

Undersheriff gets word out on eclipse crowd effects on Morrow County

Traffic, fire hazard, shortages and trespassing some of the problems to expect

By David Sykes

Ask Undersheriff John Bowles if he is becoming an expert on the upcoming total eclipse set to hit Oregon on Aug. 21, and he will only say that he has learned “a lot” about the rare phenomenon when the moon passes between the earth and the sun, totally or partially blocking the view of the sun and causing total darkness in the middle of the day. But then he adds, with a smile, “It is pretty interesting.”

Bowles has become the go-to guy on all things eclipse in the county, developing a PowerPoint presentation and taking it around to various groups in the county. He is making an effort to prepare local people for what is coming their way on Aug. 21, and some of it may not be positive.

Bowles says local residents can expect up to 14,000 cars per day to travel through Heppner prior to the event, pointing out that on an average hunting season day there are about 2,500 coming through. He says most of the people,



Morrow County Undersheriff John Bowles last week gave a presentation about the upcoming eclipse to the Heppner Chamber of Commerce. Bowles has been traveling around the county giving programs on what residents can expect if thousands of people show up to view the Aug. 21 event, which will look similar to the inset photo. -Photo by David Sykes

some coming from around the United States and even the world, will be heading for spots south of Heppner where the eclipse will be 100 percent. People in Heppner who stay put and watch will see a 98 percent blockage, he says.

The path of totality will be approximately 70-90 miles wide and last approximately 2-3 minutes, and the county’s Off Highway Vehicle park (OHV) in the mountains on highway 207 will be in that total path. The sheriff’s depart-

Let’s hear it for the red, white and blue



The Ione American Legion color guard pauses for the National Anthem, sung by MaLinda Morter, during the Fourth of July parade on Ione’s Main Street last week. For more photos from the Independence Day festivities, see PAGE EIGHT -Photo by David Sykes

Heppner gets \$3 million in state funding for road improvements

Rep. Smith helped ‘develop and pass’ the transportation bill

By David Sykes

The Heppner City Council was delighted to hear Monday that a session-ending transportation bill passed by the Oregon legislature included \$3 million for “pedestrian safety and road improvements” for the city of Heppner. Although there had been talk the money was coming, it was not confirmed until the legislature passed the final transportation bill at the recent end of its session.

“This session I helped develop and pass a \$5.3 billion Oregon Transportation Package. Within the package I included more than \$32 million of direct investments for District 57,” Representative Greg Smith said in a letter to constituents and to the Heppner city council. (See related story.)

Heppner Mayor Cody High was pleased with the announcement and said the city is “waiting for the rules” to see how the money

can be spent. “This is good news but we are waiting for the rules. Sounds like streets and sidewalks to me, but we are waiting,” he told the council.

In other business at Monday’s meeting the council finalized an agreement with former city manager Kim Cutsforth resolving a dispute about vacation pay she claims was owed during her four years of employment with the city. Cutsforth had earlier filed a claim with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) saying the city owed her \$1,882 in unpaid vacation benefits for the period of Sept. 1, 2013 to Feb. 28, 2017. She resigned the city manager job to become executive director of the Howard & Beth Bryant Foundation in Heppner. The city had disputed the vacation pay claim, but eventually the council decided to pay and

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Smith brings transportation funds to county

Heppner, Port of Morrow, Irrigon, and county receive funding

By David Sykes

Representative Greg Smith was successful in securing state funding for several county entities in the final transportation funding package approved by the just-concluded state legislature session in Salem.

As an example, both the cities of Heppner and Irrigon received \$3 million each in funds for “pedestrian safety and road improvements.” The Port of Morrow Received \$6,550,000 in funding for the East Beach Industrial Park Rail Expansion Project, and Morrow County got an additional \$550,000 in road funding this session.

“I was able to achieve successes that will bring positive contributions to our district,” Smith said in a letter to constituents. “This session I helped develop and pass a \$5.3 billion Oregon Transportation Package,” he added. “Within the package I included more than \$32 million of direct investments for District 57.”

In announcing the funding to the Heppner City Council Monday night mayor Cody High said, “This is good news.”

Morrow County Commissioner Chair Melissa Lindsay called the funding a “win” for Morrow County in a statement to the Gazette-Times Tuesday.

“The hard work of Representative Greg Smith in supporting our district will bring increased regional growth and economic development to Morrow County by improving the infrastructure of our road systems,” Lindsay said. “I appreciate the counties road department managers’ hard work to balance rural counties with bigger metropolitan areas and improve the disbursement of moneys. The stability of funding to roads and the local project ear marks included in this bill are a real win for Morrow County,” she added.

Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell released a statement saying, “For Morrow County it gives us additional reliable revenue dedicated to roads. The funding formula on the first \$5 million in new revenue is a win for counties small in population with large geography. This means an additional \$550,000 to Morrow County,” Russell said.

Commissioner Jim Doherty released the following statement about the state transportation bill: “I am not one for more taxation, and we certainly cannot pave our way out of the congestion in the Metro area. The challenge is that much of rural Oregon is facing a backlog of underfunded, much needed infrastructure maintenance. Perhaps less so in Morrow County where we have, in recent years, been blessed with additional Strategic Investment dollars. In truth this is a bit unfair to the constituency of Morrow County. They are sinking an inordinate amount (of) their tax dollars into a network of roads that are not just for the benefit of local transportation—as they are used exceedingly by Oregonians as a whole.

“With the collective effort of all the counties we were able to craft a formula that is based less on population and more on road miles. This will make it much more equitable for the rural counties. We must be vigilant moving forward and insist that these added dollars the Legislature is seeking make their way

into real tangible projects,” Doherty told the Heppner Gazette-Times.

Other District 57 funding projects in the transportation bill include: Arlington Pedestrian Safety Improvements, \$1,500,000; Dufur Pedestrian Safety Improvement Project, \$400,000; Eastern Oregon Trade & Event Center (EOTEC) Access Road Project, \$1,097,000; Hermiston North First Place Project, \$4,500,000; Milton-Freewater Pedestrian Safety and Road Improvements, \$3,000,000; Port of Umatilla Road Construction, \$2,000,000; and the Umatilla Army Depot Access

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Rental rehabilitation grants now available

WCVEDG starts \$100,000 program to boost South County rental units

By David Sykes

Those wanting to fix up a home for a rental unit can now get some help to pay for the repairs, the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG) has announced.

Under a new program, those wanting to rehabilitate a home and turn it into a rental unit can receive up to 20 percent of a project’s cost, up to \$20,000, to pay for repairs such as roofing, plumbing, electrical systems, flooring, heating and cooling, and more. The grant funds are being distributed by WCVEDG from the Columbia River Enterprise Zone, in an effort by both groups to

help alleviate a shortage of rental units in South Morrow County. The funds are available only for rentals in the WCVEDG service area, which includes Heppner, Lexington, Ione and the surrounding unincorporated areas.

Recognizing there has been a shortage for some time, WCVEDG has been working to help increase the number of rentals available in the area. At its June meeting the group voted to allocate \$100,000 from its housing budget towards the rehab program. WCVEDG board member Kim Cutsforth is the person to

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