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People on verge of losing control of water

By David Sykes

The government is trying to take more and more control over water usage and that will be detrimental to agriculture and in the long run the people of America, an Oregon water rights expert told a gathered crowd of around 75 people in Heppner Sunday.

Helen Moore of Water For Life, an agricultural advocacy organization, said there is very little respect in the Oregon State Legislature for what agriculture does or represents in our culture. She pointed out several examples of both the state and federal governments trying to gain more control of not only water but the land around the water.

Helen Moore of Water For Life talks to community members at a water rights program put on by the Willow Creek Valley Tea Party Patriots Sunday, March 21, at Heppner High School. *-Photo by David Sykes*

In one example Moore said legislation introduced in the last Oregon legislative session would have changed the definition of 'navigitable" water ways to mean "anything you could float a toothpick in". She said the bill would have also allowed people using a waterway to come on to private property bordering the river or creek. "You could have kayakers for instance coming on your land, opening gates camping and leaving their garbage on your land." And, she said, there was nothing in there (the bill) that limited how much time they could stay on your land. This is an uncompensated taking of private property.

Ports are also against this because people could come onto their lands, Moore said. "More government, more rules, more takings. We believe water rights are property rights." Although the navigable waters bill did not pass,she is confident it will be coming back to the legislature again.

"It is important we engage with our legislature and let our voices be heard," she said about water rights legislation. "Agriculture is using water to grow food and raise animals, and our legislature can be very disheartening to listen to and what our leaders are saying about working people. No other issue will matter if we lose the fight against water control," she added.

Moore also said the federal government is trying to gain more control over water from the states, and she cited the San Joaquin Valley of California where thousands of acres of farm land no longer receive irrigation water in order to protect the Delta Smelt fish. "And the fish is not even native to that area," Moore says.

She points to the proposed Clean Water Restoration Act that talks about navigitable water ways and would give the federal government control over all water. "Our governor (Ted Kulongoski) wrote a letter supporting this," Moore says. "We support local control. The federal government is not necessarily good at managing anything," she says.

She says similar situations could eventually cause the United States to begin importing food. "I would prefer my food come from the United States. We don't have a problem protecting fish," she said. But she pointed out that in one area of Oregon diverting water for fish has caused more dust and weeds to develop in a former wetlands area.

-See WATER RIGHTS/Page EIGHT

Gray set to retire after 32 years of service with Morrow County Court

Justice of the Peace Charlotte Gray is set to retire after 32 years with the Morrow County Court. Her current six-year term will end on December 31, 2010.

While her work in the court system began 32 years ago in Morrow County, Gray got her first taste of court work in The Dalles. Gray moved to The Dalles in 1971 from Kansas and was hired by Municipal Court Judge Ron Summers to be a clerk. In addition to being the clerk, she was also the deputy municipal judge. "The Lord provided on that job," said Gray.

In 1976 Gray moved to Heppner, and in 1978, after Dee Gribble retired as justice of the peace, Gray applied for the job. On December 15, 1978, Gray was appointed by the governor of Oregon as justice of the peace. In 1980 the Morrow County courts were combined and the Morrow County District Court was established in Heppner. Currently Gray spends two nine-hour days in Heppner on Mondays and Tuesdays and two 11-hour days in Irrigon on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Charlotte Gray

While Judge Gray does not have a law degree, she has made sure to keep up with changes to the law by attending judicial conferences. A few years ago she also attended a two-week non-attorney judge course in Reno, NV. She has also taken a four-week class with the Legal Institute's National Judicial College, followed by eight months of video and testing. This course was equivalent to one year of law school.

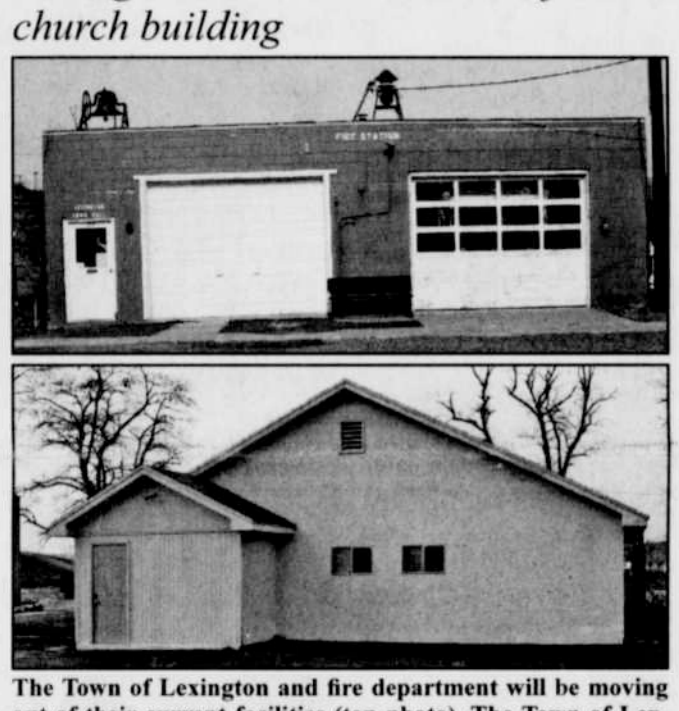
Gray states that one of the hardest things about her job is the jail space. "It has improved but there have been times that I have had to let people out early, and that's hard." However, she does enjoy when she can help people who are ready to get their licenses returned.

One thing Judge Gray will not be missing with the upcoming election cycle is running for re-election. "It's hard to have to stand in front of a room full of people and sell yourself to them," said Gray.

Gray and her husband, who will be retiring September 1, are already making plans for their retirement. In March 2011 the couple is planning are RV trip to the coast where they will stay for a month, as well as a spring 2011 trip to Richland, OR. Retirement will also provide more time to spend with sons Kevin and his wife Leslie of Lafayette, Terry and his wife Amy of Nevada, and granddaughters Autumn, Leslie, and Katelyn.

Town of Lexington purchases Kingdom Hall

Town government to move into former church building



The Town of Lexington and fire department will be moving out of their current facilities (top photo). The Town of Lexington will be moving into the former Kingdom Hall building (bottom photo). New fire department facilities are yet to be determined. *-Photo by David Sykes*

By David Sykes

The Town of Lexington has purchased the former Kingdom Hall building at 325 S. F Street in Lexington and plans to move town hall to the new location. The present town hall, along with the attached fire department, will be torn down.

The town received a $103,000 FEMA grant to buy the building, which cost $40,000, and will use some of the rest of the grant money for repairs and upgrades to the building. "It is with excitement that the Town of Lexington moves forward into a brighter future," Lexington Mayor Dwyla Yocum said after the purchase on March 19. She said the town is now moving forward to find additional funding with which to build a new fire hall. Under terms of the FEMA grant the present building housing town hall and the fire department must be torn down because it is located in the flood way.

On March 3 Lexington resident Marsha Kemp called an unofficial town meeting which 25 people attended. At that meeting, Kemp and several other residents discussed asking the city to not purchase the Kingdom Hall and instead look for other funding to combine with the FEMA grant and build either a combination fire hall and town hall or two separate structures.

Kemp said at that time her group had estimated a new fire hall to cost approximately $300,000 for construction, not counting the cost of the land.

Zoo Day at Heppner Preschool

Students at Heppner Daycare and Preschool recently learned about the letter "Z" with Zoo Day on Wednesday, March 17. Pictured are: front row (L-R) Camryn Scrivner, David Cribbs, and Sallie Orem; second row (L-R) Reece Gorham, Isiah Martin, Hattie Orem, Teagan Ramsey, and Chace Jones; third row (L-R) Irelynn Kollman, Narin Stone, Ty Boor, Olivia Foster, and Shaylynn Deloach; and back row (L-R) Trevor Nichols, Cole Greenup, Eli Petzoldt, and Jake Lentz. *–Photo by Megan Futter*

Area pastors invited to submit Easter messages

Easter will be celebrated April 4 this year. Area pastors are invited to submit their Easter messages to be published in the March 31 edition of the Heppner Gazette-Times.

The deadline to submit articles is Friday, March 26. Messages can be emailed to editor@rapidserve.net, faxed to 541-676-9211, or dropped off at the office.

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