

State of Emergency Declared by Kotek in Morrow and Umatilla Counties

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Industries have taken voluntary measures to do their part to reduce wastewater in the basin headed into this non-growing season, and we know that this will be the last winter when land application will occur due to the upgrades that the Port of Morrow is currently making and the updated schedule that DEQ has required," said Kotek.

"I did not make this decision lightly. We must balance protecting thousands of jobs in the region, the national food supply, and domestic well users during this short period of time during an unusually wet winter," she added.

"I have been very clear in my expectation that all entities involved in the creation and reuse of wastewater in the Lower Umatilla Basin work with federal, state and local partners in our shared goal of reducing the nitrate groundwater contamination in the basin. This remains unchanged. I expect partners in this ecosystem, along with the counties, will continue to explore connections to public water systems and other drinking water solutions for impacted residents in both the near and long term."

Cumulative precipitation since November is currently above the 95th percentile of the average for the last 23 years in the region.

Given measured cumulative precipitation to date, along with forecasted La Niña winter conditions, the Port of Morrow anticipates that precipitation and freezing conditions will combine to overwhelm wastewater

storage capacity in February and exceed the capacity of the Port's approved land application site to accept wastewater consistent with the soil moisture restrictions in the Port's permit.

A recent permit modification requires the Port to finish building its new lined storage lagoons this year, effectively ending future winter application on the land a year ahead of the previously agreed upon schedule. A DEQ permit modification now reflects this and sets a deadline of Nov. 1, 2025.

The compounding effect of the high levels of precipitation and lack of adequate lagoon storage capacity poses an imminent risk that the Port may have to stop receiving wastewater from food processing and other industrial facilities in February, or sooner.

This would cause those facilities to cease operations, which will in turn trigger furloughs of potentially thousands of workers resulting in substantial economic harm to the region and the State of Oregon.

This order follows the continued involvement of the state over the past two years to address the ongoing nitrate levels in the groundwater in this region. These actions include:

- Providing free testing to all domestic well owners in the LUBGWMA as well as a large-scale canvas effort to reach homeowners in the region to provide education about high levels of nitrate in drinking water and free testing resources;

- Free filtration systems for homes that qualify;

- Clean drinking water delivered directly to home-

owners;

- A comprehensive Nitrate Reduction Plan strategy developed by state agencies in coordination with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);

- Adding capacity and professional facilitation of the local LUBGWMA Advisory Committee to help provide the structure to create meaningful recommended actions from the local stakeholders;

- Quarterly meetings with the EPA to continue the state and federal collaboration and commitment to address the complex situation in the LUBGWMA;

- Visits to the area to meet directly with community members about drinking water concerns and with the industry and agricultural partners to push for more action; and

- Millions of dollars of investment from the state to cover the cost of testing, treatment, water delivery and long-term strategy development.

Kotek issued Executive Order 25-02 pursuant to ORS 401.165 et seq.

Kotek determined that to avoid the shutdown of food processing and agricultural industries in Morrow and Umatilla counties, while still ensuring the protection of groundwater and groundwater users, the restrictions specifically set forth in Schedule A, Conditions (6), (8), (11) and (13) of the DEQ Permit, as applied to Farm 1 and Farm 3, and exclusively to fields that are ranked as "Low Risk" by the Permit on Farm 4 and Farm 5 are waived for the duration of this Executive Order.

Decision to move circuit court back to Heppner

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85 percent of the caseload is in the north end.

"I was able to secure keeping the historic courthouse operational while still having a court facility in Boardman," Hill said, "which would allow for service to both the north and the south ends of the county."

"I represent the Sixth Judicial District. I represent the chief justice, and I represent the people of both counties," Hill added. "And I will do the best interest of what I think is and what I've heard are the best interests of people. And that's not to disregard one part of the county or the other."

Hill also said that, while Morrow County's caseload didn't justify a full-time judge, the logistics of the Boardman location made another sixth judicial district judge more likely. That, in turn, would create four more staff positions, all of which Hill said would be state funded.

The shift back to Heppner, Hill said, would result in the district not getting a sixth judge or those positions. He did not address the City of Heppner's concerns about the possible negative economic impacts to that city, saying only that there was no economic advantage to building a new court facility in Heppner.

Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenzholz also opposed moving the circuit court back to Heppner, saying Boardman allowed better access to justice for all citizens.

"Leave it there. I don't think you're being fair to the north end and their de-

sires," Wenzholz said.

He also reminded the other commissioners of the outspoken opposition to the fairgrounds site.

"I don't think that those people have changed their minds," said Wenzholz. "Stuart Dick got up and yelled at us that we weren't listening to the people and to not put it at the fairgrounds. So I don't know why we're going back to the fairgrounds."

Peterson responded that the BOC had received many letters, including from those who had opposed the fairgrounds, saying they had changed their minds.

"They recognized that if this was the only viable location for Heppner, that that was important to them, that it remained in Heppner," he said. "So yes, we have in fact received word, and it is written, that there has been a change in opinion regarding that."

Wenzholz also said he thought it was the BOC's duty to represent the majority of the county's citizens. "That is the county's

role, is to be a service provider, and one of the best ways to provide good customer service is to provide the services where the customers are," Wenzholz said. "And when you have over 75 percent of the population—and that will continue to grow—located in the north end of the county, the services should be there."

Peterson echoed Sykes's earlier comments and said he also had been public in his support for keeping the circuit court building in Heppner and that he believed it was important for elected officials to keep their word.

"If we are going to be a body that people can trust, then we need to be consistent with what we say that we are going to do. And I'm going to hold with what I said I was going to do," he said.

The BOC voted 2-1 to repeal the siting of the circuit building in Boardman and move it back to the fairgrounds site in Heppner. Wenzholz was the dissenting vote.



Lunch & Dinner Menu

1/16 - 1/22

- Thursday** - Chili burger and curly fries
- Friday** - 2 beer battered cod & clam chowder
- Saturday** - popcorn shrimp salad & breadstick
- Sunday** - Sausage Egg English muffin with hashbrowns
- Monday** - Hot Roast Beef Sandwich w/ beef & barley soup
- Tuesday** - Grill Chicken Parmesan flatbread sandwich & macaroni salad
- Tuesday night** - 6-9pm \$2 hard shell tacos
- Wednesday** - Grilled cheese & broccoli soup



Barney Lindsay Scholarship Dinner & Auction

JANUARY 25, 2025
GILLIAM BISBEE BUILDING
HEPPNER, OR

Join us as we work to support students in all of Morrow County



5:00 Doors Open & Silent Auction
6:00 Dinner served
7:00 Live auction begins

TICKETS \$50 EACH

TICKETS ON SALE AT MURRAY'S DRUG IN HEPPNER OR
EMAIL KIMBERS97839@YAHOO.COM

Interested in helping with an auction item, please contact Ashley Lindsay, 541-379-4079, Erin Heideman, 541-561-0081, Beth Dickenson, 541-980-8677, Tiah Devin, 541-980-5436)