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WOLF NUMBERS

ON THE RISE

Grant County had two packs, 16 wolves in 2021

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle



While the number of wolves in Oregon remained relatively flat last year, four more of the predators took up residence in Grant County, state wildlife managers said in a recent report.

Oregon had 173 wolves at the end of 2020 and 175 at the end of 2021, an increase of just two animals statewide. Meanwhile, Grant County's wolf population grew from 12 in 2020 to 16 in 2021.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reported a very modest statewide increase in wolves at the end of 2021 in its Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management 2021 Annual Report.

According to the report, the population increase represents an annual growth rate of 1.2% above last year's numbers. The yearly growth rate for Oregon's wolves has averaged around 9.4% over the past five years. The report added that 2021 set a new low regarding overall growth.

In 2021, more wolves were killed than any other year on record since they began returning to the state in 2009, according to ODFW's report.

There were 26 documented wolf deaths statewide last year, up from 10 in 2020, the report states, with 21 of those deaths caused by humans.

Meanwhile, the number of documented packs across the state decreased to 21 from 22 after eight wolves were poisoned in Eastern Oregon, wiping out all five members of the Catherine Pack in Union County plus three wolves from other packs.

At the same time, the number of livestock killed by wolves

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County budget comes up short

\$800K 'miscalculation' adds up to fiscal crisis; cuts, law enforcement levy possible

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Grant County is in the grips of a financial crisis and faces looming cuts to submit a balanced budget in a little over a month.

In a May 2 email to the county's budget committee members, County Treasurer Julie Ellison wrote that when reviewing budget figures, she came across a miscalculation and substantially reduced the county's reserve funds to offset a significant shortfall.

"The path we are on is unsustainable," Ellison wrote.

She continued in the email that she could trim elsewhere in the budget but asked the committee members to make suggestions ahead of the Wednesday, May 11, session.

"Next year will be heart-wrenching if we do not take the opportunity to make some changes now," she added.

During a phone interview on Thursday, May 12, Ellison said the miscalculation worked out to roughly \$800,000.

In last year's budget, Ellison said the county, facing a major budget shortfall, abolished two reserve accounts that combined were just under \$520,000. This year, she said, the county appeared to be in better financial shape and so she cut them.

In addition to the reserve accounts, she said it appeared that American Rescue Plan Act funds, federal dollars allocated to state and local governments to respond to COVID-19, were added twice in the proposed budget and left the county's contingency fund with just \$20,000 instead of \$300,000.

Ellison said the calculation error is forcing budget cuts that were anticipated last year.

Indeed, the county faced a similar financial crisis heading into last year's budgeting process.

Citizen budget committee members Bob Quinton, Amy Kreger and Rob Stewart pulled no punches in last year's budget committee meetings, saying the county might have to cut jobs instead of simply reducing hours and furloughing certain positions as the committee had discussed in earlier sessions.

In the end, however, the committee scrapped that idea and opted for backfilling budget holes with COVID-19 relief funds and money from prospective legislation in Congress that could potentially increase the county's payment in lieu of taxes funding to upwards of \$900,000.

Quinton, who chairs this year's proceedings, said the committee would need to go back through each county department and "figure out what stays and what goes."

Quinton said that by figuring out



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle
Citizen Budget Committee chair Bob Quinton listens during Grant County's budget session on Wednesday, May 11, 2022. Grant County is facing a budget crisis after the county's treasurer found a miscalculation amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

where they could make cuts, the committee could have department heads that had hired more employees in the past four years go back to their 2018 staffing levels.

Quinton said that was just one idea, but added the consensus last year was that the department heads did not want to lay anyone off or cut anything.

"So here we are about a year later," Quinton said, "having to talk about this."

County Judge Scott Myers said one option the county could look at would be to reduce the cost-of-living increase for county employees.

Kreger asked what the savings would be if the county cut the increase across the board to make it fair.

Ellison said the increase this year

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John Day greenhouse goes to private operator

City approves library land swap, sells Gateway parcel and dissolves police department

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Multiple resolutions with long-lasting ramifications for the city of John Day were approved at the May 10 City Council meeting.

The greenhouse will no longer be run by the city and is transitioning to private operators. The council also approved the purchase of the Grant County Library Foundation's plot of land near the Kam Wah Chung Heritage Site, voted to dissolve the John Day Police Department and approved the sale of 2.8 acres on the Innovation Gateway property.

The city will officially stop operating the greenhouse on June 30. An agreement with CYA Holdings LLC of Huntington will put the greenhouse in private hands starting July 1.

The agreement is a five-year lease that has an option for CYA Holdings LLC to purchase the greenhouse at any time during the length of the contract for the value of the loan on the property.

Other terms of the contract are the greenhouse being partitioned into its own taxable lot and the city providing two storage facilities to store equipment. The city will also provide facility startup training for the staff set to take over operating

the greenhouse.

The lease-to-own contract will expire in June 2027 and is priced at \$24,000 a year.

Shawn McKay of CYA Holdings said he's "known about the greenhouse for a while" and this opportunity came up in talks with John Day City Manager Nick Green about things that are happening in town.

Shawn McKay and his wife, Robyn, were previously associated with Burnt River Farms in Ontario. The company's website describes Burnt River Farms as a farm to market cannabis company located in Eastern Oregon.

Echoing earlier statements by Green at the May 10 meeting, Councilor Dave Holland stressed that the plan was always to have a private entity operate the greenhouse.

The greenhouse going to private operation now means the city's only financial obligation to the facility is an insurance bill of \$2,500 a year plus the initial cost of staff time to train the new greenhouse staff. The City Council voted unanimously to enter into the lease agreement with CYA Holdings LLC. The agreement will take effect once it has cleared final approval by the city manager and city attorney.

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ELECTION NEWS ONLINE

For the latest news on local election results, see our website, www.bluemountaineagle.com.

You'll find a special tab for election stories in the navigation bar at the top of our home page.

Blue Mountain Eagle reporters were scheduled to be on hand at the Grant

County Clerk's Office on Election Night as the first results were announced and planned to file their stories online as soon as possible after the polls closed at 8 p.m. Tuesday, May 17.

Because of our Tuesday afternoon press deadline, we were not able to get election results in our Wednesday, May

18, print edition.

However, we will continue to update election stories online in the coming days as late returns come in and results are certified.

Full stories on local elections will be published in next week's print edition.

