

Court seeks disaster status for County



Hard road to go

State highways, county roads, city streets and private parking lots have all been seriously damaged by the recent thaw and flooding. This stretch of highway—near the airport in Lexington—looked like a battlefield this week as trucks and pickups sank to their axles as the road gave away beneath the weight. Morrow County has imposed a voluntary 10-ton weight limit to stave off further damage.

The Morrow County Court is asking the State of Oregon to declare the county a disaster area, stating that the recent week of flooding has caused at least \$500,000 in damage to farms, roads and buildings.

In a letter to the director of the Oregon Emergency Services Division, Judge D.O. Nelson termed the \$500,000 figure "a very conservative estimate," stating that "the total damage could be much higher."

Damages totaling \$250,000 were estimated for county-maintained roads, culverts and bridges, with an estimate of \$150,000 set for damage done to agricultural land. A figure of \$100,000 was set for buildings and homes, in-

cluding an estimated \$30,000 in damages done to lone schools.

The move could mean that persons who lost property in the flooding would become eligible for low-interest disaster loans, and that some financial relief may be available to pay for damage done to county school buildings and roads.

Gov. Atiyeh would have to declare the county a disaster area in order for such aid to become available. Before he would do so, state officials would make an independent assessment of property damage and make recommendations.

Just how long that process would take is not immediately known.

Meanwhile, although floodwaters have receded, problems remain. Heppner remains without sanitary drinking water, after floodwaters apparently demolished a section of main line near the Dick Wilkinson Ranch on Upper Willow Creek. Impurities are entering the system, apparently at the pipe rupture, contaminating the water. On Tuesday health officials reported that the bacterial count was dropping, but remained above the safety level, and ordered that precautionary boiling be continued into a second week. City crews have yet to locate the exact site of the rupture.

County roads may be free of surface water, but the sudden

thaw has taken its toll on pavement. The 55 mile per hour limit was probably never more stringently adhered to than during the past week, since speeds above that level could only result in serious damage to vehicles traveling on hundreds of miles of county roads rutted by runoff and pocked with chuckholes.

Along Hwy. 207 between Lexington and Cutsforth Corners, a log truck Tuesday had to be towed away when it became stuck in ruts in the pavement. Two county bridges in the Valby and north lone area washed away, and the Morgan Street Bridge, weakened by the floodwaters, remained closed to traffic. Ranchers are faced with

removing tons of silt and debris from fields along creek bottoms, repairing fences and trying to salvage water-damaged hay.

Al Osmin of the Heppner Water Control District told members of the Heppner-Morrow County Chamber of Commerce Monday that diversions, debris basins and waterways along Willow and Hinton creeks, Balm Fork and Shobe Canyon prevented the flooding from "being a lot worse than it was."

A number of the soil conservation constructions were ruined in the flooding, Osmin said, but federal emergency funds may be available to help pay for their replacement.

The Heppner GAZETTE-TIMES Morrow County's Award-Winning Weekly Newspaper

VOL. 97 NO. 7

HEPPNER, OREGON

THURSDAY, FEB. 15, 1979

TWO SECTIONS—14 PAGES

20 cents

Northwest Medical Foundation leader explains Pioneer Memorial study to public

About 80 persons took part Tuesday night in a public meeting held to discuss Northwest Medical Foundation's study and recommendations regarding Pioneer Memorial Hospital.

Northwest President M.J. Blair reviewed findings of his firm's study, as he had done during a late January meeting before county, city and hospital officials. Since the findings were made public, they have been the topic of considerable discussion in the community.

Northwest's report concludes, among other things, that:

—A change in management is needed for the hospital.

—Much of the hospital's equipment is obsolete.

—A new wing must be built to the hospital.

—A family practitioner, a physician with surgical experience, and an internist should be located in Heppner.

—Pioneer Memorial will always require a subsidy to continue to operate.

Since the report was issued, several hospital officials have criticized Northwest's "special interest" in making the study, since the firm is involved in the health management field and is interested in negotiating for the new management of Pioneer Memorial. Board members have also stated that the report contains little information that was not already known by hospital and county officials, and Northwest's relationship with the Seventh Day Adventist faith was questioned during a recent hospital board meeting.

Blair told those attending Tuesday's meeting that "we came to do a study on the hospital. We don't want to get involved in a community controversy." Northwest's president stated that his firm is "not pressuring anyone," and has "never asked for a commitment" from county or hospital officials. "We're not politicians," he said. "We manage hospitals. We would not have come in if the hospital board and the county did not feel that a problem existed."

Judge D.O. Nelson, at the outset of Tuesday's meeting, stated that the decision to authorize the Northwest report was reached with the

support and consent of the hospital board.

He also emphasized that decisions regarding Northwest's recommendations would be up to the hospital board—and not the county court—to make.

"The court wants to make it clear that any decisions to be made about running the hospital will be done by the hospital board—except for budget matters," Nelson said, noting that "in the past, the county court has possibly overstepped its bounds in running the hospital."

Hospital board member John Maas stated that the possibility of hiring Northwest or a similar management firm to run the hospital has not

been ruled out by his panel. "If the most viable route is to go through a foundation like Northwest, we'll go that way." With only one board member having more than four months experience as a trustee, "we just won't jump in the first parade that comes through town," Maas said.

"Things need to change at the hospital," Maas continued, noting that board members and Heppner physicians "are moving into a better relationship," and are working together to attract an additional physician.

When asked by a citizen how much control Northwest would be given should it be decided to hire the firm, Blair stated that "we would want

internal control sufficient to do a good job," the terms of which would be outlined in a contract of at least three year's duration. Northwest would seek the right to hire and fire employees, but Blair stated that his firm would retain current workers, although "we would have to have our own administrator."

Regarding Northwest's links to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Blair stated that "we're not out to twist peoples' arms to make Seventh Day Adventist Christians out of them. Our's is not a hard-sell program...If you visit any of our hospitals, you won't feel put upon."

Blair said that he could not guarantee that Northwest

would be successful in obtaining the mix of physicians outlined in the report, but stated "in all likelihood, yes, we could...We've done it in many other areas."

Those attending Tuesday's meeting were asked to fill out "straw ballots" regarding several hospital questions. The ballots were made available by Merl Cantin.

Of 60 persons who filled out the ballot forms, 47 indicated that they favored hiring a management firm, seven voted that they did not, and six wrote qualified endorsements of the concept.

All 60 respondents indicated that they wanted the hospital to remain in Heppner.

Hospital trustees, Dr. Gifford launch search for additional physician

Dr. Joe Gifford met with members of Pioneer Memorial Hospital's Board of Trustees and representatives of the Doctor Search Committee last week, to map out strategies aimed at bringing an additional physician to Heppner at the earliest possible date.

According to a news release from the hospital board, Dr. Gifford "listed basic needs that an incoming physician would require—a place to practice, equipment to practice with, and a place to live. All three require substantial cash outlays."

Citing a "tight money" policy in effect currently by local banks, "Dr. Gifford questioned if a new doctor would be able to find a money source to begin practice in the area," the release stated.

As a result, the hospital board agreed to meet with local bankers to determine "bank policy on loan support of local doctors."

The news release stated that the hospital board, Doctor Search Committee and Dr. Gifford "are pledged to work in an aggressive, unified effort to bring competent personnel into the area at the earliest date," as well as seeking temporary measures "to insure that the community will

have continued local medical expertise." Also being investigated is the possibility of bringing in a nurse practitioner.

Hospital board members restated their commitment to provide a medical practice area within the hospital, stating that "space could be made more available in the existing facility with a modest amount of change." The

trustees also plan to add outpatient examination rooms and office space for doctors in an addition to the hospital that appears relatively certain to be funded by a grant from the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Prior to Dr. Gifford's return to Heppner, Pioneer Memorial "had a tentative agreement" with the emergency staff at St. Anthony's Hospital in Pendle-

ton "to provide consultation here in case of Dr. Wolff's absence," the release stated.

Pioneer Memorial Administrator Bob Byrnes "is seeking to reaffirm that agreement. Such an agreement would guarantee that the hospital would always have medical consultation even if the local doctors were out of town."

Bellamy introduces rural health bills in Legislature

State Representative Billy Bellamy has introduced legislation aimed at increasing the medical services available to his constituents in District 55.

Bellamy's office announced that the freshman legislator has co-sponsored a bill which would provide scholarships and loans to medical students who will conduct their practices in rural areas, and will support another measure which would allow nurse practitioners to dispense medicine and to purchase three-party liability insurance.

The Culver Republican is also sponsoring a legislative

task force on rural health care needs of rural areas and recommend appropriate legislation.

Bellamy said he is "seeking suggestions and comments from the people in our rural

communities and towns as to the most equitable solution to the problems of inadequate health care. I'm firmly convinced that the final solution must involve as much local control as possible."

Sweeney appointed to Pioneer Memorial Board

In a late announcement Wednesday morning, the Morrow County Court said it had appointed Dan Sweeney of Heppner to the Pioneer Mem-

orial Hospital Board of Directors.

Sweeney replaces John

Cont. on page 3

Heppner's water woes remain unresolved

BOIL WATER

Residents of Heppner are urged to boil their drinking water until further notice.

Mayor Jerry Sweeney told the Gazette-Times that city crews had been unable to locate the break—or breaks—in a city water line located up

Willow Creek as of Wednesday morning. The Mayor said residents will be notified when the water is safe to drink by officers using the public address system on the police car.

DA's car vandalized

HHS students among witnesses in grand jury drug probe

Nearly 20 witnesses—many of them Heppner High School students—have been called to testify before a Morrow County Grand Jury drug investigation.

The grand jury met throughout the day Friday and on Monday before adjourning late Monday afternoon.

The drug probe has not yet resulted in indictments, but indictments are reportedly expected to be handed down, possibly next week.

District Attorney Dennis Doherty confirmed that the

grand jury probe centered on a drug investigation, but declined to elaborate. He did state that although the grand jury has recessed, "the investigation cannot be considered complete, in a final sense."

On Friday afternoon, a car owned by Doherty, parked near his home, was vandalized. According to a report filed with the sheriff's department, the carburetor of the vehicle was filled with mud, electric wiring was pulled loose, and two tires were shot flat.

When questioned about the incident, Doherty commented that "I can't say for sure that

it has any connection with the investigation...If it does, it wouldn't have any bearing on the case, anyway."

Parents of students called to testify in the investigation were notified to explain their absence from classes. Most students were reported to have spent nearly the entire school day at either the Monday or Friday grand jury sessions.

School Board awards bids for North Morrow school buildings

Groundbreaking could begin as early as next month for two new northern Morrow County school buildings, following a decision Monday night by the Morrow County School Board to award bids on the two projects.

The decision to award bids followed a session in which board members trimmed more than \$220,000 from the two construction projects. Original bids for the buildings—an elementary school in Boardman and a junior high in Irrigon—when opened earlier

this month, were found to exceed by far the amount the board has budgeted for school construction.

While the square footage of the buildings was not trimmed, the school board did cut costs by substituting less expensive materials, deleting some blacktopping projects and cutting back on the amount of equipment to be installed.

About \$91,000 was pared from the original bid on the junior high building, and nearly \$130,000 was trimmed

from the elementary school's original bid.

Low bidder on the Boardman school was the Timber Co. of Hermiston, and low bidder for the Irrigon facility was R.A. Chambers and Associates of Eugene.

Next Monday, the board is expected to take action on giving official names to the two new buildings.

Construction contracts are expected to be drafted and signed within the next week, and construction could begin within several weeks.