

The Heppner

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Heppner rail line up for sale

Union Pacific Railroad has solicited 70 short line rail operators in the United States for the purchase of the Heppner and Condon branch lines, George Skorney, regional public relations director of Union Pacific Railroad said Monday.

All shippers on both lines have been notified that Union Pacific has put the lines up for sale. "I'm not saying that U.P. will file for abandonment of the lines if they do not sell," he said. "However, that is always a possibility. The company has not filed at this point."

We prefer to keep the branch lines in operation through the more economical method of short line operators, Skorney continued. Branch line operation can be expensive in relation to the volume of traf-

fic derived from the line. "It is our belief that preservation (of the branch lines) can best be obtained by short line operators who have more ways to curtail expenses than a railroad which is bound by union

contracts specifying the number of people needed to operate trains and the functions they may perform. Short line operators are not bound by train speed requirements and can use slower speeds than U.P. trains," he said.

Heppner branch line, built in 1888, carries mostly lumber, wheat, and barley. The Condon branch line, built in 1905, is mostly wheat and barley. Each branch is 45 miles long separated by eight miles of track between Arlington and Heppner Jct. Heppner is the stronger of the two

branches, Skorney continued, but the two branches are offered as a package because it might be more attractive to a short line operator.

A short line operator would provide his own locomotive and maintenance equipment, Skorney said. The operator would be purchasing the track and "bridge rights" on the eight connecting miles of U.P. track so that the same locomotive and maintenance cars could be used on both lines, he said.

"We can't say if a short line operator would reduce rates," he said. "That would be up to the operator. A short line operation would provide more economic stability for the long term operation of the line. The track is in good condition now, but could eventually require major maintenance such as the replacement of ties. U.P.'s maintenance costs are high and the company is not able to save money to put toward major maintenance."

"U.P. has not sold any lines in this part of the country, so I want to emphasize that this does not mean the line will be abandoned or that the track will be pulled up. We would rather keep all branches in operation through short line operators," he concluded.

County signs lease for more office space

Morrow County Court last Wednesday signed a lease-option with the Pioneer Memorial Hospital Foundation for the clinic building on the hill behind Pioneer Memorial Hospital and next to the doctors' office.

The Foundation paid \$10,000 down and has been making payments on the former dental clinic which has been unoccupied for several years, Larry Mills, president of the Hospital Foundation told the Court. The Foundation will give up its equity in the building if the county decides to assume their contract, he said.

The Foundation will allow the county immediate access to the building to make some minor interior repairs to prepare the building for occupancy January 1.

County/forest service exchange roads

Morrow County Court last Wednesday signed an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service for the transfer of 27 1/2 miles of county road to the Forest Service and the transfer of 25 miles of Forest Service Road to the county.

The county will benefit by the transfer, Judge Don McElligott said because both parties will be better able to maintain and administer their roads. In addition, the Forest Service has agreed to improve roads which were scheduled for improvement

although they are now in county hands. The county will be allowed, with a special permit, to use forest service rock pits for improvement of roads, and the Forest Service has said they will do everything they can to get Willow Creek Road down Coalmine Hill on the Forest Highway program, he said.

The roads which the county traded away were unimproved "wagon track" roads, he continued, and could have cost the county in maintenance if logging in the forest

required the county to fix the roads.

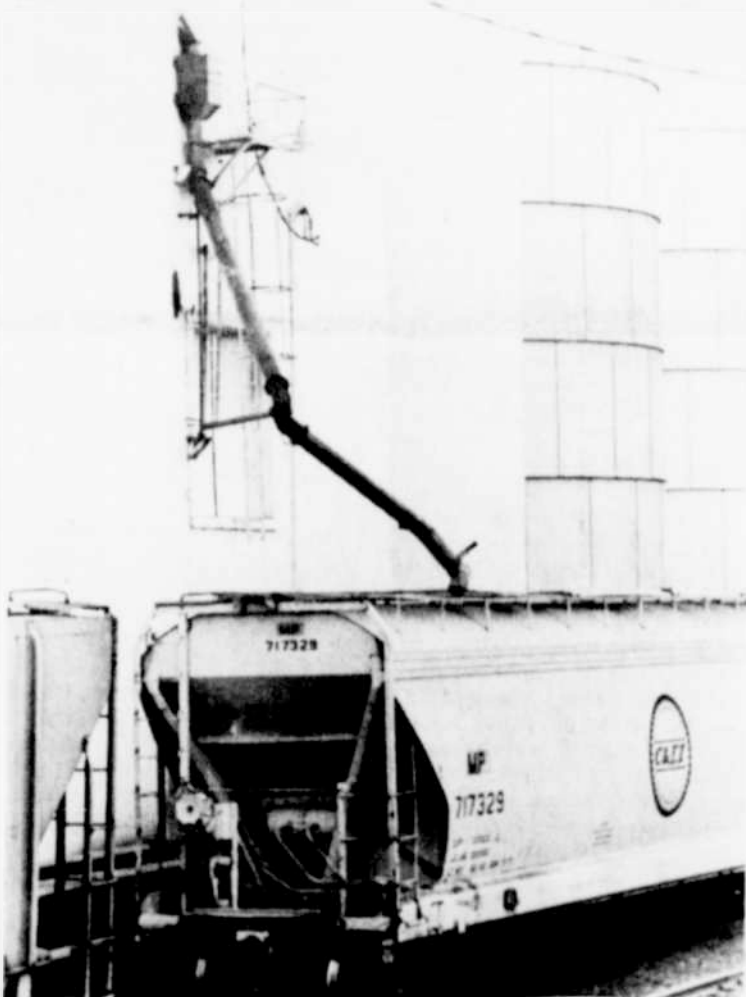
A final benefit to the county, the judge said, is that you can drive from Anson Wright Park to Tupper to Cutsforth Park all on county road.

County roads traded to the Forest Service - 5.3 miles of Morphine Rd, 10.3 miles of Ritter Road, 7.1 miles of Brown Prairie, and 6.0 miles of Arbuckle Driveway.

Forest Service roads traded to the county - 15 miles of Tupper to Linger Longer, 2.5 miles of Coal Mine Hill, and 7.5 miles of Iron Shaw Creek to Four Corners.



Commissioner Jerry Peck (left), U.S. Forest Service Regional Director Ben Siminoe, Judge Don McElligott, and Commissioner Irv Rauch sign road exchange agreement.



Grain cars load from Union Pacific siding at Jordan Elevator.

New fish hatchery will be located next to existing Irrigon facility

Morrow County's choice of site for a proposed Bonneville Power Association fish hatchery at Irrigon adjacent to the existing fish hatchery there has been accepted, County Planner Deane Seeger told the County Court last Wednesday.

BPA has proposed a hatchery for steelhead hoping to plant them in the Umatilla River, a promise which goes back historically to an early Indian treaty when dams were first built on the Columbia River which destroyed many fish. The Northwest

Power Planning Council discovered that the U.S. Congress also established their responsibility to the fish and wildlife along the river as well as the power produced from it.

The Court, the Planner Senators Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, the Port of Morrow, city of Irrigon, and East Central Oregon Association of Counties have been working for some time for relocation of the proposed hatchery to a site acceptable to the county.

The site originally proposed by

BPA, directly east of the Morrow County Grain Growers Barge facility is one of the last natural deep water sites on the Oregon side of the river. It's also a pristine area for sturgeon fishing, Seeger said. It is essential to the longrange economic needs of the county. Historically, it is a proven site for industry, but can be compatible with recreational uses.

The county, he said, would like to maintain Patterson Ferry Road for industrial use and reserve Eighth St. West for tourist and homeowners

traffic. The county has scheduled improvements on the road.

The Planning Commission was also concerned about the impact of a large well for the hatchery which would have been at the same level as 169 existing private wells.

School Supt. hospitalized

Morrow County School Supt. Doyle McCaslin was admitted to Good Shepherd Community Hospital in Hermiston on Monday with chest pains, a spokesperson for the hospital said.

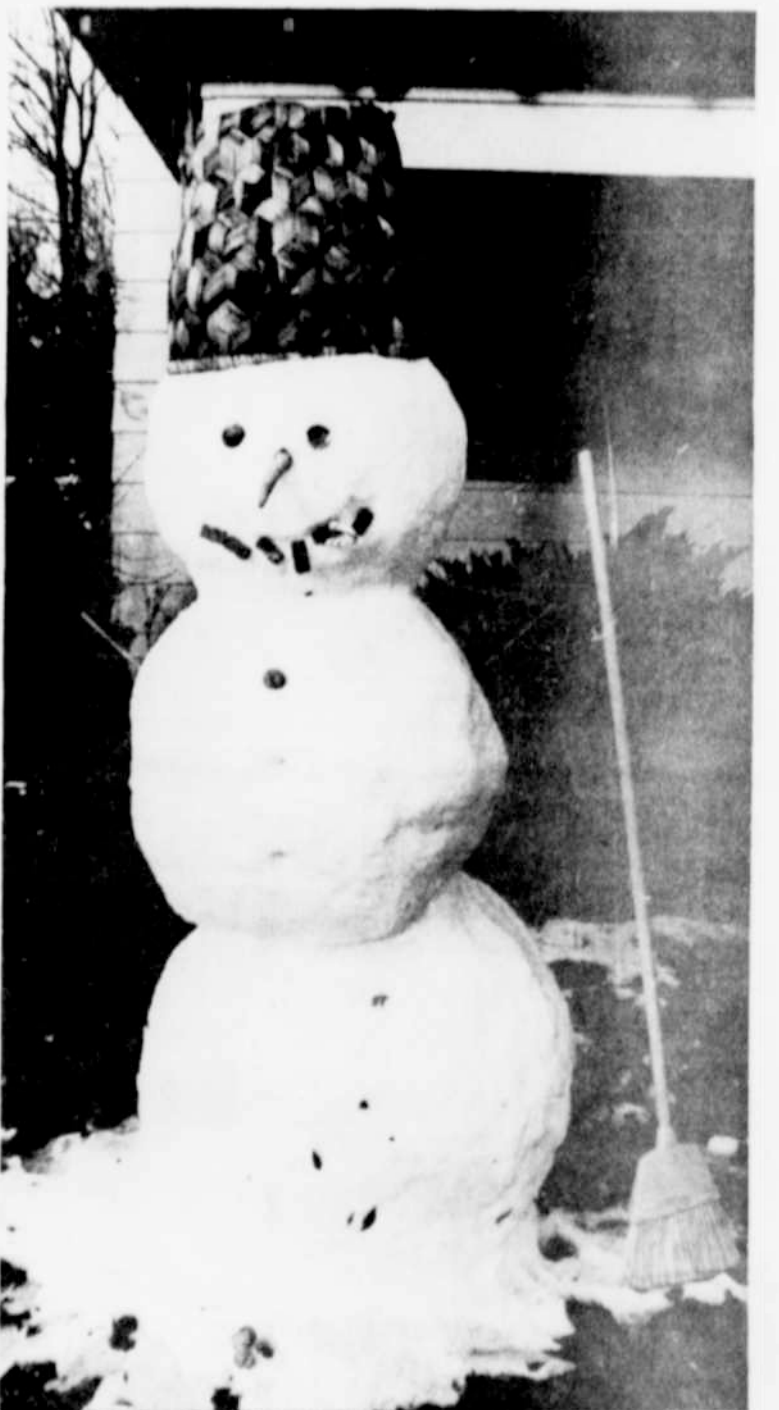
Tuesday his condition was fair and he was still under observation.

Assistant Supt. Chuck Starr said that McCaslin is expected to undergo more test and observation before he is released from the hospital.

G-T will publish Dec. 24

Next week's Gazette-Times will be published and mailed on Wednesday, Dec. 24. We will observe regular deadlines for news items and advertising. News items and letters to the editor need to be at the office by 5 p.m. Monday; classified advertising deadline is 1 p.m. Tuesday; and display advertising will be accepted until 7 p.m. Tuesday.

The newspaper office will be closed Christmas Day, Dec. 25 and Friday, Dec. 26.



This frosty fellow has greeted passersby on Quaid St. in Heppner for the past week. Do you still want warmer temperatures?

