

Salem advances groundwater bill aimed at ‘pollution hotspots’

Morrow County responds to bill with concerns

By Andrea Di Salvo

Oregon legislators are advancing Senate Bill 1154, a sweeping proposal to overhaul how the state responds to groundwater pollution, despite concerns at the local level.

The bill, introduced in February and backed by Governor Tina Kotek, aims to establish clear thresholds for contamination and coordinate multi-agency responses in affected areas.

SB 1154 would allow the state to automatically designate “groundwater management areas” when contaminants like nitrates exceed safe levels.

Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott told the Morrow County Board of Commissioners (BOC) last month that a technical working group has been meeting with the governor’s staff for the past several months to provide input on various aspects of the bill.

While the bill may contain some well-intentioned steps to solve issues such as the nitrate pollution in North Morrow County, some aspects of the bill concern local stakeholders.

Mabbott said that, as written, the bill wouldn’t affect the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWA). However, that could change.

SB 1154 would affect future designations, as well as impacting the implementation of programs in the LUBGWMA.

It also authorizes environmental inspections, local advisory committees and infrastructure support—especially in rural zones—while restricting new development that the state says might worsen pollution.

Supporters, including environmental groups and public health advocates like Oregon Rural Action, argue the bill is essential for protecting communities where drinking water has become increasingly unsafe.

“This is a public health crisis in slow motion,” said

one supporter from the Oregon Environmental Council.

However, the bill faces opposition from rural property rights advocates who warn it could give state agencies too much authority, including the ability to inspect private wells and septic systems.

Critics also object to new limits on land-use decisions, calling them an overreach into local control.

With that in mind, Mabbott crafted a letter for the BOC’s approval, which outlined several concerns Morrow County had with the bill as drafted.

Among those concerns were funding sources, need for dedicated staff, worries over the exclusion of the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) in the process, severe restrictions on feedlots of any size, and metering on wells. Top of mind was the desire for more local input, which the original bill didn’t stress enough, Mabbott said.

“We’ve all seen over the past few years how state agencies, and even federal agencies...get really involved in policy making and rules without any direct input of local government,” said Mabbott.

The Morrow County BOC agreed with the concerns and unanimously approved the letter as a response to the bill. The Port of Morrow has so far remained neutral on the bill.

SB 1154 originated as a 100-page document. After a public hearing June 19 and a work session June 23, it has emerged as a 44-page document.

Some of the concerns put forward by Morrow County and other critics seem to have been addressed, such as the inclusion of the DLCD, while others seem to have been overlooked.

SB 1154 left the House Committee on Rules Monday with a recommendation to pass and was scheduled for further House hearings earlier this week.

Mueller named to George Fox University dean’s list

Leah Mueller of Irrigon was among those who earned dean’s list recognition at George Fox University for the spring 2025 semester.

Traditional undergraduate students must earn a 3.5 grade point average or above on 12 or more hours of graded work to earn a spot on the dean’s list.

Mueller is a sophomore majoring in biology.

George Fox University

is a Christian college classified by U.S. News & World Report as a “Best National University.”

More than 4,000 students attend classes at George Fox, which offers more than 60 undergraduate academic programs, accelerated online degree programs for working adults, six seminary degrees and 15 master’s and doctoral degrees.

Holly Rebekahs plan picnic and bingo this Sunday

Are you ready for a picnic?

In conjunction with its monthly Bingo, Holly Rebekah Lodge will be serving a picnic lunch on June 29 starting at 3 p.m. For only \$5, they will be serving a hot dog, baked beans, potato chips, and a Dixie cup.

Following lunch, at

approximately 3:30 p.m., Bingo will commence. For another \$5, a person may purchase a packet of Bingo cards good for 15 games.

People of all ages are welcome to come to one or both events. Come and enjoy the fun and food, and just maybe you will go home with a prize.

MCHD severance figures remain unclear

-Continued from PAGE ONE

zette-Times requested the correct figure from both individuals, but they have not provided it as of now.

In response to a public records request asking for salary amounts, MCHD responded that the request was received, and records are being prepared. While there is no doubt the request will be filled, it had not been as of press time Tuesday.

Both women’s separation agreements have been made public, and the Gazette-Times obtained copies through a public records request with MCHD.

Roberts’s package included 12 months’ worth of her current salary, including any scheduled salary increase, to be paid bi-weekly over a 12-month period with the option for Roberts to accelerate the payout for a lump sum of the remaining severance amount at any time and for any reason.

Additional compensation included employee benefits for the 12-month term regardless of whether the acceleration was used—five percent contribution to Roberts’s 401a retirement plan, Tri-County Ambulance Association membership, LifeFlight membership, accidental death and dismemberment insurance, long term disability insurance, and medical, dental and vision insurance benefits at no cost to Roberts.

She is also to receive the balance of any hourly wage accrued through the last day of employment and unused vacation time accrued through the last day of employment, though vacation and sick leave do not accrue after her employment ends.

Mahoney’s package was similar, but she receives 18 months of total compensation for her Chief Operating Officer salary along with Chief Financial Officer supplemental compensation, to be paid bi-weekly over an 18-month period. Mahoney also has the option to accel-

erate payment within the first year, but the maximum payout is limited to 12 months of compensation.

Mahoney also received a performance bonus of \$50,000 for her 28 years of service, wages and unused vacation time accrued through her resignation date of June 13, 2025, and 18 months of employee benefits, regardless of whether the acceleration option is exercised. Benefits include employer retirement contributions and family medical, dental and vision insurance. As with Roberts’s agreement, vacation and sick leave do not continue to accrue after Mahoney’s resignation.

An extra detail in Mahoney’s separation package includes a nine percent yearly compounded interest rate to be applied if MCHD stops severance payments without Mahoney’s consent.

However, with all these

details, the documents do not provide specific dollar figures for severance, accrued wages, vacation time or benefits, as these depend on the employee’s current salary, any scheduled increase, hours worked, accrued time and benefit costs.

Since the severance agreements obtained by the Heppner Gazette did not specify a total amount, the Heppner Gazette cannot verify either Wimer’s claim or Roberts’s and Mahoney’s assertion that the amount is inaccurate.

YOUR AD
COULD BE
HERE!

Submit Ads
heppner.net
Call
541-676-9228
Email
graphics@rapidserve.net

We also offer
design and
printing services

Heppner Gazette-Times
Sykes Printing

DEADLINE:
MONDAYS
AT 5PM

Spot On Septic – Reliable, Fast
&
Affordable!

Keep Your System Running
Spot On!

Serving Morrow County!
Septic Pumping, Maintenance, Inspections
& Repairs for Residential & Commercial
541-567-1015


service@spotonseptic.com
310 S Main St. Stanfield OR 97875

PUBLIC NOTICE

Town of Lexington Burn Ban

The Fire Chief of the Town of Lexington is imposing a closed season for the Town of Lexington for open burning effective Monday, June 16, 2025, until further notice. The ban includes all burning barrels and open burning.



Home of the Lexington Jack Rabbits!

IONE’S 4th of July Celebration

July 3rd

Ione Annual 4th of July Golf Tournament	Willow Creek Country Club in Heppner, OR	July 3rd at 9:00am
---	--	--------------------

July 4th

Fireman's Breakfast	Ione Fire Hall	7:00 -10:00 am
5k Walk/Run (\$10 Registration)	Ione City Park	7am Registration/ Walk starts at 7:30am
Horseshoe	Horseshoe Pits	Available all day
Cruz-in Car Show	Ione City Park	10:00 AM
Vendors & Booths	Ione City Park	11:00 AM
Fishpond, Bike Raffle	Fire Hall/Park	11:00 AM
Free Face Painting	Ione City Park	11:00 AM-5:00PM
Parade Grand Marshal:	Main Street	1:00 PM
Duck Race	Main Street	Following Parade
Laser Tag	Ione City Park	1:00PM-8:00PM
I/A Football Cornhole Tournament (\$20 entry)	Ione City Park	Registration 1:30, start time 2:00 PM
Dunk Tank & Ice Cream Social	Ione City Park	2:00-4:00 PM
BINGO	Legion Hall, 2nd Street	2:00-4:00 PM
Luke Basil	Amphitheater Stage	2:00-3:00 PM
Zac Grooms	Amphitheater Stage	3:30-4:30 PM
All American BBQ - \$5	Fire Hall	5:00-7:00pm
Miguel the Mysterious Magician	Amphitheater Stage	4:30-6:00pm
Featured Entertainment	Amphitheater Stage	6:30-10:00 PM

Cody Alan & The Crossroads (6:30 pm)

The Wade Aylett Band (8:30 pm)

Fireworks Display

Visible throughout Ione (weather permitting)

Dusk

All event, times and locations are subject to change

Ione’s 4th Of July Celebration is Sponsored in Part by Morrow County Unified Recreation District


Morrow County Unified Recreation District

WWW.HEPPNER.NET

SUBMIT NEWS, ADVERTISING & ANNOUNCEMENTS
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
SEND US PHOTOS
START A NEW SUBSCRIPTION