



## New commissioners conduct first meeting of the year

### Board hears nitrate update, appoints interim administrator

By Andrea Di Salvo

New Morrow County commissioners David Sykes and Jeff Wenholz met in their first official capacity last Wednesday, Jan. 4. The two men were each elected to their positions last year and began their terms Jan. 2.

Former commissioner Don Russell, who's term ended Dec. 31, was present in the audience. With the recall of Jim Doherty, the third commissioner position remains vacant until filled by appointment by Sykes and Wenholz.

"We're starting 2023," said Sykes, who is board chair under rules previously set down. "We're looking forward to working with all of you, the county employees, the private sector people, all our volunteers in Morrow County.

"We have a lot of really good people, really smart, hard-working people, and we look forward to accomplishing the tasks of county government that will work with you and make this a great county to live in," he said.

### Emergency management update

The new commissioners heard an introduction to emergency management and an update on the county nitrate emergency from Morrow County Emergency Manager Paul Gray. Gray also asked that he, as head of emergency management, be put in charge of the nitrate emergency and finalizing recovery operations.

Gray said former commissioner Jim Doherty had previously been in charge of dealing with the nitrate issue, and he wanted to make sure he had the authority to go ahead and finalize the county's part in that work.



Morrow County Emergency Manager Paul Gray gives the new Morrow County Commissioners an update at their first meeting of 2023. -Contributed photo

Between last fiscal year and this year, the county has spent \$130,359 out of a budget of \$160,000. Gray said he had already received some of the back as reimbursement from the Boardman business coalition and hopes to get more. Gray also said the county has an agreement with the Oregon Department of Human Services Office of Resiliency and Emergency Management to pay for water deliveries from the beginning of July to the end of March and hopes to have access to that funding soon.

Gray said the county is now in the recovery phase, and he's looking to get a lot of the burden pushed off the county and onto the state.

"There's not much more we can do," said Gray. "The rest of this is going to have to be dealt with by the state, so I want to have the authority to talk with the state so we can get some of this stuff pushed off onto them, and then we no longer have to deal with it."

Sykes questioned exactly what kind of authority Gray was looking for, and Gray said he just wanted authority to talk with state entities like the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in phasing out of the nitrate management, but that he was not asking for financial authority.

Sykes also asked if Doherty had been designated to interact with the state and if the state had recognized him as a designated contact that they would have to take official action to replace. Gray said that was not the case, and said he wanted no authority outside what he had under the county's emergency operation plan.

"I just want to make sure that you all want me to be able to do what we're talking about doing, which is to close out this nitrate thing and pass some of this stuff along to the state."

"Again, commissioner Doherty was the one handling some of this stuff, and I wasn't privy to some of the conversations he was having with the state," he added.

Morrow County Planner Tamra Mabbott clarified that the nitrates in drinking water was a public health issue that became an emergency issue but was also an environmental issue. She said the planning department worked with agencies like the DEQ and Oregon Health Authority to deal with the environmental aspects.

She suggested a work session with county planning, emergency operations, public health and the commissioners to discuss roles and plans. Gray said he is dealing with just the

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## Sweeney sworn in as Heppner mayor

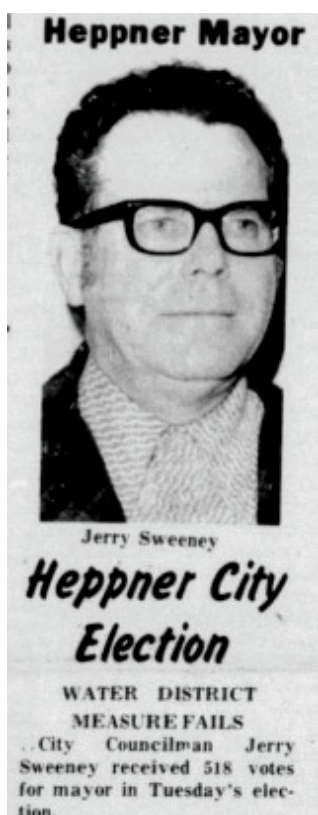
### 50 years after Grandfather



Corey Sweeney was sworn in as the City of Heppner's new mayor Monday, Jan. 9, replacing outgoing mayor Jim Kindle. -Contributed photo



Not only is Sweeney's mayoral election a milestone in his own life, but he is taking on the same role his grandfather Jerry Sweeney took on exactly 50 years ago. -Contributed photo



Jerry Sweeney elected mayor Nov. 9, 1972

## ODE Releases new school guidance for 'gender expansive' students

SALEM—Last week, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) published "Supporting Gender Expansive Students: Guidance for Schools." This update replaces the previously released "Guidance to School Districts: Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment for Transgender Students" from 2016.

According to National Public Radio, the term gender expansive is an adjective "that can describe someone with a more flexible gender identity than might be associated with a typical gender binary."

ODE says the new guidance is grounded in the "recognition, respect, affirmation, friendship, joy, belonging, and safety every human deserves—including the students, staff, and families that make-up our school communities," according to a statement sent out by the agency.

"Gender expansive students are protected under federal and Oregon civil rights laws. School districts have a responsibility to provide a safe and affirming educational environment for all students, including gender expansive students," Oregon Department of Education Director Colt Gill said. "Affirming and supportive educators, schools, families, friends, and communities are shown to increase academic success, feelings of belonging, and reduce negative mental health outcomes."

Key points in this updated guidance included, among other things, "expanded and clarified support for all gender expansive students, including but not limited to transgender, nonbinary, two spirit, intersex, agender, genderqueer and genderfluid identities" and "recommendations for merging legal requirements with best practice in the classroom, in school activities, in school policies and procedures, and more."

## Ione to discuss sewer plans Jan. 24

The City of Ione will hold a public meeting at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 24, to discuss a possible public sewer system in Ione. The meeting will be held at Ione City Hall.

The City of Ione is applying to the USDA Rural Development, Water and Environmental Program

## Snowmobile club playday a success



A family play day in the snow at the 4-Corners Snowmobile Club annual play day. -Contributed photo



Poker Run third-place winner Lucas Matheny. -Contributed photo



Poker Run winner Tenley Taruscio. She won the Poker Run with four aces. -Contributed photo



Club secretary Mike Gorman and member Curtis Cutsforth serve up a hearty lunch. -Contributed photo

The 4-Corners Snowmobile Club recently held its annual play day on Kelly Prairie.

While the weather was snowing and blustery at the beginning of the day, it settled into a calm and comfortable afternoon around the bright and warm campfire attended to by the members. At one point, 52 snowmobiles and 13 tracked side-by-side machines were counted in attendance.

The club also held a special fundraiser, collecting donations to give to seven-year old Jaxson Nelsen, who recently lost his mother in a tragic accident that took the lives of three local Heppner residents. Due to the generosity of those in attendance, donations from various other individuals and funds from the 4-Corners Club, \$3,000 was raised for the cause.

Club secretary Mike Gorman prepared a hearty hot dog and chili meal, with hot chocolate for the children.

President Cliff Dougherty and wife Dawna orchestrated the trail ride and Poker Run fundraiser. Almost all in attendance participated in the Poker Run, with the winner being young rider Tenley Taruscio, with a poker hand of four aces. Second place was Kylie Gaines, and third place was Lucas Matheny.

Prize sponsors were Morrow County Grain Growers, Heppner Auto Parts and Les Schwab Tire. Snow grooming volunteer Ron Carlson and wife Kim had the trails in tip-top shape for very comfortable riding.

The 4-Corners club is a local nonprofit group dedicated to winter sports and is associated with the Oregon State Snowmobile Association. The state association provides the snow grooming cat and implements that groom and maintain area riding trails.

For information on the club and to join, contact club secretary Mike Gorman at 541-980-3396.

representative of the contracted engineering firm of Anderson Perry & Associates will be present to address any technical issues.

For more information on the USDA Rural Development application, please contact Ione City Hall at 541-422-7414.