"Higher prices in March aren't going to have the same effect as opposed to, say, September," he said.

For now, prices aren't affecting school buses or school bus routes, according to both Uptmor and Simmons. If gas prices stay high for a prolonged period of time, however, the school district would take steps to mitigate those effects.

"If gas prices severely affect the budget, shortening routes is a possibility," Simmons said. Simmons added that eliminating bus service as a response to high fuel costs "isn't feasible."

See Fuel, Page A18

