



The giant shovel prepares to dump a scoop load of coal into the 120 ton hauling truck

## Reclaiming land important to Amax

The following is the second of a two part series on the trip made by Heppner Gazette Times News Editor Steve Powell to the Amax Coal Mines in Gillette, Wyoming. By Steven A. Powell

Reclamation is an ongoing process at the two Amax Coal Mines in Gillette, Wyoming. It is also the area with the most government supervision, said Amax Media Relations Representative Don Warfield.

Reclamation is the contouring and rebuilding of the land once the coal is removed.

Reclamation on the land mines is a continuing process. When topsoil is dug up in one area, it is moved to another area for the finishing touches for reclamation. After the topsoil is put on, the land is contoured as close as possible to how the land originally was. Of course with the coal gone, it is at a lower elevation. The overburden soil is transported the same way.

Recontoured overburden is covered with 18 to 24 inches of topsoil before seeding.

To finish off the reclamation, seeds and trees are planted to cut down erosion. Meadowlark Farms Inc., a

subsidiary of Amax, farms and ranches Amax Coal mines before and after they are mined. The goal of the Amax reclamation program is to return the mined areas to productive dryland farming and rangeland.

Cotton wood and willow trees and rock formations are planted in selected areas and streams and creeks are returned to resemble the original body of water.

There are about 541 acres at the two mines in various stages of the permanent reclamation.

At the Belle Ayr Mine, in 1979, 156 acres were affected by mining and another 180 acres were seeded in the reclamation process that restores mined land to agricultural use. About 1,000 trees were planted on reclaimed areas of the mine last year.

At the Eagle Butte Mine, the younger of the two Amax Mines, the reclamation process is not as advanced. Last year, 78 acres of land were affected by the mine and 20 acres were seeded.

Randall Shinn, reclamation supervisor, said the goal of his job is to get the land "back to productivity that equals or exceeds its abilities previous to the mining of it."

Shinn said he must make sure the new reclaimed landscape is stable and will not erode so it can be used as farm land. The success of the reclamation process is judged by the productivity of the land.

The reclamation work force has 15 employees and a \$3 million budget.

Studies have been done on how the mining affects the supply of antelope and small mammals in the area and Shinn says the effect seems to be minimal.

Despite all of the mining activity, antelope, deer, rabbits and other animals can be seen within only a few yards of the mine.

Shinn and Warfield agreed

that it should be up to the states to monitor the coal mines. The federal government first got involved with the Surface Mine Reclamation Act of 1977. When the federal government sets the reclamation standards, it is the same for all states and it should not be that way because states have different types of climate and land, Shinn said.

"Have to use some of the same type of reclamation practices that they do in southeast states even though the lands are quite different," Shinn said.

Shinn added that in 1980, the states are scheduled to regain control of the supervision of the mines but the federal government will still make inspections.

Currently the mines are inspected quarterly by the state and twice a year by the federal government but with the states in control, they will inspect the mines monthly with the federal government inspecting quarterly.

"If we do not do what they (the inspector) tell us to, they can fine us or close us down," Shinn said.

Even though Amax owns the land, it has to lease the rights to mine it from the federal government. The present lease for the Belle Ayr Mine runs to the late 1990's and the lease for the Eagle Butte Mine runs until 2015.

Warfield said the federal government has not allowed new leases for coal mining in the U.S. since 1971. Amax owns the land it mines and plans to either sell it back to private owners or lease the land to farmers after the land has been mined and reclaimed. Amax owns 6,000 acres at the Eagle Butte Mine and 4,000 at the Belle Ayr Mine.

Geologists say it is 600 feet to the next coal seam so to mine that would be uneconomical using today's mining methods, Warfield said.

The City of Gillette is a

young, the average age is 25, boom town that has grown from a town the size of Heppner in the 1950's to 7,000 in

population in the 1960's because of the oil boom and then 18,000 now with the coal movement.

"The city was drilling for water recently and struck oil but we need water worse than oil!" Warfield said.

There is only three unemployment in Campbell county and they have "an excellent school system with a \$36 million budget for 5,000 students," Warfield said.

The county gets 14 inches of rain a year and wheat farmers get an average of 22 bushels per acre.

The Amax company has a good working relationship with its employees.

Amax employees voted to stay non union in 1979 by 91.5 percent. The reason, according to Warfield is because "We treat our people right."

Warfield said they deal with their employees face to face, one on one. The mines are operating 365 days a year but the pay is "good" he says. A starting general laborer can make \$11.50 an hour or \$28,000 to 30,000 a year. Amax receives about 4,000 applications a year and has about a nine percent turnover.

And the Amax Mines are safe too. At one time, according to Warfield, they went three years without having an accident.

Underground mines are more dangerous than surface mines," he said.

The surface mines are also very clean. The machine operators work in air conditioned cabs so they do not even get dirty. We looked all over the mines trying to find a dirty miner and could not find one.

"We don't build the sexiest mines, but we build the most efficient," Warfield concluded. "We have to because it is our only business."

## Proposed County budget cut \$98,100

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Director Don Briggs. She said he started here after coming from a 26,000 job in Multnomah County and he took a cut for four months at a rate of 22,360. Krebs promised him he would make \$24,960 beginning in July and she will not go back on her word.

Krebs said he has a lot of responsibility taking care of the county grounds, county buildings, solid waste, airport and the roads and bridges and he has done it without an office, secretary or bookkeeper. She said a road crew of 18 needs a director and Briggs must inspect all of the bridges in the county by Sept. 1. He is an engineer and in management and it takes

that kind of money to get a man with his qualifications, she said.

All county employees will receive a cost of living pay increase of 11.4 percent.

Assessor Greg Swwek said Morrow county property owners are lucky because this county is the richest county per capita in the state and the utilities pay for 49 percent of the county taxes (Portland General Electric pays one-third) so the tax rates are low compared to the rest of the state.

On the August 26 or Sept. 16 ballot, depending on whether an "emergency election" was declared yesterday by the county court or not, voters will

see the figure \$1,014,082 which is outstanding the six percent limitation increase allowed by law. The total requirement needed to balance the budget from county taxes is \$1,577,072.

The Morrow county Salary Committee met with members of the public June 27 to discuss county salaries for both elected officials and county employees.

Greg Swwek, county assessor and chairman of the salary committee, invited about eight members of the community to present their view on what they think would be an adequate salary for county workers.

Krebs opened the meeting by saying, "The county is in serious trouble after the defeat of the budget."

Represented on the salary committee were Sharon Biddle, secretary at the district attorney's office; Greg Swwek, county assessor; Norma Groce, mental health secretary; Dorothy Krebs, county commissioner; Barbara Bloodworths, county clerk; and Margo Sherer, county tax collector. Missing were Pat Wright county nurse and Deane Seeger, county planner.

Merlin Cantin said he talked to approximately 55 people about the county budget. He said 15 of them did not vote but said they would next time because the vote was so close (June 24.) Cantin said 25 voted "no" and 15 "yes". Of the 25 that voted no, the main objection they had to the county budget as previously proposed was wages and elected officials salaries. Cantin said the second problem is the amount spent on roads.

"People are not happy with

the way money has been spent on roads in the past," Cantin said. "I have made my own personal complaint to the county court. I have asked for some gravel to be put on a road near my home and I was told I would have to wait my turn because the gravel trucks are in the north end (of Morrow County)."

Cantin criticized the county for not sticking with an independent study that was done in 1977.

"Studies cost the taxpayers money and when my money is spent, I would like to see them use that study," he said. "That study was done by an outside group and I object to Dode (Dorothy Krebs) doing a salary study."

Krebs said that study done by LPGI was not working because there were no job descriptions in it while the one she has proposed and recommended be adopted by the county does include job descriptions.

Krebs said 11.4 percent of the wage increases is for the cost of living so any thing more than that is the raise. Elected county officials would have received anywhere from a 20 to 45 percent increase if the county budget padded June 24.

Swwek said the state average for elected officials is \$21,720 and Morrow County was asking for \$19,618. He asked Steve Powell what he thought a fair wage would be.

Powell said he thought the salaries as proposed may be fair but that it was too big of a jump all at once for the voters. He said elected officials should receive about 18,500 and the judge about \$21,000 instead of the proposed \$19,618 and \$25,000.

In last year's budget, elected officials received about \$16,000 and the county judge about \$17,000. Powell said it would still be a healthy increase but instead of the county officials receiving a 21 percent increase, they would have about a 15 percent increase of a 45 percent increase for the judge, he would get about a 23 percent increase. With the cost of living factor, that would mean about a four percent raise for the county elected officials and an 11 percent raise for the judge.

"In one year, I do not think we should try to make up for the past 30 years of county officials being underpaid," Cantin said. "I will not support it."

### Heppner golfer makes top 8

Former Heppner golfer Charles Rawlins placed in the top eight at the recent Oregon Amateur Golfing Championship.

He was one of 32 participants in the tourney. He made the cut to the top 16 after the first two days of golf and then went on to make the top eight on the final.

"My driving was good but my putting was off, Rawlins reported.

### \$1,000 grand prize given

A \$1000 grand prize will be awarded in the Sixth Annual Poetry Competition sponsored by the World of Poetry, a quarterly newsletter for poets.

Poems of all styles and on any subjects are eligible to compete for the grand prize or for 49 other cash or merchandise awards.

Rules and official entry forms are available from World of Poetry, 2431 Stockton Blvd., Dept. N, Sacramento, California 95817



Bud Marshall takes Ramona's blood pressure to make sure everything is going smoothly.

### Marshalls cautious with kidney machine

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everything that is done. "Nutrition is very important because of the loss of nutrients while I am on the kidney machine," Mrs. Marshall said.

Other precautions also have to be taken.

Bud Marshall has to wear

sterile gloves whenever he works with the kidney machine equipment. He takes her blood pressure periodically and watches her weight very closely to make sure it does not fluctuate too much.

The kidney dialysis machine is cleaned once a week with formaldehyde and once a month with Purex.

"We run tests to make sure it is cleaned out," Bud Marshall said. "It tells us if something is wrong. If (the machine) has a blood leak

detector, if everything is not right, a beeper goes off."

Bud Marshall shoots a syringe full of the anti-coagulant "hepper" into the blood lines to prevent his wife's blood from clotting.

"If there is too much hepper, she can bleed too easy," he said. "Someone has to be around all the time to watch the machine to see if her blood pressure drops or if she needs a soda cracker to prevent muscle cramps."

**Morrow County Grain Growers Closed Friday & Saturday July 4-5**

**Effective July 1 No outside burning within City Limits of Heppner**  
Fire Chief Ferrie Burkenbine

**St. Jude's Children's "Wheels For Life" BIK-A-THON**  
Ruggs to Lone City Park Saturday July 19  
Registration—Ruggs 8:30 a.m. Departure—9:30 a.m.  
Lunch served at Lone city Park for all participants Prizes for both boys and girls  
Rides will be available from Heppner City Park, Del's Market in Lexington, and Lone City Park for those needing rides.  
Departure time from these points is 8:30 a.m.  
Pledge cards are available at Murray's Drugs, Heppner, Del's Market, Lexington, and Bank of E.O., Lone.  
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