

Morrow County still taking recyclables

China not buying has hurt the market

By David Sykes

Even though China no longer buys our waste, Morrow County is still collecting cardboard, glass and metal. Public Works Management Assistant Sandi Pointer told the county commissioners last week. And even though the county is raising its garbage dumping fees (see new fee schedule published below in this week's paper) it still takes a wide range of electronics and household items for free at its two transfer stations.

Pointer said the pipeline to China for waste cardboard and plastic has shut down and subsequently put a severe crimp in the US waste market, however, the county continues to have its recycle bins out and collecting. The county operates a

collection bin on Riverside in Heppner, one at the south end transfer station between Heppner and Lexington and one on Frontage Lane in Boardman. These recycle bins are free to the public.

The transfer stations also still take all electronics equipment like computers and televisions as well as large household items like furniture, beds and mattresses and appliances and bathroom fixtures. Pointer said the free disposal is an effort to keep these items from being dumped along the roadside. "We want to keep our county looking good," she said.

At last week's meeting the commission voted to approve a rate increase in south county for Miller and Sons Disposal. The increase was approximately

15 percent and increases rural residential from \$20 a bin to \$25, Heppner and Lexington in town garbage bins from \$20 to \$22.50, rural dumpsters from \$70 to \$80, and local business dumpsters from \$70 to \$80 per month. Miller will also increase the cost of hauling the big county transfer station containers to the Finley Buttes Landfill from \$160 to \$170 per container. Hauling a large container to Hermiston will go from \$240 to \$260.

"Fifteen percent sounds like a big increase," said County Commissioner Don Russell, "but it's been nine years since they had an increase." Miller and Sons owner Ryan Miller said in a letter to the commission that over the past nine years they have increased their customers from 444 to 647 which has increased the mileage on the trucks, affecting both the road tax and fuel usage. Miller said his company needed the rate increased to meet costs which he expected to increase an average of 15 percent over the next three years and in future years. Miller also said he plans on replacing two of his trucks and adding "upwards of six roll-off containers to accommodate the community growth and projects coming into Morrow County."

While at the meeting Commissioner Jim Doherty discussed the current state of recycling in the county. Pointer said it now costs \$60 a ton to bale and ship cardboard that can only be sold for \$50. Since China quit buying, much of it is being stockpiled at Hermiston Sanitary storage yard waiting for the market to improve. "Hopefully it will get better," she said.

Pointer also told the commissioners she is looking for a solution to the plastic waste in the county. She said the plastic used to go to the Finley Buttes Landfill where it was sorted and then sold to China, but since that market is gone it is just going into the ground. "We have all these milk jugs, plastic containers and other things that I hope to find a way to recycle," she told the Gazette-Times. She thought maybe a shredder or chipper might work to find a use for the plastic. "I hate to see it just going into the landfill," she said. "If anybody has an idea please contact me," she added.

She said the county found it necessary to increase its dumping fees because it hasn't had a rate increase in seven years and costs have gone up. The county is now going to a cubic yard fee at the transfer stations (see fee schedule below).

In other business at its Jan 22 meeting the commission heard a report from Morrow County Clerk Bobbi Childers. Childers reported on who has filed so far for public office: Commissioner Position 1 - Joseph Armato and Jim Doherty, Clerk Bobbi Childers, Justice of the Peace Theresa Crawford and Glen Diehl, Sheriff Kenneth Matlack and Mark Pratt and Treasurer Gayle Gutierrez.

Childers also reported on the current number of registered voters in the county. Boardman has the most with 1,943, Irrigon is second with 1,753, then comes Heppner at 1,335, Ione with 443 and Lexington having 431 voters for a total of 6,561 registered voters in the county.

In other business

Childers and the commissioners discussed the recent move to consider cutting the treasurer's salary possibly in half. The treasurer is an elected position which has been held by Gayle Gutierrez for the past 23 years since 1997.

"I have been here for 20 years and this is the first time I have ever seen this done," Childers told commissioners Doherty and Don Russell (Commissioner Melissa Lindsay was not in attendance at the meeting). "This is so off track to what the county has done in the past." She said the county held a special budget committee meeting to consider the salary reduction and that when reviewing the minutes she saw no reason given why they were doing it.

Childers pointed out that one candidate withdrew from the race after learning the county may cut the salary. "People apply for a job and then find out you changed it?" she said. Russell said one reason the county budget committee and the commissioners were looking at the treasurer's salary was because years ago tax collection duties were moved out of the treasurer's office and given to the assessor's office, thus reducing the workload for the treasurer. He said no salary adjustment was made at that time. "Twenty-five years ago when they took tax collection away, the treasurer's position remained full-time. The appropriate time to look at doing this (salary reduction) is during an election cycle and not after an election," Russell added. He said now was the time to look and see if the position warranted full time pay.



Recycle bins can be found on Riverside in Heppner. -Photo by David Sykes.

Saying uncertainty over the salary made her "nervous", treasurer candidate Amanda Rea recently dropped out of the election race leaving only Guitierrez on the ballot. "May not be a full-time job which makes me nervous to give up my normal full-time job," she wrote in her withdrawal statement. "It has been over a month since the conversation began and I needed to choose for the sake of my normal job," she said.

At its meeting considering the treasurer salary the budget committee looked at three different options for the treasurer starting next year. Leave everything the same for a \$127,152 per year salary and benefit package, 25

percent cut to \$101,609, a 50 percent reduction to \$76,066 and a 75 percent reduction to \$50,524 yearly pay and benefit package.

"To be fair, compensation comes up for review for everybody every year," commissioner Jim Doherty said. He said the compensation committee, budget committee and the commission all review salaries then. "Everybody running, the salaries are up for review for everybody," he said.

The committee meets again on Wednesday, January 29 to consider the salary issue. However, the meeting is after the Gazette-Times deadline and will be reported next week.

4-H Club meets

Grow 'Em and Show 'Em 4-H club held their first meeting of the year on January 26 at the USDA Service Center in Heppner. Officers were elected with Hunter Houck elected president, Aden Lathrop, vice-president, Natalie Piper, secretary/treasurer, Avree Lathrop, sentinel and

Reese Houck, reporter. The club members created a schedule of events for the next 4-H year and discussed fundraisers. The club also spoke about possible field trips and community service ideas.

The next meeting will be held February 23 at 4:30 p.m. at the same location.

Buttons for sale

Buttons for this year's St. Patrick's celebration will be available for sale beginning February 7. The buttons will sell for \$3 each and gets the purchaser two entries for a drawing to win \$100.

The design for this year's button was created

by Julie Baker and features the road bowling event. Buttons may be purchased at the Heppner Chamber, Heppner City Hall and Murray's. Also at the city hall and chamber offices, St. Patrick's koozies will be available for \$3.

NEW TRANSFER STATION DUMPING FEES



Dear Resident,

A minimum of \$8.85 will be charged for any amount of waste deposited at the transfer stations up to a full cubic yard (six 32 gallon bags/containers). If you do not have a full cubic yard of waste (six 32 gallon bags/containers), you may want to wait until the full cubic yard is met and then deposit your waste. The attendant is not required and will not keep track of loads.

Effective January 2020, Morrow County Public Works Transfer Stations has been working from the same fee schedule for the past seven years. Due to the continual increase in cost for the County to dispose of the waste and an effort to minimize illegal dumping to occur, it is with careful consideration working with our neighboring waste collectors that the fee schedule for Morrow County residents utilizing the Morrow County Public Works Transfer Stations will be restructured to a *per cubic yard* charge. Effective January 2020, we feel this is the best feasible way to charge utilizing basic hauler terms and will add some consistency between the stations since all loads include multiple products with various weights and densities.

Currently with the two transfer stations, it costs the County an average of \$8.85 per cubic yard to dispose of waste.

There will be a **minimum** fee of \$8.85 (or one cubic yard) and then charged per cubic yard for anything greater than one. The fee is restructured as the following:

$Length \times Width \times Height/depth = \text{---} \text{ divide by } 27 \times \text{minimum charge } \8.85

Examples:

- 4'x4'x1' (LWH): 0.59 cubic yards \$8.85 up to the 1 cubic yard, close to equivalent to SIX 32-gallon garbage bags is .96 cubic yards.
- 6'x6'x1' (LWH): 1.33 cubic yards \$11.50
- 8'x16'x4' (LWH): 18.96 cubic yards \$167.50

Morrow County has two transfer stations:

- SOUTH-END STATION, HWY 74 HEPPNER/LEXINGTON HWY, LEXINGTON
- NORTH-END STATION, 69900 FRONTAGE LANE, BOARDMAN, OR

Both transfer stations are open every Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. With the changing of the fee structure, we will now be able to accept cash, check and Visa or Mastercard for your convenience. The new point of sale will provide consistency, accuracy and help with inventory of waste for our recycling and waste calculation reporting efforts.

Our transfer stations offer **FREE** of charge disposal for recycling of newspaper, cardboard, small steel cans, small glass and aluminum, latex and/or oil based paint (no more than 5-gallon containers), electronics including computer towers, computer screens, key boards, printers, handheld radios, fax machines, tablets, telephones, cell phones, stereo and copiers.

In addition, the disposal of large household items is **FREE** of charge. Examples of these are sofa/couch, love seat, chair/large chair, mattresses, box springs, toilets, sinks kitchen/bath, bathtubs, refrigerator, freezer, water heaters, stove/range, washers and dryers.

We appreciate your continued efforts in helping to keep our county garbage free! You can also be an active member in the solid waste solutions of our county by becoming a member of our Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC). SWAC meets four times a year and meetings are open to the public. By becoming a member or attending the meetings, it allows you to participate in different issues such as rates, services offered and/or how the transfer systems operate.

If you have any questions and/or concerns please let us know by emailing spointer@co.morrow.or.us or calling 541-989-8166.

