NEWS

Judge won't halt logging

Environmental groups fail to block S. Oregon projects By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI Capital Press

EUGENE — Environmental groups have failed to convince a federal judge to block two logging and fuels reduction projects on 8,000 acres of public forestland in Southern Oregon.

U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken has refused to issue a preliminary injunction against the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's Bear Grub and Round Oak projects because the environmental lawsuit against them probably won't succeed.

The Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center, Oregon Wild and Cascadia Wildlands nonprofits are unlikely to prevail on their claims that federal wildlife biologists improperly considered the effects of BLM's forest treatments on threatened spotted owls, the judge said.

While the ruling doesn't end the lawsuit, Aiken determined the environmental plaintiffs "failed to show serious questions" regarding their



Tom Kogut/USFS

Environmental groups argued that two Southern Oregon timber projects would harm the threatened spotted owl, but a federal judge has refused to stop the forest treatments.

allegations that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's analysis violated the Endangered Species Act.

"And on this preliminary review, FWS appears to have considered the relevant factors and articulated a rational connection between the facts found and the decisions it made," as required by federal law, the ruling said.

In consulting with BLM on the projects, federal wildlife biologists found that the forest treatments would probably downgrade habitat in 37 of the spotted owl's home ranges within the project areas, Aiken said.

However, the projects will require that logging units be

dropped from timber sales if they're occupied by spotted owls and will include other design criteria to avoid disturb-

ing the species, Aiken said. The federal government is unlikely to jeopardize the owl's continued existence or otherwise "take" the threatened species because the vast majority of its nesting, roosting and foraging habitat won't be negatively affected by the forest projects, she said.

¹'Instead, it found that the majority of (the habitat) in the action area — 96% in Bear Grub and 83% in Round Oak — would remain untreated and available to support current and future spotted owl populations," the ruling said.

The judge said she cannot substitute her judgment for that of federal biologists but will allow the environmental plaintiffs to proceed with the lawsuit because they have standing to pursue the allegations in federal court.

The environmental plaintiffs filed the lawsuit last year, claiming the projects will further distress vulnerable spotted owl populations. They also alleged the federal government relied on uncertain or unenforceable conservation measures in approving the treatments.

Boise Cascade Wood Products and the Timber Products Co. have intervened in the lawsuit to defend the projects, which would generate 38 million board-feet of timber for their veneer and plywood mills, according to a court document.

A logging truck typically hauls about 4,000-5,000 board-feet of timber.

"Thus, proposed intervenors have a direct and substantial interest in being able to harvest the timber offered through these projects, and a direct and substantial interest in ensuring sufficient timber supply from the BLM generally," they said.



By PETER WONG Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Housing and Community Services Department said that as of Wednesday, April 6, it has made \$319.3 million in emergency rental assistance payments to landlords on behalf of 48,313 Oregon households since the U.S. Treasury made the first federal funds available in May 2021.

But it has received a total of 105,082 applications. Because of duplicate applications, the actual number of households applying is closer to 100,000, state officials say. A household can get assistance only once.

State law shields ten-

ants from eviction proceedings while their applications for assistance are pending, if they show proof to their landlords. The shield ends when the application is approved or denied. The law also set Feb. 28 as the deadline for payment of past-due rent, going back to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic on April 1, 2020.

March 21 was the deadline, and it resulted in a final statewide surge of 13,592 applications for the month. The program paused applications on Dec. 1, reopened on Jan. 26, and was scheduled to close March 14. But Oregon got a last-minute allocation of \$16 million in federal funds that went unspent in other states and communities. State officials still hope for a greater share of the additional \$198 million they requested from the Treasury.

Five counties and the city of Portland got federal funds separately for their own rental assistance programs, and their totals are not reflected in the state agency figures.

The Oregon Legislature approved \$200 million from the state budget for emergency rental assistance in a special session in December 2020, when prospects for federal aid appeared uncertain. That \$200 million was spent by the close of the twoyear state budget cycle in June 2021.

Oregon got an initial \$289 million for emergency rental assistance from the U.S. Treasury, which allocated money that Congress approved as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, President Joe Biden's pandemic recovery plan. That \$289 million has been spent or committed. The program has contin-

in become program has continued with \$100 million more that the Legislature approved from the current state budget in December, plus \$16 million more from the Treasury, and \$13 million that the state housing agency shifted from housing stabilization programs. Oregon also got \$1.1 million from the Treasury late last year.

Tenants can call Oregon Law Center's Eviction Defense Project at 888-585-9638 or evictiondefense@ oregonlawcenter.org.



Contributed Photo

From left, Ryan Gerry, Grant Union High School principal, with Rep. Kurt Schrader and Majalise Tolan, secondary director for the Lincoln County School District.

Mr. Gerry goes to Washington

By STEVEN MITCHELL Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Grant Union High School Principal Ryan Gerry joined 300 school administrators in Washington, D.C., last month to ask lawmakers for additional resources to address top priorities in education, including school staffing shortages and a student mental health crisis.

Gerry, the Oregon Association of Secondary School Administrators' executive committee president, attended the National Association of Secondary Principals advocacy conference.

The principals met with roughly 200 members of Congress and their staff as they finalized the fiscal year 2022 federal education budget.

For his part, Gerry said he presented his concerns to several members of Oregon's congressional delegation, meeting with Sen. Jeff Merkley, Rep. Kurt Schrader and staffers from Rep. Cliff Bentz's office.

Gerry said while he had attended conferences around the state, this was the first conference he'd attended in the nation's capital.

The advocacy group pressed for increases in principal preparation programs and mental health services for students.

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals' website, the lobbying efforts paid off. The whittled-down federal budget included a \$27 million increase for state grants that fund teacher and principal training and \$111 million — a \$95 million increase over fiscal 2021 — that can be used to train more school counselors, social workers and psychologists.

Gerry said the country has not previously seen the levels of staffing and teacher shortages coupled with a national issue with student wellness such as what is coming out of the pandemic period of COVID-19.



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WHAT'S HAPPENING

FRIDAY, APRIL 15

Valley View Easter egg hunt and open house • 2-3:30 p.m., Valley View Assisted Living, 112 NW Valley View Drive, John Day

Drinks and hors d'ouevres will be served. RSVP to srodriguez@sapphirehealthservices. com or 541-575-3533.

'62 Days planning meeting

• 7 p.m., Sel's Brewery, 113 Washington St., Canyon City

Regular weekly meeting of the Whiskey Gulch Gang to plan this year's '62 Days festivities. Anyone who wants to help is welcome. For more information, call Colby Farrel at 541-620-0874.

SATURDAY, APRIL 16 Bunny Hop 5K

• 9 a.m., Dayville City Park, Highway 26, Dayville

The seventh annual 5K walk and run benefits the renovation of the Dayville Community Hall. Registration begins at 8 a.m., with the race starting at 9. The cost to participate is \$15 (no shirt included this year).

Mt. Vernon Easter egg hunt



• 10 a.m., Phil Boyd Memorial Park, Mt. Vernon

The Mt. Vernon Volunteer Fire Department presents its annual Easter egg hunt, with prizes for kids up to age 10. Fire truck rides are offered starting at 9 a.m.

Dayville Easter Egg Hunt

• 10:15 a.m., Dayville City Park, Highway 26, Dayville

The city's annual Easter egg hunt, which follows the Bunny Hop 5K, is divided into four age groups, from babies through sixth-graders.

SUNDAY, APRIL 17

Easter sunrise service • 6:30 a.m., Crisp Heights, Southwest Fourth Avenue, John Day

A sunrise service to celebrate Easter. For more information, call 541-575-5840.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20

County commissioner candidate forum

• 6 p.m., main conference room, Grant County Regional Airport, 72000 Airport Road, John Day

The Blue Mountain Eagle will host a free public forum with the three candidates running fr a seat on the Grant County Court. The candidates will talk about their campaigns and answer questions about issues facing the county.

THURSDAY, APRIL 21 Pool facility open house

• 6-7:30 p.m., Parks and Rec office, 845 NW Bridge St., John Day

The John Day/Canyon City Parks and Recreation District will host an open house to answer questions about plans for a new community pool at the Seventh Street Sports Complex in John Day.

FRIDAY, APRIL 22 Bingo night

• 6 p.m., John Day Elks

Lodge, 140 NE Dayton St., John Day

A fundraiser for the Grant Union High School Class of 2026. Dinner provided by the Elks Club at 6 p.m., with bingo starting at 6:30. The cost to play is \$5 per card.

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Do you have a community event in Grant County you'd like to publicize? Email information to editor@bmeagle. com. The deadline is noon Friday for publication the following Wednesday.







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