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HEPPNER Gazette Times

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More water in lake may get study

By David Sykes

A plan to raise the level of the Willow Creek Lake by 12 feet may get a closer look by the Army Corps of Engineers, Congressman Greg Walden's office said last week.

The Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVED) has been pushing for a feasibility study that would allow more water to be stored at the lake and alleviate some of the negative recreational effects of a recent decision by the Corps to sell 2,500 acre feet of water to downstream irrigators on a long-term permanent yearly basis.

An aerial shot of the Willow Creek Lake.

The irrigators have been receiving extra water under yearly drought declarations, and had formed an irrigation district to ask for the extra water on a permanent basis. In April the Corps granted the request after taking public comment and holding a public meeting in Heppner.

Following the Corps' action WCVED president Nancy Snider appointed group member David Sykes to investigate the possibility of allowing additional water to be stored at the lake, thus satisfying both irrigators and recreationists' water needs. Sykes wrote a letter to the Corps asking that they conduct "a study determining the feasibility of increasing the conservation pool at Willow Creek Lake." To show broad community support the letter was signed by various community leaders, including Heppner Mayor Les Paustian, Snider, Willow Creek Park District chairman Skip Matthews, Willow Creek Irrigation District board member Brian Thompson, Morrow County Judge Terry Tallman and State Representative Greg Smith. The letter was submitted to the Corps of Engineers through the office of US Congressman Greg Walden.

Last week Colby Marshall of Walden's La Grande office said that the request could be included in the Water Resources Development Act, which governs projects by the US Army Corps of Engineers. However Marshall said not to expect action too soon as the congress will most likely not act on much until the new administration takes office in January. "There is no draft bill yet. We don't know if we are in or out, but we like our chances," Marshall said. The request is asking for $400,000 to complete the study, and Marshall said the Corps helped write the request and "get the wording right."

Marshall also pointed out that U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio, of the 4th Congressional District of Oregon, serves on the committee which will consider the request.

In addition Heppner Chamber of Commerce executive director Sheryll Bates, with funding from Morrow County for economic development, has been contracted by WCVED to work on the water raising request. She has sent letters to Senator Ron Wyden, Walden, Senator Gordon Smith and the Army Corps of Engineers offices urging support of the feasibility study and raising the lake level.

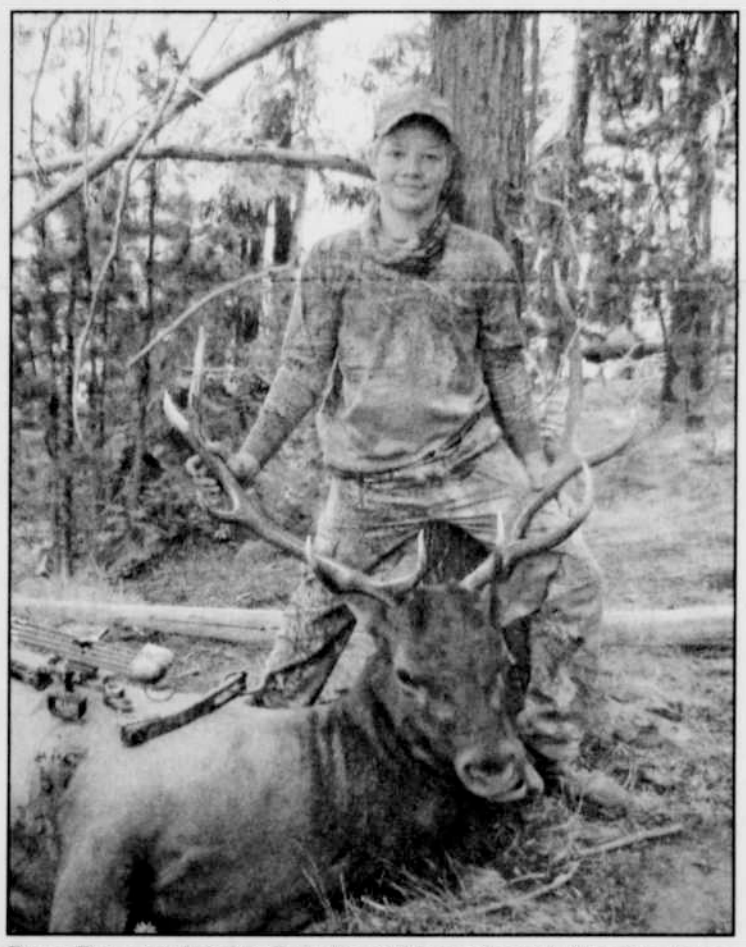
"On behalf of the Heppner Community, we would like to request that you give strong support ... to have a feasibility study on Heppner Dam to raise the water level. The raising of the water level increase considered should be from three-foot to 12-foot to accommodate irrigation for farmers and to allow more recreational opportunities at Willow Creek Lake..," the letter said.

Bates said this week that the Chamber has been in regular contact with representatives from Walden, Wyden and Smith's offices and Corps of Engineers. "They helped to put together the final request in the "required form" in order for it to be placed on the docket for discussion during the September session. Each of the representatives from Walden, Wyden and Smith's offices has been very supportive of what we are requesting. Colby Marshall has been a great liaison to understand the process and what action we as a community needed to take to make this happen," Bates said.

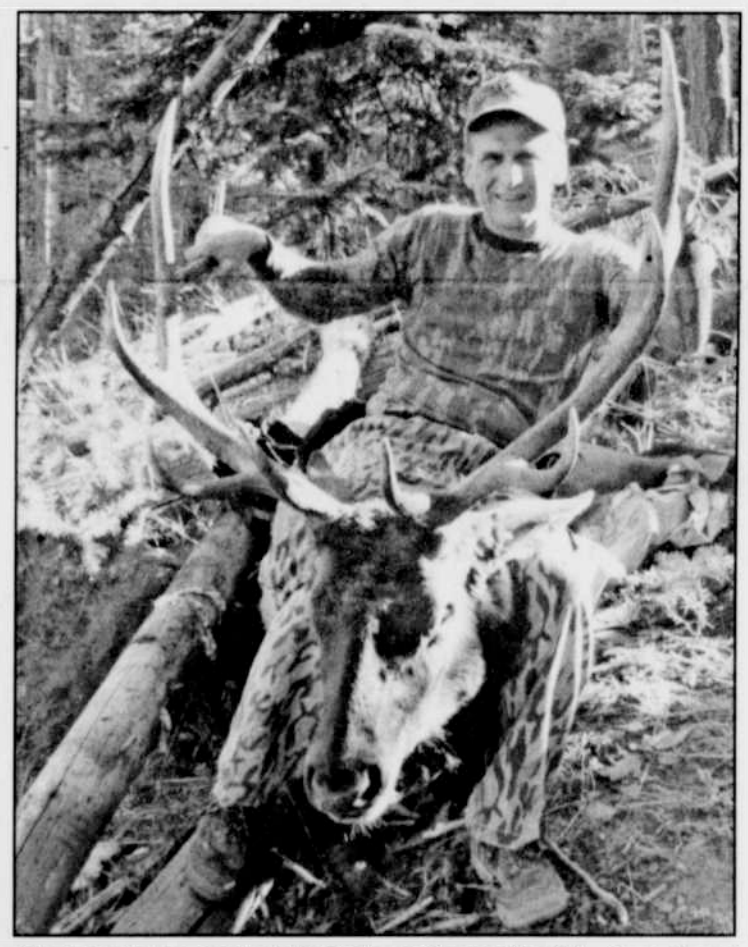
Contacted last week, Walden's office said the study and the decision "was not going to happen quickly" because of the new congress and the new president coming in.

Marshall said, "We like our chances," but also pointed out that nothing was going to move quickly. He did say that there was an "assumption" in the Corps that raising the pool will be "okay."

Bennett, Lemmon have successful bow hunts



Ryan Bennett shot his 5x5 elk on September 14. He also shot a deer, antelope, and turkey with his bow this year. Those pictures can be found on Page THREE. *–Contributed Photo*



Mark Lemmon shot his 5x5 elk on September 11. *-Contributed Photo*

The Heppner Gazette-Times wants to see pictures of your trophy animals from this hunting season. Stop by to have your picture taken, drop off photos, or email them to editor@rapidserve.net.

Ione School Board surprised by chairman's resignation

From the Umatilla-Morrow ESD:

The Ione School Board held interviews Monday night for potential board members to replace board member Joel Peterson, who resigned in August. Little did the board know that after it filled Mr. Peterson's position, it would soon have another vacancy to fill.

In open session, the board selected Lisa Rietmann as Mr. Peterson's replacement. Board member John Rietmann, Lisa's brother-in-law, declared a conflict of interest and did not vote.

"We were very lucky to have such a good group of board candidates to pick from," said board vice-chair Joe McElligott during the meeting. "We want to thank you for your interest and your commitment to the Ione Community School."

During the bond update, Board Chairman John Rietmann answered questions that he and others had heard in the community regarding the bond, which will appear on the Nov. 4 ballot. His comments are available on the Ione School District web site, www.ione.k12.or.us.

Halfway through New Business on the meeting's agenda, Chairman John Rietmann abruptly announced his resignation from the board, effective immediately. In passing the gavel, John Rietmann addressed the rest of the board and the audience.

"It is my experience that perception is reality, especially in a small town," he said. "Lisa and I are close relatives, and the fact that both of us are on the board might lead some in the community to think that 'the Rietmann's' are running the school. For our school to be successful we need have the confidence and trust of the community. No one board member is irreplaceable. As we have seen tonight, there are many fine candidates in our community for the board, and I think we should give them a chance."

With that, Mr. Rietmann left the meeting and the building. Vice-Chairman Joe McElligott then took over the meeting. Board member Anne Morter moved to accept Mr. Rietmann's resignation. However, the motion died for lack of a second motion. "I won't second that motion, no way," said Board member Bink Ramos. The board will take up the issue of John Rietmann's open position in its October meeting. In other business, the board approved the proposed extra-duty contract schedule and approved Jim Raible to run concessions.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:
MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

Elks Lodge to hold oyster feed

The Heppner Elks Lodge will hold Hunter's Oyster/Salmon/Ham Feed on Saturday, October 4, beginning at 5 p.m.

The cost is $16 per plate and will include oysters and salmon/ham with au gratin potatoes, coleslaw, dinner roll and dessert.

Everyone is welcome.

Marijuana plants discovered by BENT

Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team (BENT) discovered approximately 1,200 marijuana plants growing on an island in the Columbia River on August 12. The plants were found during a marijuana flight conducted by BENT.

BENT has no suspects at this time.

According to OSP, the previous week the Benton County multi-agency task force also found a stash of marijuana plants.

BENT is multi-agency narcotics team made up of the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Oregon National Guard, Pendleton Police Department, Hermiston Police Department, Umatilla County Sheriff's Office, and the Oregon State Police.

Chamber Adopt-A-Highway litter pick up to be held

The final 2008 Oregon Department of Transportation Adopt-A-Highway litter pick up will take place on Thursday, September 25, from 5-6 p.m.

This event is sponsored by the Heppner Chamber of Commerce.

Sheriff's Candidate Forum to be held at Chamber Lunch

This week's chamber lunch meeting will host the Sheriff Candidate Forum, with Bill Kuhn as moderator.

Please RSVP your attendance and respond with any questions you would like to have asked so that the Chamber can prepare the list of questions for the moderator.

Final RSVP's are needed by Wednesday afternoon, September 24.

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