

The INDEPENDENT

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Spring is in the air



From robins to scrub jays to this pair of bald eagles at Vernonia Lake, avian nesting activity declares spring is near, no matter what the temperature may be.

Drainage problems swamping Mist Drive properties

The Vernonia City Council heard from two Mist Drive residents, at their Feb. 21 meeting, who said that they and another homeowner have a drainage problem because of stormwater runoff coming down from Heather Lane. They feel the problem should be addressed by the city because building through the years has been filling in natural creeks that should have handled the water that now collects on the three properties.

City Administrator Robyn Bassett said the city wants to look into the Heather Lane drainage and will have the city consultants, Kennedy/Jenks, look into the issue to move toward a solution in partnership with the property owners.

A work session was held on the wastewater facility upgrade project. Preston Van Meter, PE and Jennifer Coker, PE, both from consultants Kennedy/Jenks, told council that the current cost of the upgrades is es-

timated at \$9.6 million, the city has a Community Development Block Grant for \$1 million of that amount and is looking for other funding options to further reduce the cost to citizens. In the meantime, to get the project underway, the city will obtain a loan from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality at 3.4 percent interest with a 20 year payback. Options for funding the project include a General Obligation Bond measure on

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Counties, state concerned about federal budget cuts

Federal budget cuts for 2007 are a major concern for every state in the U.S. and for all Oregon counties.

Cuts would be made in hundreds of domestic discretionary programs across the budget, including numerous programs to assist low-income families, children, and elderly and disabled people, education programs, environmental protection programs, and research related to cancer, heart disease, and other medical conditions.

Some specific areas of concern are a reduction in the federal Medicaid match, which would result in a loss approximately \$24 million dollars for Oregon seniors and people with disabilities, combined with a reduction of about \$45 million/year for nursing homes and Medicaid.

Other programs would be terminated, among them the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, which provides nutritional food packages for less than \$20 a month to more than 400,000 low-income elderly people, one-third of whom are over age 75.

Deep cuts are included for Section 202 housing for the low-income elderly, with a 26 percent cut below the 2006 level and a 50 percent cut in Section 811 housing for low-income people with disabilities.

Law enforcement funds would also be reduced, with a 79 percent cut in Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).

A specific worry for Oregon Counties is the Secure Rural

Schools and Community Self Determination Act, which would replace PL106-393 payments to offset the loss of forest receipts, reducing federal forest payments to counties by about 50 percent in 2007 and end in five years.

According to Commissioner Joe Corsiglia, Columbia County received \$1,990,675.00 under the Forest Payments program last year and will receive approximately the same amount this year, assuming 10 percent will come from forest harvest. Commissioner Corsiglia says there's no realistic way to replace that revenue.

"Since property tax rates have been permanently capped, we can't make up the loss of the Federal funds with revenue we don't have," Corsiglia said.

"Critical and vital county services from human and veterans services to road maintenance and construction projects will have to be eliminated or cut back."

The Oregon Congressional delegation has expressed determination to seek renewal of PL106-393.

Nearly time for St. Patrick's Day Parade

Anyone feeling "Irish" in Vernonia on March 17, St. Patrick's Day, is invited to join the St. Patrick's Day parade. There is no entry fee.

Participants will gather at 5:15 p.m. outside the home of the parade's founder, Pat Knight, at the corner of State Avenue and Bridge Street. The parade goes from there along Bridge Street to downtown. The parade is short – and a lot of fun.



Local teen will join Northwest Medical Team for project in Mexico. Please see page 10