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Port of Morrow Commission Approves DEQ Settlement

According to a press release issued by the DEQ (Oregon Department of Environmental Quality), a settlement has been reached between the DEQ and the Port of Morrow regarding wastewater permit and nitrate violations in Morrow and Umatilla counties in Oregon. As part of the settlement, the port will provide \$1,933,721 to support safe drinking water efforts in the affected area, which includes water testing, treatment, and delivery. Additionally, the port will pay a civil penalty of \$483,430 to the state treasury.

The Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWA) relies on groundwater as its primary drinking water source. However, elevated levels of nitrate have been detected in some pri-

ate wells, posing serious health risks. Sources of nitrate include agricultural fertilizers, animal manure, industrial wastewater (including from the Port of Morrow), and septic systems.

DEQ Director Leah Feldon stated that this settlement serves two purposes: providing funding for safe drinking water to those in need and holding the Port of Morrow accountable for permit violations. DEQ has been working closely with the port to improve its wastewater treatment and reuse, with the ultimate goal of ensuring compliance with water quality regulations and improving groundwater in the area.

To address the issue, the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) is already offering free water quality testing, treatment, and



- Contributed Photo

delivery to residents with private wells in the Lower Umatilla Basin. The funds from this settlement will supplement OHA's ongoing efforts. OHA recommends that private well users across Oregon regularly test for bacteria, nitrate, and arsenic, which are common groundwater pollutants in the state.

The total settlement amount is \$2.4 million, with the port required to follow a compliance plan that includes additional

restrictions aimed at reducing the risk of groundwater contamination. The plan includes higher penalties for applying wastewater near drinking water supplies, no increase in net wastewater flow until new treatment and storage systems are operational, and requirements to assess crops and facility infrastructure. The port is also working with state agencies to develop strategies for reducing wastewater during the next two growing seasons while long-term wastewater infrastructure solutions are being implemented.

Under DEQ's Supplemental Environmental Project policy, up to 80% of the penalty can be allocated towards an approved project. In this case, \$1.9 million will go towards

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ODOT region manager talks progress, funding issues with county commission

By Andrea Di Salvo

Road maintenance is going to continue to be a struggle due to lack of funding, an Oregon Dept. of Transportation (ODOT) representative told the Morrow County Board of Commissioners recently.

The topic came up when Ken Patterson, ODOT Region 5 Manager, appeared at a board of commissioners meeting to give an update on ODOT's work in the region. Region 5 covers eight counties in Eastern Oregon and is headquartered in La Grande. When fully staffed, Patterson said, Region 5 has about 300 employees.

Patterson told the commissioners he has been the regional manager with ODOT for a little more than a year and said he was trying to meet with each of the county commissions in Eastern Oregon.

"A lot of our interests between ODOT and the counties are very similar," said Patterson. "You look

at a lot of the growth in this area, and a lot of it's due to transportation."

Patterson also introduced District 12 manager Rich Lani, who works out of Pendleton. District 12 covers Umatilla, Morrow, Grant, and part of Wheeler counties. Lani is the main contact for day-to-day ODOT operations in the district.

At the top of the list of Morrow County projects was the recent replacement of ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) ramps at all the corners of state highways, such as the recent curb work along Heppner's Main Street. Patterson said ODOT faced a lawsuit over the ramps and lost, which triggered the statewide project.

"That's been a major portion of our capital program in Eastern Oregon for the last few years," he said, "When it's all said and done, all the curb ramps along the state highways

will be ADA accessible."

ODOT is also in the process of replacing the signs on I-84 from I-5 to the Idaho state lines, he said. Crews are currently working on the section of interstate from Arlington to Pendleton.

A big impact for the north end will be bridge repairs and a major redesign at the I-84 Tower Road interchange. However, he said ODOT is currently in the design phase, and the project probably would not happen until 2026 or 2027.

Other projects either planned or underway include a paving project from Boardman to Stanfield, work on culverts on the Columbia River Highway, and plans to install electric vehicle charging stations along I-84 from I-5 to the Idaho state line.

Commissioners also questioned Patterson regarding plans and strategies for other county needs, such as a better I-84 interchange

at the Port of Morrow and how to get funding for an Olson Road I-84 overpass.

ODOT was also involved in several House Bill 2017 projects in Heppner and Irrigon, as well as working with Morrow County to develop its new transit system. That system will include a Heppner-Boardman connector and a Boardman-Port of Morrow circular.

"There's been a lot of growth of transit, especially here in Umatilla and Morrow counties," Patterson said. "As we have more growth and try to get people to jobs, we've expanded our transit."

Those services will also tie in with Kayak's regional network.

"That's been the backbone of our transit in Eastern Oregon. The CTUIR (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation) has built a really robust intercity program,"

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Border discussions back again at county commission meeting

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners held the third of three yearly meetings regarding the proposed moving of the Oregon-Idaho state border at its regular board meeting last Wednesday.

The commissioners may or may not be tired of the issue, but in November of last year, Morrow County voters approved a measure requiring the county board of commissioners to meet three times a year to discuss how to promote the interests of Morrow County in any negotiations regarding the relocation. This was the third and final meeting this year.

The measure did not specify an end date for the meetings, so the board of commissioners will plan three more meetings for 2024.

Morrow County Counsel Justin Nelson said these

meetings are only the beginning of what would be a very lengthy process to even attempt to move the state border.

In fact, legislators from both states met in Baker City on Oct. 19 to discuss next steps for the Greater Idaho movement. At the meeting were Oregon representative Vikki Breese-Iverson (R-Prineville) and Idaho representatives Judy Boyle (R-Washington County) and Barbara Ehardt (R-Idaho Falls), along with proponents of the Greater Idaho movement.

"There's a lot of legwork that has to be done," said Nelson. "I think the idea with this measure is just to have the county meet to just talk about it three times a year."

Board of commissioners chair David Sykes noted that the measure had passed by 60 percent in Morrow

County.

"So the voters were pretty substantially behind this," said Sykes.

Mike McCarter, president of Move Oregon's Border for a Greater Idaho, was present via Zoom to speak for the cause.

"The moving of the border may not be the ultimate answer," said McCarter, "but right now, with situations going on, with the way the legislature in the western part of Oregon tends to treat us over in eastern Oregon, it is the answer right now."

McCarter added that the movement is "bringing everything to the surface." "We're just trying to get the discussion started in the legislature," he said.

McCarter added that the movement leaders had a meeting scheduled with Oregon Speaker of the House Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis), with another tentative meet-

ing in the works with Oregon Governor Tina Kotek.

"Things are starting to open up a little bit where at least we're talking about things," said McCarter.

The board of commissioners opened the floor

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Heppner women take third at state

Grady Greenwood ends his season on top



(Top) Heppner High school cross country girls pose with their 3rd place state trophy. (Below) Hunter Greenwood standing on the 1st place podium for the 5000 meter race.

- Contributed Photo

The Mustang cross-country teams showed they had the endurance to make it all the way at the OSAA Cross Country 3A/2A/1A State Championships in Eugene last Saturday. After a season of ups and down—but mostly ups—the women's team took third in the 3A/2A/1A 5,000 Meters, while the Mustang men placed sixth in their own 2A/1A 5,000

Meters. As impressive as their team performances were, senior Grady Greenwood and sophomore Lily Nichols again led the charge in gaining individual places on the podium.

Greenwood has made a habit of taking first this season, and that didn't change at the state meet. While Greenwood didn't beat

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Heppner Mustangs win OSAA 2A State Football Championship opening game 28-7



Hayden McMahan (13) can't be stopped as he drags a Regis player across the goal line during Heppner's win Saturday.

- Photo by Tyllynn Cimmyotti

The Heppner Mustang football team won their opening game of the OSAA 2A State Football Championships with a 28-7 victory over the Bandon/Pacific Tigers. With the win the Mustangs (8-2) move on to play a quarterfinal game against the Regis Rams.

The Pirates kicked off to start the game and Heppner moved the ball right down the field for a score. The ten-play drive was highlighted by an 11-yard run for a first down by Hayden McMahan, a 23-yard run by Mason Orem, and a 10-yard run by Caden

George for another first down for the Mustangs at the Tigers 2-yard line. Hayden McMahan ran the ball in from there for the touchdown. Caden George punched the ball in for the 2-pt. conversion to make the score 8-0.

Martin Medina kicked off for the Mustangs and just four plays later Caden George forced a Tiger fumble. Caleb George scooped the ball up to give Heppner possession near midfield. The Mustangs moved the ball down the

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