

New invasive weed found in county



Plumeless thistle

Plumeless thistle, a state listed noxious weed, was recently found in South Morrow County by an observant landowner who was spraying other thistles at the time and saw something that stood out as just a little different. Its previously known range in the state included Grant County, with a few small spots in Willowa and Klamath Counties.

Plumeless thistle has a branching growth form with spiny wings on the stems that extend to the flowers. The weed grows to more than four feet tall.

Rosettes form on a stout fleshy taproot. Leaves grow 4-8 inches long and have wavy margins with yellow spines along the edges. Flowers are rose to purple atop globe-shaped heads measuring 1-2 inches in diameter. Bracts of the flowerhead are tipped with yellow spines. The plant blooms May to July, with seeds developing by late summer.

Plumeless thistle may look like Scotch or musk thistle from a distance, but up close it is distinctively different. Once established,

plumeless thistle degrades the quality of range and pasture land and, if allowed to expand, will crowd out desirable forage and exclude livestock from grazing.

If you suspect you have found a thistle that looks a little different than the ones you're used to seeing, or any other suspect weed, please contact the county weed control office to report it to confirm identification. Early detection and rapid response is critical to controlling and eradicating new invaders before they become established.

WIND FARM

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"We have a new workforce training center," commissioner Jim Doherty told Hochmuth. "We would like to see you train local people for local jobs and hope you talk to them and see if there

is a program to get some local people to access these high paying jobs." Doherty was referring to the new Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) workforce training center that recently opened in Board-

man, and is cooperating with businesses at the Port of Morrow to train local workers for the many jobs at the Port.

Hochmuth said in North Dakota, where NextEra operates wind farms and is building more, the community college has training programs to train local workers. "Eighty percent of our workers come from the training program. We want to use local vendors and resources," she said.

Commission chair Melissa Lindsay wanted to make sure it was understood what she means by "local." "Local to us is not The Dalles, but Morrow County," she told Hochmuth. "This project was sold as a local project," she said about Wheatridge, the original developers based in Ione. "A lot of the county backed off opposing this project because they were told it was a local project," she said, in urging NextEra to hire locally.

Commissioner Don Russell agreed, saying local people will also be better for the company. "Local people make better employees because they aren't going to be moving away," he said. "They live here so they are going to stay here."

Hochmuth said there will initially be "hundreds" of construction jobs, but it is understood those are specialized workers most likely coming from outside the area who then leave once the project is completed.

The commissioners also discussed the upcoming Strategic Investment Program (SIP) negotiations. NextEra will be starting with the county. The SIP is available to new companies locating in the county, and lowers the company's property taxes as an incentive to locate here. Currently the other wind farms and the recently completed Portland General Electric Carty Gas-Fired plant at Boardman

have SIP agreements with the county, and NextEra will begin negotiating its own SIP soon. Hochmuth says her company wants to have an agreement in place by the end of August. The construction timetable for the new windfarm is to start at the end of 2018 and have the wind farm completed and producing energy by the end of 2019 or first of 2020, she said.

With that in mind the commission voted to appoint county assessor Mike Gorman, county administrator Jerry Sorte, commissioner Jim Doherty and the county's attorney to the negotiating team. Commissioner Don Russell will serve as an alternate member. NextEra will need to have a separate SIP agreement covering that portion of the project located in Umatilla County.

On other issues, the commission and Hochmuth discussed transmission of the electricity once it is generated by the wind turbines. There is now an ongoing dispute concerning "wheeling," or sending the generated power out to the grid once the wind farm is in operation.

Columbia Basin Electric Cooperative and Umatilla Electric Cooperative are presently in a dispute about who might end up building and owning a transmission line to get the power out. Columbia Basin filed a complaint in January with the Oregon Public Utility Commission accusing Umatilla Electric of encroaching on its exclusive service territory. Hochmuth said NextEra will only be owning transmission lines between the two groups of wind turbines in Morrow and Umatilla counties, and will not be involved in wheeling.

"The outward transmission line will not be part of this project," she said, and it is up to the two co-ops to figure that part out.

COMMUNITY COUNSELING

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opmental disability, and alcohol and drug abuse treatment services for Morrow County residents over the next two years.

CCS has been providing these services for some time and has received high praise not only from the commissioners, but from mental health organizations state-wide. The contract was an extension of one already in place with several minor changes.

Earlier the commission had wrestled with how to provide adequate oversight of CCS as required by the State of Oregon. State funding for CCS flows through the county, and along with the money comes a mandate for the county to provide "oversight" of the organization.

At an earlier meeting, the county decided a financial audit was the best way to provide that oversight, and therefore requested that CCS be required to turn over all of its financial audit information as part of their contract with the county. However, CCS auditors balked at this, saying they provide services in five different counties, and therefore did not want to give all of their information to Morrow County. They instead only wanted to give the county what are called "disclosure statements."

At the July 5 meeting Morrow County Finance Director Kate Knop said county auditors would not accept disclosure statements, but she said there would be a way around the issue. Knop said full audits and tax returns for CCS can be obtained from the Federal Audit Clearing House website, so the county can get the information there. The Clearing House receives this information for any organization receiving over \$750,000 in federal funds. With this issue cleared up, the commissioners moved forward and voted unanimously to approve the new two-year agreement with CCS.

CCS is currently in the process of constructing

new head offices on Sperry Street in Heppner. The organization offers a wide variety of behavioral health services to four counties, including individual, family, and group therapy, gambling counseling, alcohol and drug treatment, 24/7 crisis intervention services, psychiatric consultation, and medication management, in addition to cooperation with various other organizations including residential and acute psychiatric services and school programs. CCS also offers case management for developmental disabilities in five counties.

In other business at the July 5 meeting the commission voted to look into the parks department to purchase two metal buildings for storing equipment and machinery. The county missed an earlier opportunity to buy some used buildings for \$12,000 when they were sold to someone else. Commissioner Jim Doherty asked the board to look into purchasing different buildings for the parks department.

The commission also heard a report on the effort to reorganize the structure of the Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo (OTPR). Apparently, the group plans to recommend that the county board of commissioners create a board-appointed rodeo board to oversee year-round use of the rodeo facilities. The OTPR plans to create nonprofit agencies to manage the annual rodeo. It was said there would be the public meetings later to further discuss the proposed change.

It was reported that Mary Corp, the Oregon State University Regional Administrator has put out a proposal to create taxing districts in Morrow and Umatilla counties to fund extension services and programs. The new tax rate proposed has been .033 per thousand. No decision has been made but she plans on meeting with the board in the future to further discuss the plan.

Parks subcommittee to meet

The Morrow County Parks Plan subcommittee will hold a regular meeting at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, July 24, at the Morrow County Bartholomew Building, 110 Court Street, Heppner.

The meeting will be

to discuss and work on the Morrow County Parks Master Plan sections regarding recreation, projections, tourism and the review of the Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Park.

The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. A request for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodations for persons with disabilities should be made at least 48 hours before the meeting to the Morrow County Parks Department at 541-989-9500.

For more information please contact the Morrow County Parks Department Office at 541-989-9500 or by email at mcparks@co.morrow.or.us.

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