

Ione School District to reap benefits from wind project windfall

By April Sykes

Ione School Board member Anne Morter told the board Monday night that the Ione School District will receive additional tax monies resulting from the wind farm currently under construction in Morrow and Gilliam counties.

According to Morrow County Assessor Greg

Sweek, the whole wind farm project is worth approximately \$75 million with the Morrow County portion being around \$40 million. He said that the first \$25 million of the project is taxable with around 2/3 of that in Morrow County, resulting in an additional \$15-3/4 million taxable in Morrow County.

Sweek said that Ione School District currently has an \$85 million tax base and this project will add approximately \$16 million to their tax base. While the additional tax income for ISD will be offset by the state school fund (ISD will get less funding from the state school fund), it will still have a beneficial effect on the proposed Ione School District bond issue, said Sweek. The increase in tax base will reduce the tax rate for the proposed bond.



Karl Ostheller, new Ione superintendent/principal

Sweek said that ISD will also get an additional \$40,000 a year for a five-year period (a flat amount, not in tax monies) to fund a renewable energy education program at the school. Morter and Sweek said that in Sherman County the renewable energy education monies that were negotiated were used to beef up science and math programs in their schools. The program will be determined by the district.

Sweek also said that the energy company will also pay a \$500,000 "community service fee" which will be divided up among all taxing districts where the wind project is located.

In other business, the board approved a three-year contract with new superintendent/principal Karl Ostheller, who was present at his first board meeting Monday night. As per the contract, the district will pay Ostheller a base salary of \$81,000 for 250 work days minus eight paid holidays; 12 days of paid sick leave; 20 days of paid vacation which may be accumulated from year to year up to a maximum of 10 days with payment of up to 10 days accumulated at the end of his employment; the same medical, dental and vision insurance benefits available to other licensed district employees; reimbursement for business travel at the current IRS mileage rate; payment by the district of both the employer's and employee's Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) contributions; and \$1,000 in moving expenses. The agreement specifies that the superintendent/principal be required to reside in the Ione School District. The board makes the district-owned residence available to the superintendent/principal for \$200 per month plus utilities. Also in the contract the board specified that they will evaluate his performance no later than February 15 and review his employment status no later than March 15 of each contract year to determine whether to offer him an extended contract.

At the meeting, the board learned from Beth O'Hanlon, chief financial officer employed with the Umatilla-Morrow ESD, that in order to stay within the 2008 budget and meet local budget requirements, the district was unable to pay all of the outstanding bills presented in June. She said this was primarily due to the June 2007 transportation bill paid in July 2007, unanticipated expenses with previous superintendent Bryn Browning's resignation and higher operating costs caused by inflation. The larger vendor invoices not paid by the

district included: Umatilla-Morrow ESD for custodial services-\$33,032; Mid Columbia Bus for transportation-\$43,005; Columbia Basin Electric-\$3,076. She said that if 2009 revenue allows for an increase in appropriations, a resolution will be presented to the board to correct the additional 2009 expenses paid.

O'Hanlon said that Joe McElligott and Ann Morter spoke to Mid Columbia Bus and were able to negotiate a \$4,487 mileage credit from Mid Columbia Bus. She said the district's bill has been adjusted downward. O'Hanlon also reported the following: the Oregon Department of Education does not send Basic School Support payments in June but will send two payments in July; the Ione Education Fund contributed \$30,000 to the general fund in June; federal REAP money totaling \$16,093 was received in June; ODE reversed its decision to require the district to submit an "onerous" report on the Title IA grant and the district will not be required to return \$3,200 to the state; ODE has issued another estimate for 2009 school support in the neighborhood of \$1,551,837, only around \$200 down from its May estimate; the district has not yet received funds from the Willow Creek Park District for the Ione pool.

O'Hanlon said the community function ended up over budget due to increased food costs, with \$24,567 budgeted for food purchases and \$28,973 in expenses before the benefit of state commodities. She said that after the commodities are added in, the community function will be \$5,200 over budget. She said that a resolution will be prepared to adjust the 2009 budget.

In other business, board Chair Joel Peterson resigned from the board, effective in August, declaring a conflict of interest since the board approved the hiring of Peterson's wife, Lea Mathieu, as a fourth-fifth grade teacher. Morter said that regulations preclude a board member from having a spouse in the employ of the district.

Also at the meeting, the board:

-debated a previous expenditure of \$800 for a girls' team's game day shirts, purchased apparently because some people had complained about the girls' team members' inappropriate dress. The board voiced their concerns about the cost of the shirts, that only one sports team had been singled out to receive them and debated whether the shirts were to be the property of the school or individual players' financial responsibility and whether the board actually approved the expenditure. Cost of the shirts was around \$34 each. Athletic director Ryan Rudolf said that the shirts

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HEPPNER

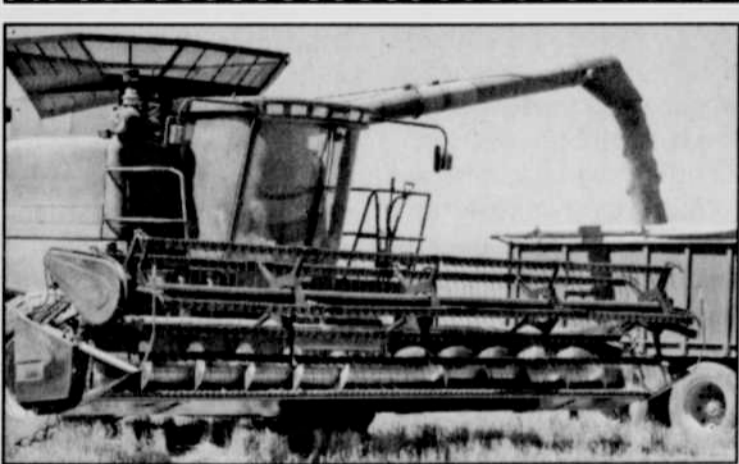
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Wheat harvest below average



"There will not be an outstanding harvest this year, it is below average," said John Ripple of Morrow County Grain Growers. "The rain in May saved us from disaster but was too late to substantially help this year's crop." Top left: Aaron Allstot of M.C.G.G. dumps the trucks at the North Lex elevator. Top right and Bottom left: Sean Murray of the Larry Lindsay Ranch runs the combine while Barney Lindsay keeps the trucks near by ready to deliver the grain to the grain growers. Bottom right: Aaron Allstott takes a sample of wheat and does the required testing for storage purposes. -Photos by Sandy Matthews

Court Street to see \$2.5 million improvement project

By David Sykes

A major improvement to Court Street and Fairview Way is set to begin next year, and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) held a public hearing in Heppner last week to discuss the project.

The project will be

a major repair, widening and straightening of Court Street starting at the bridge in front of the courthouse and out to Fairview Way, near to the Morrow County Fair Grounds.

The road is a state highway so the \$2.5 million project will be funded through the state. Some of

the improvements to the road will be added or replaced sidewalks and parking; straightening of the sharp corner and the addition or retaining walls; addition of school crossing with signs and a flashing beacon to encourage a safer area for pedestrians, and addition of road drainage system.

The Courthouse Bridge will also see the removal of existing asphalt and replacement with two inches of water proofing membrane as well as other maintenance work.

ODOT officials said there will be a need to acquire additional right of way along the affected streets,

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Meeting to be held for proposed treatment facility

A meeting is set for the community to hear about the secure treatment facility proposed for Heppner on Wednesday, July 30, at 6:30 p.m. at St. Patrick's Senior Center. Presenters will be Tim Mahoney, manager of the Umatilla Treatment Facility; Kimberly Lindsay, director of Community Counseling Solutions, formerly Morrow-Wheeler Behavioral Health; and Rod E. Estes, development specialist with Lifeways. A question and answer session will be held after the presentations.

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