

Oregon DEQ raises Port of Morrow fine to over \$2.1 million

Local businesses offer help at Boardman Foods to deal with groundwater emergency

Hermiston Herald

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has increased the penalty against the Port of Morrow from \$1.3 million to a little more than \$2.1 million.

State environmental regulators levied the initial fines in January, accusing the port of excessively spreading nitrogen-rich wastewater as fertilizer on area farmland for years. DEQ announced in a statement Friday, June 17, the additional \$800,000 is "for additional violations involving over application of wastewater containing nitrogen to agricultural fields in the Lower Umatilla Basin, an area with longstanding groundwater contamination."

The Port of Morrow has been appealing the \$1.3 million in fines.

"The Port of Morrow recognizes groundwater contamination is a serious problem, and has been for decades," port Executive Director Lisa Mittelsdorf said. "The port believes this is a community problem that will require a community solution. By the DEQ's own analysis, the port's industrial wastewater reuse program is responsible for less than 5% of the area's nitrates. We will continue to work with DEQ to collaborate on a solution that will address what happens to industrial wastewater during winter months without shutting down the industries generating that wastewater."

According to the statement from DEQ, the Port of Morrow is one of many sources contributing to nitrate contamination in northern Morrow and Umatilla counties — an area known as the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area.

The primary source of contamination in the area, about 70%, is from fertilizer used on irrigated farmland, according to the management area's action plan. Additional contributors are dairy and cattle farms (about 20%), food processing facilities, such as the port that reuse wastewater to irrigate fields (about 5%) and residential septic systems and other sources (about 5%).

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AT THE SUMMIT

BY ERICK PETERSON • Hermiston Herald

For anyone wanting to meet some of Oregon's most influential government leaders, the 2022 Eastern Oregon Economic Summit was the place to be.

MAKING FRIENDS

Oregon legislators praise bipartisanism. **A10**

MERKLEY SPEAKS

Senator sees a federal role in solving local issues. **A11**

CANDIDATES

Gubernatorial hopefuls address potential voters. **A12**

COURTING VOTERS

Betsy Johnson meets locals at Hermiston restaurant. **A13**



Local officials and business owners gather Friday morning, June 17, 2022, at the Eastern Oregon Economic Summit in Hermiston. Yasser Marte/Hermiston Herald

LIGHTER SIDE



"Three Minutes with..."

Teres Fair opines on Echo and family. **A2**

LOCAL NEWS



Ready for wheelies

Umatilla students build wheelchair for 6-year-old boy. **A3**

COMMUNITY



Landing Days

Big plans set for Umatilla event. **A6**

The Eastern Oregon Women's Coalition organized the event, which took place Thursday and Friday, June 16 and 17. State Representative Bobby Levy is the president of the group, and she is one of the five founding members.

"I'm really excited," she said. "This is one of the dreams that we had."

According to Levy, 300 people paid ahead of the event so they could attend. She estimated on Friday that 250 individuals were present that morning.

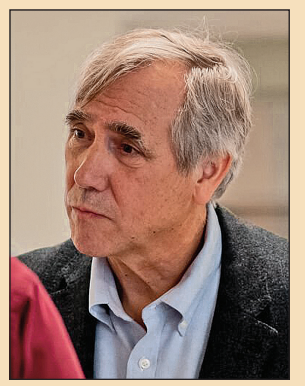
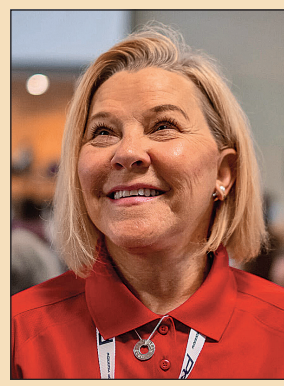
Hermiston Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan was among the attendees.

"I think it's awesome," he said. "Hats off to the Eastern Oregon Women's Coalition for the amazing work they've done."

Morgan said he was excited to see many state legislators, a U.S. senator and two of three gubernatorial candidates at the event. These people didn't just travel to town, go to the summit and leave, Morgan stated. Rather, the legislators toured the area, visited local businesses and met residents.

Maybe it was enough to give them a good picture of the region and its potential, he said.

He added that such events might not have seemed very special prior to the pandemic. Now that we have experienced isolation, he said, people have a sense that gatherings are



Yasser Marte/Hermiston Herald

State Rep. Bobby Levy of Echo, left, and co-founder of Eastern Oregon's Women Coalition, discusses the future of Eastern Oregon on Friday, June 17, 2022, at the Eastern Oregon Economic Summit. Levy and the coalition organized the event at Hermiston High School. Among those attending were Hermiston Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan, center, and Oregon's U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, right.

important; this is how we know one another and the issues we all face.

According to Morgan, he plans to tell the Hermiston City Council about his experience at the summit.

He stated that he had already been in regular contact with Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann, texting him during the summit. In these conversations, according to Morgan, Drotzmann said he had met with Sen. Jeff Merkley while the senator was in town.

Morgan said he had met at least one well-known politician, too. He visited with gubernatorial candidate Betsy Johnson during the summit.

"I made sure she got a 'thank you' for coming to Hermiston and getting her boots on the ground out here," Morgan said. "I think that it's important that when you have these people in town that you actually go out there and talk to them."

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EDUCATION



Carnegie Hall

Hermiston students perform in New York City. **A8**

OUTSKIRTS



Echo

Market attracts people for fun, food and commerce. **A9**

EASTERN OREGON



Economic Summit

Visiting legislators meet locals and tour the region. **A10-13**