



EO FILE PHOTO

In this January 2016 file photo, Cuttie and Cuddles share a pen at PAWS animal shelter in Pendleton.

Pioneer Humane Society chases taxing district model

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

The Pioneer Humane Society wants Umatilla County voters to support a taxing district for animal control.

Ben DeCarlow of Hermiston, Pioneer Humane Society board treasurer, made the pitch Wednesday morning to the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners. He said a special taxing district with a rate of 10 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value would generate around \$500,000 for the organization to cover the cost of services.

Pioneer Humane Society operates the no-kill Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter, which took in 860 dogs and 1,430 cats in 2015 and 2016. DeCarlow said the society also operates programs to provide pet food for lower income pet owners and transportation for pets that need to be spayed or neutered.

He also told the board the nationwide animal control model is for counties to support humane societies. Without the steady stream of tax revenue, he said Pioneer Humane Society "would not be headed in a positive direction."

Marjorie Iburg, former Pendleton city councilor and former PAWS

board member, told commissioners the population "could be overwhelming" for the county if not for the Pioneer Humane Society. She said that a taxing district would include Hermiston, and the animal shelter there would receive tax revenue, possibly through a contract with Pioneer Humane Society.

Commissioners Bill Elfering and George Murdock voted to allow the group to proceed and seek the approval of local city councils. The commissioners noted that was how the Oregon State University Extension Service District had to get a resolution on the May 2018 ballot to consider forming a new taxing district.

On that note, the board held the first of two public meetings on the Extension Service District.

Dan Dorran of Hermiston, former Umatilla County Fair Board member, was among the handful of people who spoke in favor of the extension service district, along with local wheat producer Greg Goad. No one spoke against.

The board of commissioners approved a county-wide boundary for the extension district and set the second public hearing on the matter for Jan. 3.

Downtown Hermiston value increased by \$8 million

Hermiston's urban renewal district has increased in value by more than \$8 million during its first four years of existence.

The Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency began in 2014 to promote downtown Hermiston by re-investing property tax growth back into enhancements to the downtown core. The area covered by HURA has increased in value by 20 percent, from \$42.2 million to \$50.5 million.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said in a news release that much of the growth has come from the new Holiday Inn Express. HURA's revenue has increased by \$100,000 in the first year of the hotel's operation. The hotel was given a \$36,400 façade grant from HURA and \$50,000 for sewer improvements from the city of Hermiston.

Other investments of HURA back into downtown have also helped raise property values, including façade grants to various businesses and a private-public partnership with Mitco Investments to create a new 50-space parking lot open to the public.

"If the main goals of an Urban Renewal Agency are to increase the taxable value and eliminate barriers to new private investment, then I think we can safely say we're hitting it out of the park so far," Morgan wrote. The city plans to begin building a new festival street next to city hall using urban renewal funds this spring, and a new senior center being built is expected to draw more traffic downtown. Morgan said projects in the downtown area were about contributing to a "critical mass" of foot traffic.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY COLLEEN SANDERS

The Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition, or EOC3, participated in a clean energy jobs rally Nov. 4 in Pendleton, organized by Don Sampson and Renew Oregon to raise support for a proposed Oregon cap-and-invest energy policy.

Climate coalition gains momentum

Group born out of Umatilla County focus group

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO MEDIA GROUP

One year after becoming a formal nonprofit organization, the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition is ready to broaden its outreach on climate change issues affecting farms, forests, businesses and communities across the region.

The group, which goes by the shorthand EOC3, originally formed in 2006 as the Umatilla County Climate Change Focus Group, an ad hoc citizen's committee to discuss local climate impacts and how to adapt moving forward.

EOC3 filed for nonprofit status in January 2017, and its nine-member board of directors has produced a strategic action plan outlining goals and programs. That plan will be unveiled at the group's 2018 annual meeting Saturday, Jan. 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Oregon State University Extension Service conference room at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton. The meeting is open to the public.

Colleen Sanders, EOC3 board chairwoman and the newly hired climate adaptation planner for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, said their primary mission is to provide education and understanding about climate change, especially as it influences rural Eastern Oregon.

"So much of our human society has been built on the predictability of our climate and the seasonal weather patterns," Sanders said. "What climate change is doing is completely throwing a wrench in those."

Looking ahead to 2018, Sanders said EOC3 plans to host monthly luncheons and build a network of speakers versed in different aspects of climate change to promote a greater knowledge of the issues.

"The idea is to create a conversation space for climate change issues," she said.

Dave Powell, vice chairman of the EOC3 board and a retired silviculturist with the Umatilla National For-

est, gave a climate presentation Tuesday for students at Weston-McEwen High School in Athena. Though his main topic was forestry, Powell said the impacts kept coming back to one crucial element: water.

"When you think about all of the benefits and ecosystem services that a forest provides, it's becoming more and more clear to me that water is the most valuable," Powell said. "The webs that reach out from that are huge."

According to one climate model from OSU, average temperatures in the Blue Mountains could increase anywhere from 1 to 3 degrees Celsius over the next 75 years. The most obvious impact, Powell said, will be more moisture falling in the form of rain instead of snow. Lower snowpack, which is needed to replenish streams for farms and fish into summer, means faster runoff at higher elevations.

Bruce Barnes, EOC3 board member and executive director of the Pendleton-based nonprofit Flora ID, said studies show that peak water flow in the Umatilla River now comes 30 days earlier than it did in the 1980s.

"There are so many different factors to consider," Barnes said. "They're interwoven. Each one may affect several different factors, or vice-versa."

Less snow and more rain has already affected the timing of timber harvest, Barnes said, since loggers prefer to work when the ground is still frozen.

Don Wysocki, fellow EOC3 member and extension soil scientist for OSU in Umatilla County, said changes in snowpack and water availability will drive changes in local agriculture, pushing back irrigation seasons and ripening dryland crops earlier than usual.

"Harvest will occur earlier. Winters will probably get more heat units, so that changes the growth cycle of wheat," Wysocki said. "We'll probably favor wheat varieties that mature earlier to try to escape drought or water shortages."

There is some debate, Wysocki said, on how climate change may affect precipitation during the growing season, which could have a positive or negative effect on regional production.

"I've seen projections going both ways on that," he said. "But I suspect there's some evidence that we may have a little better growing season precipitation."

Sanders said she worries that changes in water avail-

ability may exacerbate existing conflicts between industries, such as irrigation and fisheries. The public has to start thinking about adaptation to ensure the long-term health of those resources, she said.

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