

The Blue Mountain EAGLE

Grant County's newspaper since 1868



Wednesday, September 28, 2022

154th Year • No. 39 • 16 Pages • \$1.50

MyEagleNews.com



FOR BETTER OR WORSE



The Elkhorns are one of many ranges that make up the Blue Mountains, which are largely on land managed by the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests. The economic fate of Grant County, like most other counties in Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington, is deeply intertwined with the U.S. Forest Service.

County's economy closely linked to Forest Service

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

As the U.S. Forest Service makes another run at updating land management plans on three national forests in Eastern Oregon and Southeast Washington, the authors of an in-depth economic analysis ranked Grant County as the most likely to experience financial impacts — good or bad — due to forest management decisions, and the least likely to bounce back from a financial crisis.

In Grant County, with more national forest acres per resident than anywhere else in the region, forest management decisions could mean boom or bust.

"There are certain limitations as well as opportunities associated with where (Grant County) is located and the amount of public land that surrounds the communities and

constitutes the county," said Mark Webb, executive director of Blue Mountains Forest Partners.

Recognizing the limitations and opportunities in the region's timber-dependent communities was one reason behind the comprehensive study from the Rural Engagement and Vitality Center (REV) — a joint venture between Wallowa Resources and Eastern Oregon University — that was presented to the Blue Mountains Intergovernmental Council, or BIC for short.

The county-by-county analysis, headed up by Eastern Oregon University economists Peter Maille and Scott McConnell, assessed the socioeconomic makeup of a region that includes 10 counties in Oregon and four in Washington, stretching across 46,000 square miles from east of Walla Walla, Washington, to south of John Day.

See Economy, Page A16

GRANT COUNTY PROFILE

Current conditions

2020 population: 7,315

Economy: Forest products, agriculture, hunting, livestock production, recreation

Public land coverage: 62.1% of the county

National forest coverage: 1,593,053 acres, 55% of the county

Largest industries by number of jobs (2019)

Government: 27%

Farm: 13%

Retail trade: 9%

Forestry, fishing and ag services: 7%

Hospitality and restaurants: 6%

Construction: 5%

Other industries: 28%

Total jobs: 3,9368 (2019)

Forest Service spending

2010-2021 forest restoration contracts: \$46,450,956 (\$29 million issued to contractors based in Grant County)

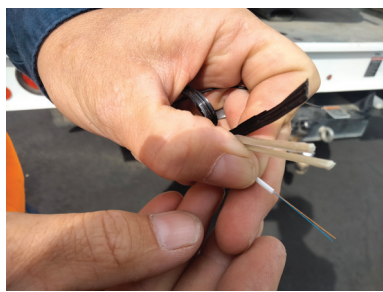
Grant, loans fuel broadband access

By TONY CHIOTTI
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Oregon Telephone Corp. has been awarded \$20.4 million in grants and loans to install fiber optic infrastructure in Grant, Malheur and Baker counties.

The latest round of federal money will provide high-speed fiber connections directly to 1,200 people, 41 businesses, 70 farms and four educational facilities as part of the ReConnect Program, using funding from the recent Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The program is aimed at ensuring rural communities see the benefits of high-speed internet.

The new funding is part of \$502 million in loans and grants being offered to projects in 20 states through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development



Tony Chiotti/Blue Mountain Eagle

An OTC Connections technician exposes the glass fibers at the heart of a fiber optic cable that makes high-speed internet connections possible.

program. Of the \$20.4 million earmarked for the state of Oregon, the full amount is being awarded to Oregon Telephone Co.

Marcus Bott, operations manager of OTC Connections, explained that OTC is currently using funds from

DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE

OTC's new high-speed internet service will be eligible for direct assistance through the Federal Communications Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program, as well as the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program.

These programs are already available to qualifying broadband internet customers.

To see if you qualify for discounted broadband service, visit the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program website at <https://www.fcc.gov/acp> and the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program at <https://tinyurl.com/yt3k9zxa>.

the first round of the ReConnect Program, over \$8 million, to install fiber in Long Creek, Monument, Spray and Seneca.

The newly announced award, a mix of \$10.2 million in grants and an additional \$10.2 million in loans, will allow OTC to update the infrastructure in additional areas. Internet speeds will improve from 10-25 megabits per second over the old

copper lines to over 2 gigabits per second over fiber, a 200 times faster connection for consumers. The new work from this most recent round will allow OTC to continue to expand coverage to additional areas in Grant County from Dayville to Mt. Vernon. A fourth and possibly final round of ReConnect Program funding is currently open and OTC is in the process of applying.

OTC is working to get all new home developments wired to the network at the time of construction. For existing homes, the company would run fiber from the closest junction to the home at the time the service is ordered.

As the fiber cables will be installed underground, there will first need to be a review from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and a review from federal agencies regarding possible archaeological sites in the path of construction. New installation from this latest round will not begin until state and federal reviews are completed, a process that took about two years for the initial round.

OTC currently employs roughly 30 people, with 20 of those in John Day. The new projects could lead to additional hires, but no decisions on that have yet been made.

John Day bowling alley reopens

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Over 100 people celebrated the grand opening of a bowling alley across from the Bare Bones Bar on Main Street in John Day Friday, Sept. 23.

The bowling alley, formally known as Nugget Lanes, sat empty for about 10 years until Bare Bones Bar owner Nick Stiner purchased the building in May of this year.

Stiner, who opened the Bare Bones Bar behind his Bare Bones Smokeshop last year, said the bar had become so popular he needed more space.

Additionally, Stiner said he does not like to see businesses such as the bowling alley that benefit the community sitting empty. So when the opportunity to purchase the old Nugget Lanes came up in May, he jumped on it.

The building already had space for a bar

with a separate entrance from the bowling area. Stiner attributes the accomplishment of reopening the 10-lane bowling alley to his staff.

Stiner said his employees have been working at the bowling alley since May to prepare for Friday's opening.

"I couldn't do this without all these employees that are like part of my family now," Stiner said. "Otherwise, I would have never done this."

The bowling alley is open from noon to 2 a.m. seven days a week, although that could change depending on business. "If folks don't come as much, we'll shorten the hours," Stiner said.

Currently, according to Stiner, eight of the 10 bowling lanes are functional. In addition to bowling, he said there are three new pool tables and a video arcade. The bowling alley is also available to rent for private events such as wedding receptions and birthday parties.



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Lead singer Les Church of the band Red Headed Stepchild belts one out Friday, Sept. 23, 2022, during the grand opening of the bowling alley across from the Bare Bones Bar on Main Street in John Day.



7 29467 30001 9