



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Decision needed soon on Gilliam County cricket help

### Funds needed to fight coming infestation

By David Sykes

If Morrow County is going to help neighboring Gilliam County fight its continuing Mormon Cricket infestation and, in turn, stop them from coming here, a decision needs to be made soon, OSU Extension Agency Larry Lutchter told county commissioners last week. "We are close to behind the eight ball," Lutchter said, "and if the county is going to support control efforts, a decision about financial help needs to be made quickly in the next several days or so."

The crickets are not yet big in Morrow County, but they are advancing from Gilliam County, and when they get here will cause tremendous damage to the county's multi-million-dollar agriculture economy. As Gilliam County has discovered the insects will eat their way through range and crop land alike.

Urgency is needed since recent warm weather will soon cause an earlier than expected egg hatch, forcing spraying to control the insects. To fight the crickets, money is needed to spray range land in Gilliam County soon. Eggs are laid in the summer and are dormant through winter. Cricket eggs hatch and nymphs emerge in the early spring when soil temperatures reach 40 degrees F. The best time to kill the crickets is after they hatch but before they reach adulthood. The chemical of choice is Dimilin which keeps the young insects from molting their skin which kills them. An oil is mixed with the chemical and when it hits the plant, sticks to it, then the cricket comes along and eats it. The best way to apply the chemical is with aerial spraying. Local crop duster John Boyer has said he is geared up and ready to do spraying and will enlist other pilots for help if necessary to get the job done.

Lutchter told the commissioners that toward the end of the season last year he had reports of Mormon Crickets in Juniper Canyon and some not far from Sand Hollow. "My guess is they are across the creek (Willow Creek in north county) already, and on the fringes of Morrow County," Lutchter said. He said if they are not controlled, they will be moving towards crop circles and the dry land north of the circles between the Columbia River, adding that from there they will

begin moving towards the city of Boardman. "If the crickets get to the (Navy) Bombing Range and the Nature Conservancy, you aren't going to stop them," Lutchter warned. County officials have not had much luck getting the Navy to commit to fighting the insects on the 48,000-acre parcel of ground they own in the county, and apparently the Nature Conservancy will not use chemicals on its land.

Lutchter said a "worst case scenario" would see the crickets going toward the Lindsay Feed Lot and into Sand Hollow, down to Mader Rust Farms and then into Umatilla County. "That is kind of the worst-case scenario. We need to stop them before they become a catastrophe," Lutchter emphasized.

Lutchter said somewhere in the range of 15 to 20 thousand acres of land needs to be sprayed in Gilliam County to help halt the crickets. "I could easily justify a \$200,000 request," he said on asking county commissioners for financial assistance. "The cost of an aerial application is about \$8.25 (per acre) and Dimilin 2L is the most efficient and effective way to suppress the problem," he explained. "Sevin bait is a solid application and is applied with a mechanical spreader at about \$1.17 per pound," he said. "I could easily justify 5 -10,000 pounds of bait too," he said. The bait is used when the insects get older and in areas where spraying cannot be done, such as organic fields.

Commissioner Don Russell asked if the organic farm circles in north county could apply the Dimilin and still be considered organic crops. Lutchter said they could not, and the best way to protect the county's large investment in organic farming is to spray the insects before they reach here, and then place bait around the edges of the circles.

The Mormon Crickets have been a big problem in Gilliam County since 2017 when they came off range-land in Ladd and Blalock canyons and moved not only into farm and range ground, but also into the city of Arlington. People remember the large infestation in that city. "I saw Arlington during an outbreak," Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said. "What are the chances we will see that in Boardman? That is our most populated city. It was ugly," she asked Lutchter. Commissioner Don Russell said he has also seen the crickets in Gilliam

County. "I have seen the crickets in Gilliam. I haven't seen them in Morrow County. When you look at it, it looks like the whole ground is moving," he said. "When you go on the golf course, you can't walk anywhere without stepping on them." Other people have described a large infestation of the crickets as like seeing the ground move. Extension agents have asked land owners and producers to keep their eyes out for the insects, as locating them is very important in control.



OSU Extension Agent Larry Lutchter

Gilliam County Extension Agent Jordan Maley was also at the commissioner meeting and said last year the crickets were seen on the freeway, so, if not checked, at some point could reach Boardman. "Last year they were on I-84 and at the junction of Highway 74, so there is the potential in Boardman. "That may happen," Maley said. "What Morrow County may want to do is what Arlington did. The only thing labeled for use as residential (against the crickets) was Tempo." So, he said Gilliam County appropriated \$20,000 to the city of Arlington for the purchase of Tempo for use within the city limits.



Gilliam County Extension Agent Jordan Maley

Maley said the infestation last year was more than his county had expected and they had to scramble to find enough chemical. "We are trying to set things in motion now because of the warmer weather and we may see some emergence (of the insects) earlier than in the past," he told commissioners.

Maley said Gilliam purchased Dimilin last year but had to double the order because of the larger than expected outbreak that occurred up near the Morrow County border. He emphasized that spotting the crickets and reporting their location when the hatch starts is very important to effectively controlling them. "We have been spraying 104 to 105 thousand acres every year and we did an additional 240,000 last year to get on top of the outbreak," Maley said. "That's the way it has worked well in Gilliam. We can quickly cover a lot of acreage." He said RDO also let Boyer fly out of their property last year, which helped in making the aerial application more effective. "The magnitude of the outbreak last year challenged us," he added.

At a meeting last September in Ione, Maley had raised the red flag to Morrow County producers about the threat of the advancing crickets. At that time, he created a distribution list of producers "to keep everyone up to speed" on the infestation. Maley said more meetings are scheduled, including one at the Morrow County Grain Growers where he will talk about the biology of Mormon Cricket, and what they look like. "There are other insects that look similar, so we want to be effective and be on top of where they are when the hatch starts," he reiterated.

Lindsay wanted to know what worst case scenario is if Morrow County doesn't help with cricket control. "Devastating crop losses in the northeast part of the county, and migration of crickets towards Boardman and into the irrigated crop land that lies just east of Bombing Range Road," Lutchter said.

Although the commissioners did not authorize the expenditure of money to help Gilliam County with their spraying at the Feb. 16 meeting, they all seemed in favor of helping and indicated they would make a decision soon on how much Morrow County would contribute.

## Sykes to run for county commissioner



David Sykes

David Sykes, Heppner, has filed as a candidate for Morrow County Commissioner, position three. Sykes is self-employed. He and his wife April purchased the Heppner Gazette-Times newspaper in 1980. He started a real estate broker-

age in 2003.

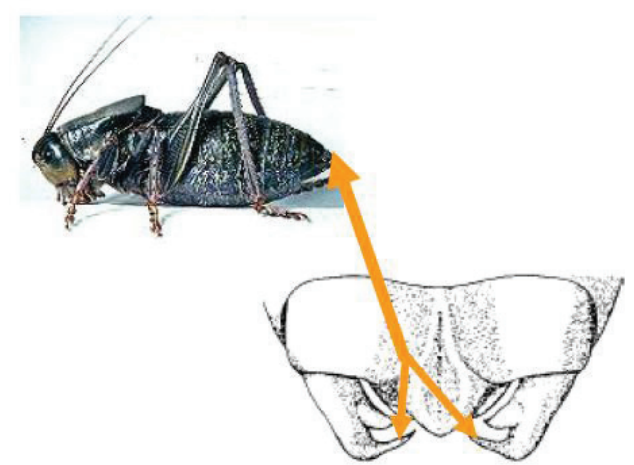
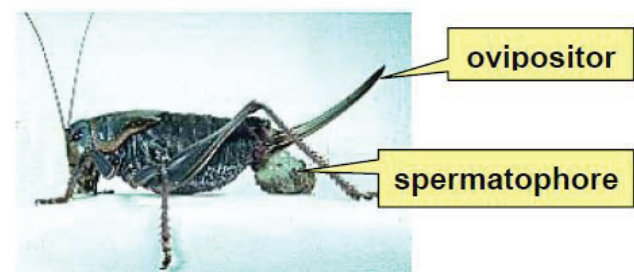
Sykes graduated from Reedsport high school then spent four years in the Navy before attending the University of Oregon where he majored in journalism.

He has previous government experience as chairman of the Morrow County Planning Commission and currently on the county Board of Property Tax Appeals.

Sykes joins Mike McNamee as candidates for position three. The deadline for filing is March 8, 2022. The primary election will be held May 17, 2022. If elected Sykes will take over the position January 2, 2023.

### Identification

Mormon crickets are not true crickets; they are shield-backed, short-winged katydids that resemble fat grasshoppers that cannot fly. Adults and nymphs of Mormon crickets have long antennae and a smooth, shiny exoskeleton in a variety of colors and color patterns. The adult female has a spermatophore (sperm holding sack) for a short time after mating and a long ovipositor (egg layer) with a gentle upward curve (Figure 2). The male cercus (appendage at the posterior end of the abdomen) has two large teeth (Figure 3). Adult Mormon crickets are 1 1/2 to 2 inches long.



## Lexington contracts for complete water study

By David Sykes

Lexington has signed with a La Grande engineering firm, Anderson Perry & Assoc., for a comprehensive study, from source through distribution, of its complete water system. Town officials signed a contract with the firm at their Feb. 8 council meeting.

Included in the study will be a look at all aspects of the water system, including number of current and expected future users, and how much water will be needed over the next 20 years. The study will also look at the size and condition of the towns water pipes and meters, capacity and production of its well and storage facilities, and

current expected flow and pressure throughout the whole system.

The \$40,000 study, which is being paid for with grants from Business Oregon and the Columbia River Enterprise Zone, will also look at the needs and costs to maintain and upgrade the system into the future. "Cost-effective alternatives for meeting long-term water supply needs shall be identified, including alternatives for correcting existing system deficiencies," the contract said. "Estimated cost and design schematics for the preferred alternatives shall be presented, and an evaluation of the general operation and maintenance require-

ments for the water supply system will be completed. New water supply options will also be investigated," the agreement said.

The study will also look at financing options for any improvements that may be chosen by the city to be done. "A financing plan will be developed for meeting the long-term system needs, including general user rate charges and outside financial assistance," the agreement read. The study will also provide information on "potential state and federal grant and loan programs that may be available to assist the town."

-See LEXINGTON WATER STUDY/PAGE TWO

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