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VOL. 139 NO. 39 8 Pages Wednesday, September 23, 2020 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Elk damage on private land growing problem for county landowners

Coalition of groups work to preserve traditional elk migrations

By David Sykes

Large numbers of elk moving onto private range and crop lands, and calling it home, is becoming more of a problem for private land owners in south Morrow and Umatilla counties, says the Director of Northwest Oregon Water Association (NOWA) who, along with others, is trying to reverse the pattern.

Speaking to the Morrow County Commission last week, JR Cook said an increasing number of elk are coming down out of the mountains for winter range, and aren't going back, causing increasing damage to range and crop lands in south Morrow and Umatilla counties. "I don't think it's any secret that elk are moving farther and farther north from the public lands," Cook said. "And they are moving onto private ground and some of them are having calves on private ground, meaning they are not ever going to leave," he told the commissioners. When the elk don't leave and return to the mountains on a traditional migration, they are becoming habituated to the new area.

Cook says elk are coming onto private land where cattle ranchers have rotated cows off, found new regenerating grass there, and liked it. "They like that new growth," he says, but it's hard on pasture lands, removing cattle ranchers' grass resources, and causing increased invasive weed growth. Cook says as the elk continue to move farther



Elk are moving onto private land in south Morrow and Umatilla Counties, causing problems for landowners. -File Photo.

north, they then get onto wheat ground and find they like winter wheat too. From there they are even moving onto irrigated ground. "As there is increased pressure from the public in the mountains the elk are getting pushed down and are getting into better and better crop land and range, and they like it," Cook pointed out. The food is good, and they are not getting bothered or harassed, he points out.

Cook estimates right now there are between four and five thousand elk that have migrated down to private land in the two counties, and are in danger of becoming habituated, or staying put and never migrating back to the mountains. Cook emphasizes how hard it is to revive the migration patterns, especially after an elk calf is born on private ground.

"How do you keep the unhabituated animals (those still migrating) on the public lands longer in order to

give them more access to public hunters and prevent more private impact?" he asked. Cook says work preserving mountain habitat is important and something the groups and agencies are working on, but he also says, unfortunately, there is probably going to be some culling operations to bring private land herds under control.

"We were able to cull about 300 elk (on private ground in south Morrow and Umatilla counties)," he says. And all of that meat was donated to needy people for food, he continued. Processors were paid to take the elk meat turn it into burger and then sent down in a reefer trailer to the Oregon food bank in Troutdale. "Obviously none of us want to lay down hundreds of elk," Cook says, "but if it's a problem, we are trying to find a solution and it also provides a food source for the food banks so it's not going to waste."

Cook says his organization and others are working to try and get ahead of the problem before it gets worse, so elk will continue to be available to the public on public property, and damage to crops and pastures will be mitigated. Partners in the effort to hold off the dwindling migration trend are regional farmers and ranchers, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and a new group called the Gurdane Elk Management Group. Gurdane is a geographical area located in south Morrow and Umatilla counties where the problem has especially manifested itself.

Cook says if the coalition of groups addressing the elk problem has one thing in common, it's that they want the public to have good access to the elk herds and to hunting them, but they want them back on public land, with their traditional migration habits.

Lexington gains needed volunteer firefighters

By David Sykes

The Town of Lexington's volunteer fire department is showing signs of growth. It was recently announced they now have three new members, Shane Miles, Trent Miles and Josie Miles. Fireman Josie Miles reported the good news to the town council at their September 8th meeting. Council members

were pleased with the additional members of the fire department, as in the past they have had difficulty recruiting new members. "It's been a long time since we have had this many people on our fire department," council member Will Lemmon said.

Josie also reported they will be applying for grants in an effort to purchase new

equipment, which is needed to replace aging firefighting rigs. "We will be focusing on replacing the brush rigs first since they get the most use," she told the council. She added there are grants for up to \$250,000 for new vehicles, and she was working on applying now, possibly through Northwest Farm Credit and Wildhorse.

In other business the

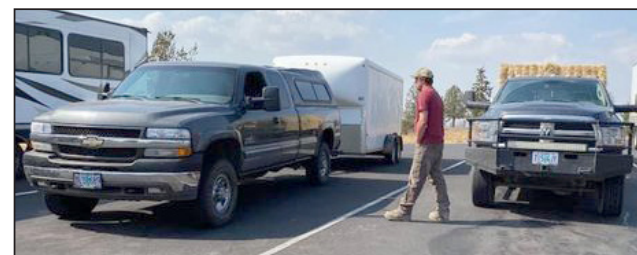
council moved forward on a franchise agreement with PrimeTime Internet which is installing internet service throughout Lexington. The council had been looking for an appropriate franchise agreement to use and had reached out to League of Oregon Cities for legal assistance without much luck. Council member Bobbi Gordon said she wasn't too impressed with the League of Oregon Cities legal assistance, and she recommended the town possibly hiring its own attorney either on



The equipment storage addition for the Lexington shop was recently completed. The addition was made possible by a grant received from WCVEDG. -Photo by Bobbi Gordon.

**ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:
MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.**

Donations gathered for fire victims



A pickup and trailer full of donations of items for displaced animals was delivered to central Oregon from south Morrow County. A load of hay was donated and delivered as well.

By Bobbi Gordon

South Morrow County residents recently stepped up and donated many items needed by the people and animals who were displaced due to fires in Oregon. Josie Miles and her mom, Sheila Miller, headed up the donation effort and arranged the transportation of the items to central Oregon where they were disbursed to the victims or transported to another location.

A simple Facebook post from Miles' childhood friend describing the devastation and need for essential items for the fire victims motivated Miles and Miller to start collecting donations in a genuine "people helping people" effort. Requests for donations began as word of mouth and a few social media posts, which inspired the community to show up in a big way.

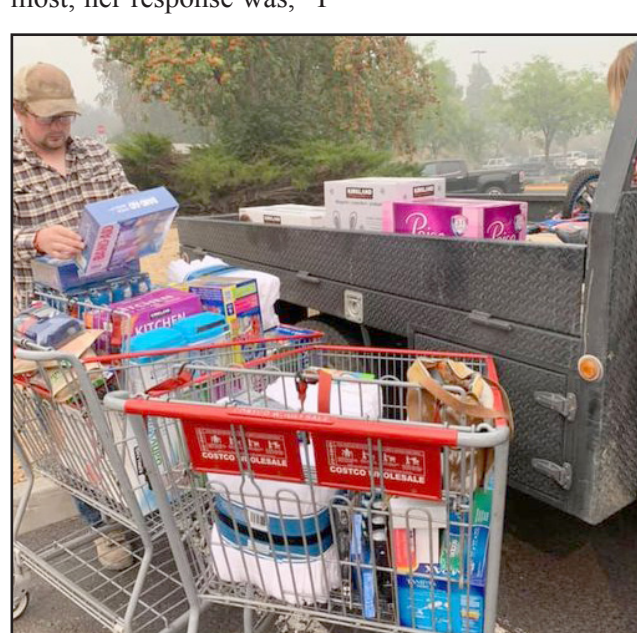
The first week, the group gathered two full pickup loads of donations and collected more than \$1,000 in cash. The cash was spent at Costco to purchase items that were specifically requested or needed the most. Donations of all kinds were collected and provided clothing and essential items to families who lost their homes as well as food and supplies for pets and livestock of all kinds. When a fire victim was asked what was needed most, her response was, "I

need anything from a hug to a house."

The second week of their donation effort was focused on animals that had been displaced, rescued or lost due to the fires. Miles said the animals go to the facilities as they are with no food, halters, leashes, medications or other necessities. County residents were asked to donate any items they could or to donate money at Morrow County Grain Growers Green Feed to purchase food dishes, dog food, cat food, rabbit feed, pig feed, hay, leashes, collars, halters and blankets.

The Miller and the Miles families transported a pickup and trailer full of donated and purchased items along with another pickup and trailer loaded with hay to Redmond on Saturday, September 19.

Josie Miles commented, "Every single donation of time, supplies and cash made a difference and helped fill the trailers with things that were needed. Thank you, Morrow County, for sharing the love." She reported that sincere and emotional thanks were expressed every step of the way. "Because donations were taken directly to those in need, we can say with confidence that everyone who donated made a difference," she continued.



Trent Miles organizes and sorts the items purchased at Costco with the donation money.

an hourly basis or through a retainer agreement. Gordon said she's interacted with an attorney in Hood River who does work for the city of Wasco and suggested he may be a possibility. The council took no action but agreed to think about it.

In other business the council heard from maintenance man Scott Lamb who said after working on it, he thinks the mechanical issues with the water sys-

tem chlorine pump may be "straightened out." Lamb suggested the town look at maybe buying a second used pump, rebuilding it and having a reserve in case of emergency. He said used pumps are available for \$200 and rebuild kits for about \$175. New pumps cost around \$1,500 he told the council. "I would rather buy a used one and rebuild it," Lamb said.



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