

OHS seeks \$800,000 to help Boardman

Morrow County Commissioner pushes back on claims about what the state is doing

BY PHIL WRIGHT

Hermiston Herald

Boardman residents needing better water filters and more well testing due to nitrate contamination could get state help this fall.

The Oregon Health Authority plans to ask the Legislature's Emergency Board in September for \$800,000 to help address the water crisis in northern Morrow County.

Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty, however, sought a bigger contribution from the state.

Doherty on Aug. 11 sent a letter to Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepner, to ask the governor and Emergency Board for \$4 million in the Oregon Health Authority or Oregon Department of Environmental Quality budgets to "implement an in-depth and culturally relevant community outreach, education and communications strategy to address immediate, short term and on-going public health efforts in the Lower Columbia Basin as a result of high and extremely high nitrate levels in domestic wells."

Doherty said since he made that request, Smith reported Gov. Kate Brown requested \$800,000 for well water monitoring and better filters.

THE NEED FOR BETTER FILTERS

Erica Heartquist is the communication officer for OHA's Public Health Division. She explained Morrow County and its partners have distributed point-of-use water filters — that is, systems that attach to a drinking water tap in the home — that don't filter out enough nitrates.

"Post-installation testing of several systems by Morrow County found that all systems reduced nitrates, but some did not reduce levels below the Environmental Protection Agency health advisory level of 10 milligrams per liter of water," according to Heartquist. "Such systems may also reduce other common domestic well water contaminants, such as bacteria and lead. OHA's request to the legislative Emergency Board will be for point-of-use water filtration systems that are specifically certified to reduce nitrates to levels at or below 10 mg/l."

The Oregon Legislature convenes Sept. 21-23 for legislative days. Heartquist said OHA expects the Human Services Subcommittee of the Joint Emergency Board to consider the request on Sept. 21. If the subcommittee gives the OK, it goes before the full Emergency Board for consideration Sept. 23.

Doherty said most of the filters the county has installed are doing the job, with more than 90% of homes testing at below 10 mg/l two weeks after installation. The kinds of filters the state is looking at buying cost



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald, File

Tory Uskoski, Blue Mountain Plumbing plumber, adjusts a newly installed filter July 14, 2022, in a Boardman home. The new filters, however, might not remove enough nitrates from contaminated wells to reach the Environmental Protection Agency's standard of 10 milligrams per liter of water. Two weeks after initial installations, more than 90% of the filters are meeting the standard.

\$1,500-\$1,800 each, he said, and he has some concerns if the filters can get to a stricter level of milligrams per liter requirement in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area in Morrow and Umatilla counties.

"We're worried a little bit because in the LUBGWMA, the trigger is 7," he said.

Oregon Health Authority has estimated there are approximately 4,500 domestic wells in the area serving about 12,000 household members.

INSTALLATION IS WEEKS AWAY

Republican Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena serves on the Emergency Board as does Rep. Smith. Hansell explained the

board does just what its name says — address emergencies state agencies could not have planned for.

"A way to describe it is this is the state of Oregon's contingency fund," he said.

Hansell also said he recently spoke with the governor, and she also is working on allocations for Echo due to the flooding there and for Wallowa County because of the sudden storm Aug. 11 that damaged property, injured people and killed livestock.

The requests for emergency funds come from the governor's office or state agencies, he said, not from legislators.

"They have to come from a budgeted agency," he said.

DOHERTY CALLS OUT THE STATE

Doherty also said he is concerned that state agencies could use the crisis in Morrow County to seek funds from the Emergency Board and then use that money for additional staff outside the county. And he said he took issue with OHA in a July 7 letter to the EPA claiming it was ramping up efforts to help Morrow County, including with "linguistically appropriate outreach and education to low-income households about nitrate contamination; a detailed hazard assessment of nitrate data and demographic analysis of impacted communities; domestic well water testing; and, for well users with elevated nitrate concentrations, alternative drinking water or drinking water treatment options."

Doherty said that letter raised his hackles.

"Frankly, they've done none of the above," he said.

Likewise, the state's claims it is working with Morrow County and its partners don't carry much water with him.

"I sure as hell don't know where they've been," he said. "I haven't seen them."

Doherty also said it was time for the state to "Get your butts out there and do something, and pay us back."

By the time the Emergency Board meets, he estimated Morrow County will have spent at least \$500,000 since June 9, when the county board of commissioners declared an emergency due to the water contamination.

Suspect, bystander shot in attempted casino robbery

BY ANTONIO ARREDONDO AND MARCO GRAMACHO

Hermiston Herald

The suspect in the robbery and shootout earlier this week at Wildhorse Resort & Casino near Pendleton tried to steal \$1 million.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon in a press release Friday, Aug. 19 reported Javier Francisco Vigil, 51, a local man, walked straight to the cashier cage in the gaming area on Aug. 17 and handed the cashier a note demanding \$1 million.

"Vigil then drew a holstered pistol," according to the press release, "pointed it at the cashier and threatened to 'bathe everyone in blood.'"

Instead of the \$1 million, Vigil got almost \$70,000 in cash before making his exit, when he then pointed his gun at a Umatilla Tribal Police Department officer who was responding to the robbery and fired.

Vigil suffered injuries in an ensuing exchange of gunfire before police took him into custody.

He made his initial appearance in federal court in Portland on Aug. 19 before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jolie A. Russo. Federal prosecutors charged Vigil with committing a Hobbs Act robbery and using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence.

The Hobbs Act is a federal law from 1946 that further criminalizes robbery or extortion. A conviction under the Hobbs Act can mean a prison sentence of up to 20 years.

The court ordered Vigil to remain in custody pending further court proceedings. He now is an inmate at the Multnomah County Jail, Portland.

CAUGHT IN THE GUNFIRE

Wildhorse is on the Umatilla Indian Reservation several miles east of Pendleton. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla

Indian Reservation reported the Umatilla Tribal Police Department at 1:04 p.m. responded to a report of a robbery in action at Wildhorse. Vigil was not the only one to take a bullet.

The Pendleton School District reported some of its staff were at Wildhorse and a school event.

"Several members of our staff witnessed the incident," according to the district, "and one staff member was injured."

The district did not identify the staff member.

CTUIR Board of Trustees Chair Kat Brigham in a statement the morning of Aug. 19 reported the bystander is expected to make a full recovery.

WITNESSES RECOUNT EVENTS

Matt Waggoner was one of the people standing by the entrance to the casino on a video call with his son when he saw a police car roar up to the entrance of the food court hundreds of feet away. He said an officer stepped out of the vehicle and began yelling for everyone to get down and put their hands up.

"It was all so sudden," Waggoner said.

The Athena resident said he saw the robber emerge from the doors, firing away at the officer. After exchanging gunfire, Waggoner said the gunman appeared to be hit on his right side before crumpling to the ground.

He also captured about 20 minutes of footage of the shooting and subsequent action on his phone.

Danielle McClelland said she was on her way to an afternoon work retreat when she witnessed the shooting. At the time, she was waiting for her father to pick her up.

"The shooting happened so fast. I couldn't see much. I heard so many shots," she said.

There were 13 bullet casings in the area behind the officer's

car and at least three bullet casings on the gunman's side.

Along with Waggoner, other bystanders filmed the shooting. Police asked one to stay back to provide evidence. The man, who wanted to remain anonymous, said he was waiting for a transfer bus to Hermiston for an appointment when the shooting happened. His statement corroborated at least part of Waggoner's recount.

"(The gunman) came towards the officer shooting," the man said. "It was surreal to see that and being able to film it. Luckily I had my phone in my hand because I was shaking."

The man also said he posted the video to Facebook.

All three witnesses commented on how quick the violent encounter was and how fast police arrived. Waggoner said three police cars were at the scene in short order and Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police also arrived.

CTUIR OFFICIALS REACT

The confederated Umatilla tribes reported approximately 20 police were on site after the shooting, including tribal police and FBI.

Wildhorse in a statement reported ambulances took both the suspect and the bystander to St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton.

"We are grateful no one else was physically injured with all that took place," according to Wildhorse CEO Gary George. "Security personnel and Tribal Police were quick to act and the situation was controlled in a swift manner."

He also credited Wildhorse staff, saying, "The way the cashiers and everyone handled the situation was exemplary."

Members board of trustees were at the casino attending a lunch with a guest when the robbery attempt and shootout occurred. Brigham in her state-

ment said the "scary event has been far ranging for everyone involved" and the tribes' policy and procedures are there to protect people.

"Our staff, the tribal police, our casino security and our gaming commission did a great job in making sure everyone was safe," she said.

Brigham also stated Yellow-

hawk Tribal Health Center is providing mental health counseling and resources to those who may need it.

"We understand how trauma affects each individual differently and we want to make sure our employees have the resources they need," according to Brigham. "The Tribe will continue efforts to improve our se-

curity, emergency response and communications to protect our tribal members, community, employees and guests."

CTUIR also reported Umatilla Tribal Police is leading the investigation with the assistance of the FBI and local and state law enforcement agencies.

— East Oregonian news editor Phil Wright contributed to this report.



NATIONAL SALES EVENT

CHOOSE FROM 12 OF YOUR FAVORITE NEW 2022 TOYOTA MODELS

CAMRY, CAMRY HYBRID, COROLLA, COROLLA HATCHBACK, COROLLA HYBRID, HIGHLANDER, HIGHLANDER HYBRID, RAV4, RAV4 HYBRID, TACOMA, TUNDRA & TUNDRA HYBRID

2.9%

APR FINANCING

60

MO.

WITH \$17.92 PER \$1,000 BORROWED



TUNDRA



TACOMA



HIGHLANDER



RAV4

[TOYOTA.COM](https://www.toyota.com)

See Your Local Toyota Dealer



ToyotaCare

Excludes Tacoma TRD Pro models. Prototypes shown with options. Prototypes shown with options. Extra-cost colors shown. Offers end 9/6/2022. APR on approved credit from Toyota Financial Services. 2.9% APR financing for 60 months with \$17.92 per \$1,000 borrowed. Annual Percentage Rate available to buyers with approved Tier 1+ through Tier 1 (excellent) credit. All offers subject to approved credit, see dealer for more information. Cannot be combined with other offers. Offer available in AK, ID, MT, OR, WA regardless of buyer's residency; void where prohibited. Does not include College Grad or Military Rebate. Does not include taxes, license, title/registration fees, dealer fees and Oregon tax (.05%). ToyotaCare covers normal factory scheduled maintenance for two years or 25,000 miles, whichever comes first. Certain models require a different maintenance schedule as described in their Maintenance Guide. 24-hour Roadside Assistance is also included for two years, unlimited mileage. Roadside Assistance does not include parts and fluids, except emergency fuel delivery. See Toyota dealer for details and exclusions. Valid only in the continental U.S.

Investigation continues seeking cause of Pendleton flour mill fire

BY DAKOTA CASTETS-DIDIER

Hermiston Herald

PENDLETON — Investigators continue working to determine what sparked the fire more than a week ago that tore through the Grain Craft flour mill in Pendleton as well as plans for the future of the burnt out building itself.

Assistant Chief Anthony Pierotti with the Pendleton Fire Department said a structural engineer came Wednesday, Aug. 17, a week after the fire, and Grain Craft "is going to find a

demolition company."

Pierotti also said an investigation is ongoing as to the cause of the fire. The fire department continues to keep a firetruck on-site to "knock down" the smoke and combat any potential flare-ups.

"All is status quo," he said.

Although the situation has remained unchanged, roads surrounding the mill have steadily reopened, and Grain Craft dispatched members of its leadership team to walk the site last week.

James Reeder, owner of the Outlying Perspective, a drone operator from Athena, flew a specialized drone on Aug. 17 on behalf of Grain Craft into and over the mill to create a 3D model of the building to help determine its structural integrity and to find any remaining hot spots.

A timeline for demolition has yet to be established, but there are discussions of opening an on-site asbestos testing facility, according to Pendleton Buildings Official Ty Woolsey.