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ON THE STREET



Brooklyn Adams, 8, shows off her knitted wares at the John Day Street Fair on Friday, Sept. 30, 2022.

Tony Chiotti/Blue Mountain Eagle

County to get \$4.36M in aid

By TONY CHIOTTI
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Grant County is set to receive over \$2.18 million each year for fiscal years 2022 and 2023. This money is part of Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund put forward by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden Oregon and Rep. Joe Neguse of Colorado.

"I'm glad this work to secure these investments in the first COVID relief act has paid off as Oregon counties continue their recovery and rebound from this public health crisis that created such a devastating economic fallout," said Wyden in a Thursday, Sept. 29, press release announcing the funds.

The money has some stipulations regarding how it can be spent, but leaves much discretion to the Grant County Budget Committee. The committee comprises the three county commissioners and three at-large members of the community, who will meet to discuss the best way to use the funds.

Scott Myers, county judge and a member of the budget committee, said the appropriation of the money was not a surprise, but the timing was. "We knew the announcement was due on or before the 30th of the month, but we got the announcement at 1:30, so 4:30 D.C. time, on the day."

Myers says the next step will be to get a quorum of budget committee members together, a process he describes as "a bit like herding cats." He imagines a priority will be in setting a large chunk of the money aside to restore hours for county employees.

In June, the Grant County Budget Committee voted to trim all but a few county departments from a 40-hour to a 32-hour work week after discovering an \$800,000 shortfall in the budget, attributed to a "miscalculation." Most county offices are currently closed Fridays as a result. The cutbacks have affected all county departments except for the fairgrounds, sheriff's office, airport and road department.



Myers

Grant County's final street fair of the year held at the Pit Stop in John Day

By TONY CHIOTTI and JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

Well, that's all she wrote. The final Grant County street fair of the year took place at the Pit Stop in John Day on Friday, Sept. 30, and featured some of the best local bakers, artisans and craft makers showcasing their wares.

Event participants were out enjoying coffee and eating fry bread and Chinese street food while visiting the vendor stalls that had a wide array of products available for purchase.

The collection of products available showed just how diverse the interests and talents are in Grant County. You could find T-shirts with original art, traditional challah bread, natural tinctures

and Ethiopian fire opals — all at the same stall.

Also on display were a wide range of succulent plants offered for sale by Becky Stonerod-Pereira and her mother, Judy Kerr. Their vendor stall, Primitive Upcycling & More, also offered brightly painted cow skulls in addition to the succulent plants.

Together, they bring the stall to events around the area, with Stonerod-Pereira creating the handicrafts and Kerr propagating the cacti and succulents. "My mom does the plants," said Stonerod-Pereira, "but mostly she cracks the whip."

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A pair of vendor booths at the John Day Street Fair at the Pit Stop on Friday, Sept. 30, 2022.

Tony Chiotti/Blue Mountain Eagle

Farmers, regulators struggle to address nitrate contamination

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

BOARDMAN — It started last January with a multimillion-dollar fine levied by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality against the Port of Morrow.

The port, situated along the Columbia River in northeastern Oregon, has for years collected nitrogen-rich wastewater from food processors and other businesses at its industrial park near Boardman and used it to irrigate neighboring farmland under a permit from DEQ.

Between 2018 and 2021, regulators found the port violated its water quality permit more than 1,000 times by regularly over-applying the recycled water on fields growing crops such as corn, potatoes and onions.

DEQ initially fined the port \$1.3 million and later increased it to \$2.1 million



Jake Madison, president of Madison Ranches in Echo.

George Plaven/Capital Press

after finding additional violations. Fearing potential health risks to the area's residents, Morrow County commissions declared a local state of emergency.

The episode — overloading of groundwater with nitrates — brings to light an issue that is neither new to agriculture nor unique

to only that part of Oregon.

Nitrogen from fertilizer, compost or manure is critical for farmers, who apply it to their fields, but too much can have unintended consequences. Crops can only absorb so much of it, allowing excess nutrients to leach down into groundwater.

Combined with oxygen, the nitrogen becomes what is known as a nitrate, a colorless, odorless compound that experts say can cause serious health problems if consumed in excess.

Though some nitrates occur naturally, the over-application of fertilizer or wastewater by farmers has been identified as a major source of nitrates beyond what the Environmental Protection Agency considers safe for drinking water.

In Morrow County, attempts to regulate contamination have so far netted frustratingly slow progress.

"To date, there's been a ton of time and resources spent being the finger at whose fault this is," said J.R. Cook, founder and director of the Northeast Oregon Water Association, known as NOWA. "We're all at fault. Now, what's the solution?"

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