

HEPPNER

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Fire causes property damage on Butter Creek

By Andrea Di Salvo
A recent fire on Little Butter Creek Road covered thousands of acres and may have cost multiple thousands in damage.

According to Heppner's Assistant Fire Chief, Steve Rhea, the fire started on March 9 around noon. It apparently started on the Currin property on Butter Creek, where the Currins were burning irrigation ditches. When the wind picked up, the fire quickly spread to the neighboring Peterson property.

"It can certainly happen fast, especially with the way it's been this year, so dry," says Rhea, adding that this was their sixth natural grass fire since January.

When the call came in, the Heppner Fire Department and Morrow County Sheriff's Office responded. Rhea said they also called for mutual aid from fire departments in Lexington, Ione, Boardman, Irrigon, Umatilla and Station 7, the new station near the Butter

Creek junction. Rhea said a lot of fencing was lost, which is to be expected in a fast-moving range fire. There was also damage to the residence on the Peterson property, and one outbuilding was lost, which Rhea thought was probably a pump house.

"We got units in to protect structures up the creek in the direction the fire was traveling," said Rhea, who added that the fire was moving south.

The residence had siding on fire, as well as fire in the attic, but responders were able to get in and put that fire out before the house burned down.

Rhea said he couldn't accurately judge the money damage done by the fire, but roughly estimated it in the range of \$45 to \$50 thousand on the house plus loss of the outbuilding, which would probably add several thousand more.

"It's hard to know because sometimes there's

heat damage, which is more extensive than it looks," he said.

He also said he had heard conflicting reports about how many acres the fire covered. First estimates put it close to 5,000 acres but later reports lowered it to 2,500 acres. Rhea said his guess was that it covered an area of two miles by about one mile wide. He added that they had problems controlling the spread of the fire because burning rabbits ran across the road and set the other side of the road on fire. He gave credit to the landowners for helping them control the fire as well as they did.

"Luckily, we had a really good response from landowners. That's critical for us," said Rhea. "Even with a lot of resources, we still need their help. They know the area and the access points, and they're there with their sprayers. We had several owners bring dozers to help with the job. We appreciate them a lot."

City approves new contract with sheriff's department

By David Sykes
The city of Heppner last week approved a new contract with the Morrow County Sheriff's Office to provide city-wide police protection. The contract is up \$3,318 over last year, to \$184,590. Sheriff Matlack and Undersheriff Myron were both at the council meeting to answer questions about the contract,

and they pointed out that the city is getting a pretty good deal for the protection they receive, and the budget has only gone up seven percent over the last six years. The city did drop the number of deputies assigned to the city from three to two between 2008 and 2009.

Councilmember Cody High raised the question of why Irrigon's con-

tract amount was less than Heppner's. Irrigon also contracts with the county for police protection. Boardman is the only community in the county that still has its own police department.

Myron said the main reason Irrigon's contract is less is that Irrigon

Heppner man arrested following accident

Oregon State Police (OSP) arrested Heppner man Jerry Lee Manley last Thursday night following an investigation into a single-vehicle traffic crash on Highway 207 near the Umatilla/Morrow County line. The accident was determined to be alcohol-related.

Around 6:50 p.m. on March 15, 38-year-old Manley was driving his 1994 Dodge Ram 1500 pickup while driving northbound on Highway 207 near Big Butter Creek Road near

milepost 20. The pickup was traveling at a high rate of speed when Manley lost control and crashed. Manley and passenger Mauna Kay Patterson, 51, from Pendleton, were transported by ambulance to Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston with non-life threatening injuries.

Upon his release from the hospital, OSP arrested Manley on charges of DUII - alcohol, assault

in the third degree, recklessly endangering another person and reckless driving. Manley was also cited for driving while suspended. He was lodged in the Umatilla County jail.

Lead investigator is Trooper Mark Amos. OSP was assisted at the scene by local emergency responders and ODOT. The highway was temporarily closed during the scene investigation.



Jerry Lee Manley

Wee Bit O' Ireland a whole lot of fun... and that's no blarney



Cloudy skies, wind and even a hailstorm didn't keep people from turning out in force for Heppner's 30th annual Wee Bit O' Ireland Celebration last weekend. -Photo by April Sykes

-See PAGE THREE for more pictures.

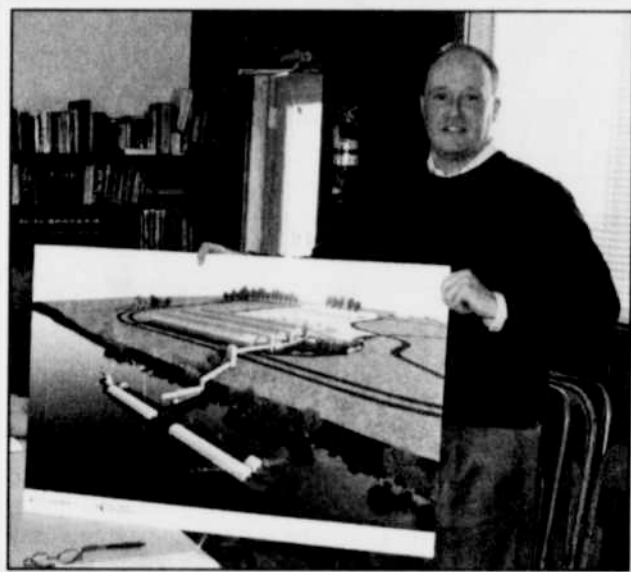
Heppner council endorses Boardman coal reload facility

Port project could generate significant county tax and school funding

By David Sykes

The city of Heppner last week endorsed a plan to ship millions of tons of coal brought in from Wyoming through the Port of Morrow and on to Korea, Japan and Taiwan. The city council was asked to write a letter of support for the project by Greg Smith, of Gregory Smith and Company, LLC, which is working in conjunction with the Port of Morrow to implement the project.

Under the plan, Ambre Energy, an Australian-based company with large coal holdings in the United States, would ship 3.5 million tons of low-sulfur coal each year from the Powder Basin area of Wyoming. The coal would travel first by rail to the Port of Morrow at Boardman, then by barge to the Port of St. Helens, where it would be transferred to large ocean-going barges to be shipped to its final



Greg Smith shows a drawing of the proposed coal reload facility for the Port of Morrow. The project would create jobs and fund schools. -Photo by David Sykes

destination in the Far East. Smith pointed out that shipping the coal through Morrow County could generate significant county property tax and additional funding for schools.

"I am asking your support to show that we have control of our own economy, not outsiders,"

Smith told the city council.

He said outside groups are expected to oppose the project "just because it is coal." Smith said environmental groups such as River Keepers oppose all use of coal, and would

-See COAL TERMINAL/ PAGE FIVE

Local athletic director honored by association

By Andrea Di Salvo

Heppner High School Athletic Director Greg Grant has been selected by the Oregon Athletic Directors Association (OADA) as 2A Classification Athletic Director of the Year, the organization announced Monday.

Grant, 51, is in his tenth year as Heppner's athletic director. Born and raised in Elgin, OR, he attended Southern Oregon University in Ashland before getting his bachelor's degree at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. He then went on to get a master's degree in curriculum and instruction at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

Grant moved



Greg Grant urges on players under the Friday night lights during his time as HHS athletic director. -Photo by Sandy Matthews

to Alsea, OR out of college, where he taught and coached at a small school for five years. After that, he said, he wanted to get back to eastern Oregon.

That was when he took the job as a teacher and coach

in Heppner, in 1990. He became athletic director of HHS in 2001.

"I've seen no reason to go anywhere else," he says.

-See ATHLETIC DIRECTOR/ PAGE TWO

Area pastors invited to submit Easter messages

Easter is April 8. The Heppner Gazette-Times invites area pastors to submit Easter messages to be published in the April 4 edition. The deadline is Friday, March 30, at 5 p.m.

Messages can be dropped off at the Gazette office, emailed to editor@rapid-serve.net, or faxed to 541-676-9211.

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