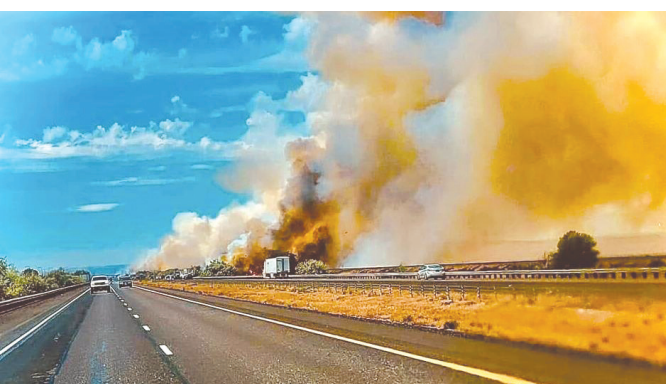


Boardman wildfires burn more than 3,000 acres



Fire along 1-84 near boardman - Contributed Photo

Boardman Fire Rescue District responded to multiple wildfires near Boardman Sunday afternoon. High winds caused the fires to burn more than 3,000 acres.

BFRD responded shortly after noon on Sunday after receiving call about several wildfires along Interstate 84 west near Boardman's Main Street. When

firefighters arrived, they found the fire line extended a little more than 10 miles, from Main Street to Three Mile Canyon Road.

I-84 was closed for several hours, and a unit remained on the scene all night to keep an eye on the fire as it smoldered into the early-morning hours.

No injuries were reported.

Farmers market seeks new coordinator

The future of Willow Creek Farmers Market is in question as it searches for one or more new coordinators. Previous coordinators Andrea Nelson and Andrea Di Salvo have announced they are stepping down from running the market after having done so for the last few years.

The farmers market in Heppner has taken place weekly every summer since 2009 except during COVID-related closures. The coordinator is a volunteer position responsible for planning, communication, publicity and registration for the market.

Anyone interested in taking over the operation of the market can contact Nelson at 541-720-4399 or Di Salvo at 757-285-5792 or email willowcreekfm@gmail.com.

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County responds to ambulance lawsuit

-Continued from PAGE ONE
an asset transfer agreement, not an exclusive grant of a franchise to provide ambulance services indefinitely.

The MCHD lawsuit also states that the ASA plans required the health district to create an EMS Advisory Committee, which the 2021 plan gave express authority to administer and review the plan. The county says this is not the case.

"MCHD appears to be under the mistaken belief that it has legal authority to govern ambulance services within the County," responds the county. "That belief is false. MCHD refuses to recognize the law or the fact that the County is responsible for ambulance service areas and plans, and for appointment of ambulance service providers."

Meanwhile, the health district is also seeking an injunction against BFRD and Michael Hughes, saying the fire district has been "actively engaged" in attempting to take over ambulance services in Boardman "for the purpose of obtaining more funding and depleting the funding being used to satisfy the financial burdens of running the health district."

MCHD also accuses BFRD of intentionally disrupting the health district's emergency medical services and undermining public confidence in the health district.

"Those activities have been so extreme and unsafe, they have resulted in the submission of numerous ethics complaints to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) that are currently under investigation," the lawsuit states in paragraph

23. "...and the MCHD initiated and completed a series of quality assurance investigations and implemented measures, pursuant to the ASA Plans, aimed at protecting the health, welfare and safety of Morrow County residents and visitors."

One of those measures was a finding of default against BFRD with an attached \$169,000 in fines, which the health district is asking the court to enforce.

The county states that MCHD has no authority over BFRD and does not have authority to levy fines.

In paragraph 45 of the lawsuit, MCHD states that both the health district and Boardman Fire are special districts operating in Morrow County. Since the health district is providing ambulance services in the county, including the City of Boardman, the health district claims that allowing BFRD to provide ambulance services within the ASA will violate ORS 198.720(2).

That Oregon Revised Statute states, "A district may not include territory included within another district formed under the same principal Act when the other district is authorized to perform and is performing the services the affected district is authorized to perform...."

Morrow County responds that BFRD is a rural fire protection district formed under ORS Ch. 478, and MCHD is a health district formed under ORS Ch. 440, so the statute doesn't prohibit it if the board of commissioners decides to allow BFRD to provide ambulance services.

"Rural fire protection

districts are authorized to respond to all medical, fire and emergency calls. That is not a violation of MCHD's right to provide ambulance transport," the county adds. "The public benefits from reduced response times and quicker medical assistance."

The county also asks the health district to supply evidence to support claims regarding loss of cost-based reimbursement and why response times would be harmed by adding additional ambulances, among others.

While Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenzholz is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit, the document does also make ethics allegations against Wenzholz, saying he failed to disclose a conflict of interest regarding his position on the Good Shepherd Health Care Board of Trustees. The health district further claims that position caused him to act against the best interests of Morrow County residents.

In response to questions about Wenzholz's role at Good Shepherd, GSHC Interim CEO Emmett Schuster told the Gazette-Times that Good Shepherd trustees are volunteers who receive no financial compensation. In addition, he said they are required to attend educational conferences once a year to keep abreast of what's going on in the healthcare field so they can better make decisions. Schuster said Wenzholz attended the last conference virtually.

"Morrow County is legally required to update the 1998 ASA Plan and regrets MCHD's efforts to create false narratives and inflame

public fear and passion with baseless allegations," states the county's release. "The BOC has invited MCHD, and others, to submit testimony regarding their concerns, and will consider such in the formulation of the final 2023 ASA Plan."

Both the full text of the MCHD lawsuit and the county's statement can be found on their respective websites, www.morrow-countyhealthdistrict.org and www.co.morrow.or.us.

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