

Wolf

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sharply increased from 31 in 2020 to 49 last year, a 58% increase. Additionally, ODFW conducted 90 depredation investigations last year, which was an increase from 73 in the previous year.

Grant County increase

Grant County has at least two wolfpacks.

Ryan Torland, a district biologist with ODFW, said what was known as the East Murderers Creek Pack has been renamed the Logan Valley Pack. The confirmed count of wolves in that pack at the end of 2021, he said, was five.

A pack, he said, is defined as more than four wolves traveling together in winter.

Additionally, according to the report, the Logan Valley Pack met the criteria of having a breeding pair. A breeding pair is an adult male and an adult female with at least two pups that survived to Dec. 31 in the year of their birth.

The Desolation Pack, which also has a breeding pair, increased from five wolves to nine this year.

Two other wolves have been identified in the West Murderers Creek Wildlife Management Unit.

Meanwhile, Torland said, the department could not locate the three wolves that had previously been present in the Northside Wildlife Management Unit. Last year, Northside had been deemed an area of known wolf activity by ODFW and those wolves had been included in last year's census.

While the Northside wolves are not in this year's report, Torland said there is a good chance the animals are still in the area. The department has just not been able to locate them.

He stated that ODFW confirms an area of known wolf activity through trail camera sightings, tracks and other evidence.

Torland said there are likely more wolves in the county and statewide. He said the annual count represents the minimum number of wolves in Oregon at the end of the year.

This year's countywide increase in wolves did not come as a surprise, Torland added.

"They're doing what I would have expected them to do and what will continue to happen," he said. "They are going to fill into more areas throughout the state, not just Grant County."

Budget

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is 3.5%, which comes out to \$66,000 out of the county's general fund. She said the Road Department's union contract requires a 3.5% increase while the contract for unionized Sheriff's Office employees calls for a 3% hike. For morale purposes, Ellison said, the county proposed a 3.5% increase.

After the meeting, Myers said he would, as an elected official, give up his cost-of-living increase if it would help the general fund.

Law enforcement funding

Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley told the budget committee that the John Day City Council officially dissolved its police department on May 10.

McKinley said the city claimed it had funding set aside for the Sheriff's Office, but he was not holding out any hope that the county would see any of it.

Since the John Day Police Department was suspended in October, enforcing the law within the city limits has fallen to the Grant County Sheriff's Office, with four patrol deputies covering the entire county. McKinley has repeatedly told both the City Council and the County Court that he needs additional deputies to provide adequate coverage.

John Day's city council 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



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Commissioner Sam Palmer, left, and County Judge Scott Myers during the county's budget committee meeting Wednesday, May 11, 2022. The county's treasurer, Julie Ellison, found an accounting error in her proposed 2022-23 budget, leaving the county with just \$20,000 in its contingency fund.

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 its three-year, \$375,000 Community Oriented Policing Services grant to the county in partial payment.)

In March, John Day rejected Grant County's fee-for-service proposal for law enforcement funding, saying it wants to see a more broad-based approach to increasing the Sheriff's Office budget and calling on the County Court to develop a plan for doing so.

Nonetheless, Grant County's draft budget included a \$300,000 contribution from John Day. One way or the other, McKinley said, the Sheriff's Office needs the staff.

McKinley said John Day's COPS grant, which the city had offered as partial payment, was, in fact, not transferable. McKinley added he had questions surrounding the city's intentions and the way it applied for the grant.

After talking to grant officials with the U.S. Department of Justice, McKinley said that

the city applied for the COPS grant in June to rehire three laid-off positions, which, at the time, the city did not have.

However, after a proposed law enforcement levy was voted down in August, the city laid off those positions in October, he said.

The way the grant was awarded, according to McKinley, it could be used to hire back those three officers and fund those positions partially at about \$41,000 a year. After the fourth year, he said, the city would have been obligated to pay for all three of those positions.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said he doubted if McKinley had seen the grant application.

"The grant was submitted appropriately and was reviewed and awarded on its merits," he said. "We were very clear in our application that the police department staff were going to be laid off if the local option levy did not pass. It didn't pass, and about a month later the council passed a resolution suspending operations of the department."

John Day received the maximum award, Green said, and it was based on the lowest direct compensation of the staff which was required by DOJ.

Green said because there is no agreement for law enforcement services between John

Day and Grant County, there is not a specific amount of money set aside.

The city could move money during the fiscal year through a supplemental budget resolution if an agreement is reached, he said, but there's no line item related to county law enforcement in the city's budget.

John Day and the COPS grant aside, McKinley was candid about the position his department is in.

"We're running ragged," McKinley said, "and I don't know what the county is going to do."

McKinley said he did not know if finding revenue was within his purview, but maybe it was.

He said he had been staying out of the politics surrounding the bond levy for the aquatic center, which is on the May 17 ballot.

However, he said he had concerns that the supporters of the bond measure were putting "play in front of public safety."

County Commissioner Jim Hamsher said while it would be a temporary fix, the county should allocate roughly \$700,000 in ARPA dollars to bring on the three patrol deputies. Additionally, Hamsher, who is also Prairie City's mayor, told the committee that he would be proposing to the town's budget committee a \$40,000 policing contract next month. He said he was pretty confident the contract would get approved.

Kreger concurred with Hamsher on allocating the ARPA dollars to hire more deputies.

In the meantime, she said, it was time for the court to see about putting a bond levy out to the public. If possible, she said, the court should try to get it on the ballot in November.

McKinley asked Kreger if she knew how much his property taxes would go up if both a law enforcement and a pool levy were to pass. She responded that she owns multiple pieces of property in the

county and she is willing to pay for both.

Kreger said that, just like with the 20-year hospital bond that Blue Mountain Hospital paid off last year, the county has to advertise the law enforcement bond correctly and the campaign has to be about educating people.

The hospital bond was not popular, she said, but in the end, it passed.

For his part, McKinley said he was not against a law enforcement bond levy.

John Rowell, a John Day resident and candidate for county commissioner, said in the long run, the county would have to go out for a bond levy if residents want to have reasonable public safety.

Myers said he would have County Commissioner Sam Palmer, the liaison to the County Clerk's Office, see if a law enforcement levy could be put on the ballot for the general election in November.

Justice Court

The budget committee voted unanimously to cut a half-time position from Justice Court. The position, which had been advertised on the county's website since March, had received a couple of applicants. The position would have cost the county roughly \$19,000 a year, plus benefits.

More cuts on the horizon?

Quinton and Kreger told the County Court members it was their responsibility to come to the budget committee with recommendations on how to trim the budget. With that, Quinton asked the court members to study the budget and come back with ideas about where the county could make cuts.

Myers said every department the county has serves a purpose, whether it is mandated or not. Given that, he said, if the county has to cut somewhere, he is leaning toward an across-the-board cut to hours to make it as fair as possible.

Greenhouse

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Library land swap

In a separate vote, the council approved the previously tabled land swap agreement between the city and the library foundation. The city will purchase a 1-acre parcel near the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site with the intention of using the land as future parking for visitors to John Day's downtown. The purchase price of the parcel is \$125,000.

The library foundation

will take possession of a 2.1-acre parcel of city land along the planned Seventh Street extension at the base of Davis Creek with plans to construct a new library at the site.

The council had tabled voting on the land swap resolution at an earlier meeting over concerns that all parties affected by the deal hadn't been in communication with one another. Library Foundation Secretary Ashley Armichardy spoke to those concerns at the May 10 meeting after hearing the council's previous concerns from Elliot Sky. Armichardy

stated the foundation has had conversations with some of the entities involved and that the library staff is "fully on board" with the land swap.

The council voted to pass the resolution unanimously. The deal allows the library board to use the acquired land as a financial match when it applies for a block grant to help fund construction of the new library. If all goes according to plan, the land swap will end the library foundation's 10-year struggle to raise the funds to build a new library.

John Day PD dissolved
The John Day Police Department is officially a thing of the past. The coun-

cil, which voted to suspend the department's operations in October, voted to formally dissolve the department at the May 10 meeting.

Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley called the event a "sad day," stating that the decision to defund the police has put tremendous strain on the Sheriff's Office.

When asked if there was anything the council could do to creatively fund the department, Holland said it has been a decades-long struggle.

"We've tried that for over 30 years," he said. "We have robbed other departments and creatively funded tying to keep the police department for 30

years that I'm aware of."

Holland added that the council put the issue to a vote with a bond levy and the people said "no."

"We gave people the option," he said. "The only other option is to pull more money out of the water fund and increase people's sewage bills by \$4 or \$5 each. That's basically a backdoor tax, and we didn't want to do that anymore."

Innovation Gateway

The council approved the sale of 2.8 acres of city land in the Innovation Gateway development to Shannon Adair, a member of the council, for \$122,840. The vote was 3-1, with Adair recusing herself and Councilor Chris Labhart voting no.

The vote formalized a letter of intent Adair signed with the city after a previous City Council discussion in December.

Adair, who owns 1188 Brewing in John Day, plans to build a brewery, distillery, restaurant and hotel on the site.

Grocery store proposed

A new grocery store is looking to call John Day home. Green said there are few details at this time but the proposed site for the store is across from the Nazarene Church on East Main Street. The size of the new store is slated to be 1,400 square feet.

The plans were announced at the end of the May 10 meeting by Green. The council was presented with a request for the city to remove fill material from the proposed build site by the prospective developers. Green stated that the need to remove the fill material was the one roadblock preventing the prospective buyers from moving forward with an agreement to purchase the site.

The City Council voted to remove the fill material, which will bring the build site down to highway grade and allow development of the site. The prospective developer will still need to come to a purchase agreement with the city and obtain a development permit to begin construction of the new grocery store.

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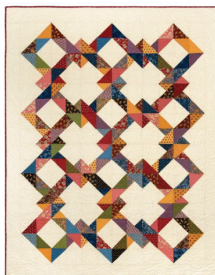
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20th Annual Grant County Quilt Show

Presented by the Grant County Piecemakers Quilting Guild
Friday and Saturday **May 20th and 21th, 2022**

Grant County Fairgrounds Trowbridge Pavilion, John Day, OR
\$7.00 for both days - Fri. 9am to 6pm, Sat. 9am to 4pm

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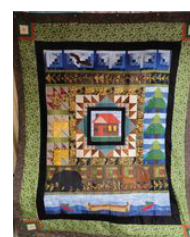


Sunday May 22nd Workshop "Knot Today" by It's Sew Emma
10am to 4pm \$25.00

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For info send email to gcpiecemakers@gmail.com or call (541) 620-4475 (Ersela Dehiya's Cell) or The Shiny Thimble (541) 932-4111 (store) or (541) 620-0120 (Karen Hinton's Cell).
Drop off your quilts on Thursday 7am to 6pm for show.