

Board of Commissioners Special Meeting
July 24, 2024
Irrigon Government Center
Irrigon, Oregon

Present In-Person Chair David Sykes, Commissioner Jeff Wenholz, Commissioner Roy Drago Jr., Matthew Jensen, Valerie Ballard, Corey Sweeney, Kevin Ince, Tamra Mabbott; Non-Staff: Curtis Cutsforth, Sandra Rice

Present Via Zoom Gregory Goebel, Sandi Proctor, Vince Guerrero, Tami Ewing; Non-Staff: Brenda Proffitt, Lisa Pratt

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance 9 a.m.

Chair Sykes made the following statement in regard to the recent Commissioner recall election: *"As Chair of the commission I am very pleased with the outcome of the election, the people have spoken. Morrow County has a bright future, and I hope now that we all come together to build a great place for ourselves and our children."*

Public Comment No comments

Open Agenda

Commissioner Wenholz added Resolution R-2024-15 Requesting a State of Wildfire Emergency for Morrow County and a Columbia Development Authority (CDA) update

Business Items

Lake Penland Corporation – Ellis Integrated Vegetation Project

Curtis Cutsforth, Lake Penland Corporation President; Sandra Rice, Secretary

The Ellis Integrated Vegetation Project (Ellis Project), is a proposed project meant to restore forest health, reduce fire risk, improve wildlife habitats, and provide timber in the Heppner and North Fork John Day Ranger Districts of the Umatilla National Forest.

The Lake Penland Corporation (LPC) is a non-profit organization composed of landowners in the Lake Penland area with 25 landowners within Ellis Project boundaries. In 2023, LPC became a Firewise Community for wildfire preparedness and prevention. Being within the Ellis Project boundary, LPC members will be affected by the project and would like the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed plans. Public comment on the Ellis Project closed in 2022, but the Forest Service provided the opportunity for LPC's letter to be added to comments previously submitted.

In 2019, the Board of Commissioners submitted a comment letter to which LPC is requesting theirs be added. The Ellis Project outlines five alternatives for the project with varying amounts of road closures and vegetation thinning. Of those five alternatives, LPC prefers a combination Alternative 5's thinning and fuel breaks with Alternative 3's road closures. The Forestry Service has received comments in support of Alternative 5 from various entities such as hunting clubs and logging corporations, however some of the roads included in the closures are used year round by Lake Penland residents and LPC believes those closures would negatively impact fire escape routes making catastrophic situations worse.

After review of the original comment letter approved by the Board in 2019 and the letter by LPC, it was decided that LPC would update their letter to say they prefer the closures of Alternative 3, rather than Alternative 2 as stated in the letter provided in the meeting packet.

Commissioner Drago motioned to direct staff to work with the Penland Lake Group and Forest Service and getting a letter attached to the Board of Commissioners letter so they can get it in before the deadline authorize Chair to sign. Commissioner Wenholtz seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval

Columbia River Enterprise Zone III (CREZ III) Area of Influence

Matthew Jesen, County Administrator

It was discovered that the City of Irrigon had not finalized its Area of Influence within CREZ III. The Intergovernmental Agreement will finalize Irrigon's Area of Influence which is similar to areas of influence for the other cities in CREZ III. The IGA will be presented to the Port of Morrow Board of Commissioners for approval and signature as well.

Commissioner Wenholtz motioned to approve City of Irrigon's Area of Influence. Commissioner Drago seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval

County Weed Management Approach: Energy Related Projects

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

With so many energy projects in County, weed mitigation and management has become a much more extensive task, taking more and more of the Weed Control Supervisor's time. Corey Sweeney, Weed Control Supervisor, has had discussions with other counties and Oregon Department of Energy (ODOE) regarding how they approach weed management for energy projects. For example, Sherman County, southwest of Morrow County, has an agreement with several wind projects with Wheeler County spraying those sites for weeds. As Morrow County does not wish to take jobs from private applicators, this is not the preferred approach. Permit fees were also brought up as an option to offset costs of additional personnel.

At this time, County lacks a cohesive plan for weed management with energy projects. Weed management plans for large-scale energy projects have proven to be insufficient and the hours needed for oversight and management are overwhelming the Weed Department. There is also a circular problem that when weeds become an issue at energy sites, landowners are going to County which in turn, County issues notices to the landowner. As ODOE is the agency responsible for tracking weed management compliance for projects approved by the Energy Facility Siting Counsel (EFSC), it's not a part of the County's responsibility to check for compliance or enforce it. However, staff are facing issues with non-compliance and working to find solutions as non-compliance negatively effects neighbors.

Staff were directed to explore and flesh out the permit process and push ODOE on compliance issues.

Resolution R-2024-15 Request to Declare State of Emergency and Fire Update

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

828,172 acres have burned in Oregon so far from wildfires. Over 240,000 of those acres are in Morrow County and as much of what is burning is outside of rural fire district protection, Chair Sykes has signed a Delegation of Authority (DOA) authorizing State to direct fire response and evacuations. Firefighters have base camp at the fairgrounds and the OHV Park. Sheriff Bowles has requested a declaration of State of Emergency as these fires exceed local resource abilities. The Commission is asked to make a resolution in order to utilize state and federal funding.

Commissioner Drago motioned to accept R-2024-15 declaring a State of Wildfire Emergency. Commissioner Wenholtz seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval.

Columbia Development Authority (CDA) Update

Jeff Wenholtz, County Commissioner

CDA met yesterday with two items on the agenda. The vote to reaffirm the action of March 26 to transfer property in Morrow County to Port of Morrow and property in Umatilla County to Port of Umatilla passed 3-2 with both ports and Morrow County representation voting in the affirmative and Umatilla County and Confederate Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) voting no.

JD Tovey from CTUIR motioned to enter into mediation pausing the lawsuit and pausing land transfers for 30-45 days. That motion failed 2-3 with CTUIR and Umatilla County voting for, Morrow County and both ports voting against.

A lease was brought forward for 55 acres of property in Umatilla County which would amount to \$42,000 a month to the CDA for five years. This was voted on and approved. The tile will eventually turn over to Port of Umatilla which will then receive the income.

Adjourn

11:47 a.m.