

Merkley, Wyden, secure \$1.7M for water crisis

Hermiston Herald

Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley announced July 29 they secured \$1.7 million for Morrow County to address drinking water contamination in Boardman.

The money comes from the fiscal year 2023 Senate appropriations bill. Merkley, as chair of the Senate Interior Appropriations subcommittee, along with Wyden, identified the funding for this critical community-initiated project that will help residents of Morrow and Umatilla counties have greater access to clean drinking water.

Morrow County in a statement reported the funds will pay for the testing of wells and to study longer-term solutions and options for rural residents who rely on individual wells for their drinking water.

"This federal funding will help Morrow County move beyond the short-term nitrate emergency and help us work towards longer term solutions," Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said in a press release. "The senators' support during the nitrate emergency has been so valuable. This new source of significant funding will allow Morrow County to develop a standardized data and testing program to monitor rural wells and also study long term solutions to clean drinking water for rural residents."



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald, File

Ana Pineyro, Morrow County communicable disease and emergency preparedness coordinator, and Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty look at results from a rapid test July 14, 2022, on drinking water in a Boardman home. U.S. Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden announced July 29 they secured \$1.7 million for testing wells and to study longer-term solutions to the Boardman water problems and options for rural residents who rely on individual wells for their drinking water.

She also said she appreciated the collaboration with the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners. She and Umatilla County Commissioner Dan Dorran worked with staff from both counties to make the request for federal dollars.

Morrow County Commission Chair

Jim Doherty in the press release called the funding "welcomed support."

Doherty and staff have spent many hours the past few months directly involved in the emergency efforts to test water in households and provide them with clean drinking water. However, he said, "Morrow County will

continue to vigilantly push the state of Oregon for long-term, permanent support to remedy the negative health effects of high nitrate levels in rural domestic wells."

Morrow County Board of Commissioners on June 9 declared an emergency over the contamination. The move came in the wake of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in January issuing a \$1.3 million fine against the Port of Morrow in Boardman for years of violating its wastewater permit and allowing hundreds of tons of excess nitrogen onto area farmlands above the already contaminated basin. The DEQ on June 17 increased that fine to \$2.1 million.

"Since the emergency declaration, we are finally receiving attention and resources from state agencies," according to Doherty. "The Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area has been in place for almost 40 years and not until the declaration have we had support from the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality."

Morrow and Umatilla County have participated in the LUBGWMA volunteer committee since 1990 when the state declared the area due to high levels of nitrates. The LUBGWMA committee is in the process of implementing the Second Action Plan to reduce nitrate contamination from a number

of sources, septic systems, fertilizer, land application of wastewater, wash-out from the Umatilla Army Depot and feedlots, according to the press release. Funding for the LUBGWMA has been almost nonexistent, primarily in the form of a part-time employee to test a small sample of wells.

In addition to the LUBGWMA committee, Umatilla and Morrow counties, together with help from stakeholders, were able to secure direct legislative funding to more scientifically study the source of nitrate contamination, the press release stated. Known as the LUBGWMA Subcommittee, the bi-county effort soon will have an Oregon State University scientist working on a study of historical data.

Doherty also credited Lindsay for advocating for the research and her involvement in the subcommittee efforts.

"We are getting closer to where we need to be to address the short-term and long-term groundwater problems," he stated. "Our immediate priority is public health and ensuring rural residents have clean, safe, potable water. We remain vigilant however, in our commitment to study the sources of pollution and to seek long term remedies. We sincerely appreciate the support of Sen. Wyden and Sen. Merkley and their staff."

Boardman bans psilocybin, approves emergency medical services

BY JOHN TILLMAN

Hermiston Herald

Boardman City Council at its meeting Aug. 2 banned psilocybin manufacture and service centers in the city.

Rick Stokoe, assistant city manager and police chief, explained Resolution No. 17-2022 further referred prohibition of the hallucinogenic fungal drug

to voters on the November general election ballot. Umatilla County, Pendleton and Hermiston previously adopted bans on psilocybin and referred them to the electorate.

While Oregon voters statewide approved psilocybin manufacture and service in 2020, Umatilla and Morrow County opposed the measure by nearly

two to one. The law allows cities, counties and other local jurisdictions to ban psilocybin production and distribution within their boundaries, if approved by voters.

Morrow County staff drafted an ordinance in July to implement a psilocybin ban and refer the matter to the voters. The county board had previously

expressed its desire to refer to voters whether psilocybin manufacturing and centers should be allowed in the county.

The board held a public hearing July 13 on the ordinance and adopted it, banning psilocybin manufacture and service in the county. Referring the matter to the voters is on the agenda for the Aug. 10 meeting, Morrow County

District Attorney Justin Nelson said.

Stokoe also said the adopted an intergovernmental agreement for emergency medical services between the city and Boardman Fire Rescue District.

"Boardman Fire and Rescue doesn't yet have a transport license," Stokoe said, "but will provide EMS response for the city."

Sheriff's Office catches homicide, kidnapping suspect

Hermiston Herald

Morrow County sheriff's deputies the night of Thursday, Aug. 4, caught a Washington homicide and kidnapping suspect.

Franklin County Sheriff's Office in Washington reported its deputies the evening of Aug. 4 received a third-party report of a missing female who may have been dead in the area of First Avenue in the hamlet of Mesa, Washington.

Deputies found the body near a residence and discovered two children younger than 12 were missing from the home and likely in danger.

"Deputies quickly suspected foul play and detectives were activated," according to the Franklin County Sheriff's Office.

That night at about 11:30 p.m. Morrow County sheriff's deputies near Irrigon located a vehicle related to the

homicide and kidnapping investigation in Mesa. Inside the vehicle, deputies discovered a suspect and the two missing children, who were unharmed.

Deputies took the female suspect into custody, Franklin County also reported, and she will make an initial court appearance in Oregon.

The sheriff's office handed over the two children to the Oregon Department of Human Services until authori-

ties can locate their relatives. The Washington State Patrol Crime Scene Response Team will be assisting detectives with processing the crime scene in Mesa, and Oregon State Police is assisting with the vehicle in Irrigon.

Franklin County Sheriff's Office also asked anyone with information related to this case to contact detectives at 509-405-5131 or 509-792-2448.

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