



New MCHD board members take the helm at July meeting

Burke is out, Houser is in as health district CEO

By Andrea Di Salvo

After a near clean sweep of the Morrow County Health District board in the May election, a new MCHD board took the helm and switched up the interim CEO at a special session July 2 in Lexington.

The four newly elected board members were inducted at the regular health district board meeting on June 30, but the July 2 special session was their first meeting as regular board members.

As the only remaining member of the previous board, Stephen Munkers took the role of acting chair through the election of new officers. Janet Greenup was elected board chair, with Russ Nichols as vice-chair, Jason Hanna as secretary and Annetta Spicer as treasurer.

Greenup then took over the gavel as new chair. After some brief housekeeping, the board members dived straight into the ongoing search for a new CEO for the health district.

Interim CEO Dennis Burke updated the board on the progress of the search for a new CEO. Burke’s



(L-R) Bob Houser as CEO pending, new board members Jason Hanna, Janet Greeneup and Russ Nichols. -Contributed Photo

main goal as interim CEO was to facilitate the search for a new CEO and ensure a smooth transition after the resignation of former CEO Emily Roberts.

Burke said that, within a relatively short amount of time, the health district had about 90 applicants, with about 20 who were “credible” and five to six who he said were “absolutely excellent candidates.”

However, he said the search had been paused to allow the new board to participate in the process.

“Then we had the board election with, basically, a complete changeover in the board,” said Burke. “We basically decided we probably need to put this on hold.”

He said they made the decision knowing there was a possibility they could lose some of the candidates if they waited.

“But we did, because we want this new board vested in the new CEO,” said Burke.

He also said he had reached out to the candidates, and the top individuals seemed understanding of the situation and remained interested. Not only were they interested in the position, he said, but also the location.

Faced with the question of how to proceed, Spicer said there was a lot of information the board needed before making any decisions.

Nichols agreed that the search for the CEO would not be a quick process.

“But in the meantime, we still need to be moving forward instead of being a little bit stagnant while we’re waiting,” he said.

Nichols said he felt Burke was a great CEO and had done what he was hired to do,”

“But I do not think what he was hired to do is what I feel needs to be done,” said Nichols.

Nichols then moved to ask Burke to step down as interim CEO and hire Bob Houser as CEO pending an acceptable contract. Houser has previously served as

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Fire danger increases to high in Northeast Oregon District



-Contributed Photo

The risk of wildfires is increasing rapidly due to warmer and drier weather. In response, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) for the Northeast Oregon District is implementing High Fire Restrictions on land they protect, effective at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, July 2, 2025.

The primary goal of these additional fire prevention measures is to reduce the risk of human-caused fires.

“Forecasts indicate that we will experience typical summer weather in the coming weeks, accompanied by elevated temperatures. Given these conditions and the escalating fire danger, we are enforcing stricter fire restrictions,” stated Justin Lauer, District Forester.

These restrictions affect private, state, county, municipal and tribal lands in Union, Baker, Wallowa, and Umatilla counties along with small portions of Malheur, Morrow and Grant counties within the Northeast Oregon Forest Protection District. This area encompasses approximately two million acres of

protected lands.

ODF encourages landowners and the public to help prevent accidental ignitions by taking extra precautions while recreating or working.

The Public Use Restrictions (High Fire Danger) include the following fire prevention measures:

- Open fires are prohibited, including campfires, charcoal fires, cooking fires and warming fires, except at designated locations.
- Portable cooking stoves using liquefied or bottled fuels are allowed.
- Propane fire pits are allowed if they are self-contained and 3 feet away from any flammable fuels with a maximum flame height of two feet.
- Non-industrial chainsaw use is prohibited from noon to 8 p.m.
- Non-industrial chainsaw use is allowed at all other hours if the following firefighting equipment is present with each operating saw: one shovel or other firefighting tool and one eight-ounce or larger fire extinguisher or one gallon of water. In addition, a fire watch is required at least one hour following the end

of chainsaw use.

- Electric Chainsaws are allowed all day.
- Cutting, grinding and welding of metal is prohibited from noon to 8 p.m. Cutting, grinding, and welding of metal is permitted at all other hours, if conducted in a 10-foot area cleared of flammable vegetation, and in possession of a shovel or other firefighting tool, a minimum of one gallon of water, or 2-½ pound or larger fire extinguisher.
- Mowing dried and cured grass with power-driven equipment is prohibited from noon to 8 p.m., except for the commercial culture and harvest of agricultural crops.
- Electric string trimmers are allowed all day.
- Any electric fence controller in use shall be: 1) Listed by a nationally recognized testing laboratory or certified by the Department of Consumer and Business Services; and 2) Operated in compliance with the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Possession of the following firefighting equipment is required for any vehicle/UTV/ATV traveling on unimproved roadways where flammable vegetation exists on roadway: shovel or other firefighting tool, minimum of one gallon of water, or 2-½ pound or larger fire extinguisher.

PROHIBITED:

- All open debris burning, and the use of burn barrels.
- Use of fireworks.
- Use of exploding targets.
- Use of tracer ammunition or any bullet with a

pyrotechnic charge in its base.

- Smoking while traveling, except in vehicles on improved roads, in boats on the water, or in a cleared area free of flammable vegetation.
- Use of sky lanterns is prohibited throughout the year in Oregon.

For further information, contact the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Current fire restrictions for forestlands in Northeast Oregon can be found at www.bmidc.org or by calling the Northeast Oregon Fire Prevention line, 541-975-3027.

<http://bluemountain-fireinfo.blogspot.com/is> your spot for current fire information in the Blue Mountains.

Find us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/oregondeptofforestryNEO/> Call Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch at 541-963-7171 or dial 9-1-1 to report a fire.

Ione 4th of July celebration in pictures page 7



Morrow County Dairy Princess Isabel Wedam rides in the Ione 4th of July parade. -Photo by Andrea DiSalvo

Vintage aircraft to land at Lexington July 16



Antique aircraft are touching down at the Lexington airport July 16. -Contributed photo

LEXINGTON, OR—Aviation enthusiasts and community members are invited to a special event at the Morrow County Lexington Airport on Wednesday, July 16, when the Puget Sound Antique Airplane Club touches down as part of its Northwest Air Tour 2025.

The event will run from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., offering visitors a rare chance to see beautifully restored

antique aircraft up close and meet the pilots who fly them.

Lexington’s Broken Spoke will be on-site serving lunch (cash only).

Organizers encourage attendees to come early to watch the planes land or stick around later in the afternoon to see the vintage take-offs—perfect moments for photos and conversation with fellow aviation fans.

Smith faces ethics investigation regarding CDA pay increase



Greg Smith

By Andrea Di Salvo

State Representative Greg Smith is again under investigation by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGE), this time for allegedly granting himself and staff unauthorized pay raises tied to a federal grant in his role as executive director for the Columbia Development Authority (CDA).

In a June 13 executive session, the ethics commission voted 6-0 to move forward with an investigation. The decision came

after OGE Compliance and Enforcement Coordinator Casey Fenstermaker reported that CDA employees, including Smith, wrote materials for a grant from the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC), including a proposed CDA budget that included pay increases for CDA employees.

The materials were developed in cooperation with OLDCC personnel and were then submitted by the Port of Morrow, the CDA’s fiscal agent at the time.

The grant application was approved by the OLDCC, and the budget that was included in the OLDCC grant application materials was subsequently approved by the CDA board. It was later discovered that the grant application included language that the employee pay increases were board approved.

“However, it appears

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