

Payette County bides time on eclipse ‘disaster’

There will be a disaster here all right, but giving it official status can wait.

Payette County is not in any hurry to pass an emergency declaration in anticipation of unfunded expenses and shortages of resources during the days leading up to the Aug. 21 solar eclipse, but the county will probably take that step, eventually.

Neighboring Washington County has already passed a declaration.

“Payette County hasn’t yet filed a declaration,” Payette County Sheriff’s Lt. Andy Creech, who is in charge of the county’s emergency management, said Monday. “I do anticipate that I will be asking the [county] commission to do that prior to the solar eclipse, but right now there’s really no advantageous reason for Payette County to do that this early.”

Creech said he has been alerting local governments and emergency responders to the need to start tracking their eclipse-related costs, however, some of which can be determined in advance. The drill may feel familiar to these people, who not long ago tracked costs for measures taken during the disastrously snowy winter.

As tens of thousands of visitors are expected to flock to the area for the solar eclipse, Washington County Commissioners passed an Emergency Declaration last week in preparation for what’s to come in the days surrounding Aug. 21.

With the declaration, officials hope to address a number of concerns when a multitude of visitors are expected to travel to the city of Weiser and throughout Washington County.

Their top priorities include dealing with a shortage of porta potties and only having limited space for waste disposal.

“It’s going to overwhelm local resources and we want to be in a position where we can get help if needed. It’s a matter of being proactive,” said Steve Penner, public information officer for Washington County Disaster Services.

The declaration was effective immediately upon filing and will go until the end August 31.

The resolution states the “solar eclipse may cause risk to public safety, financial damage, excess cost for labor, cleanup, and [primarily public] property damage in Washington County,” per a news release from Washington County Disaster Services.

Out of an abundance of caution, commissioners passed the resolution in order to make possible state assistance if at any point local agencies are not able to handle situations with their own resources, according to the release.

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“Commissioners are just looking for any type of resource, there really aren’t any specifics. It could be money or equipment depending on the circumstances,” Penner said.

Top concerns for local officials and department heads include an increase of vehicles overwhelming transportation corridors, lack of proper sanitation facilities for the number of people expected as well as a possible loss of communication abilities if networks are overwhelmed by users, as stated in the news release.

Penner adds that a shortage of porta potties combined with the existence of only two RV dumps is what commissioners are most concerned about.

As the projected number of visitors continued going up and up, Penner said officials wanted to be sure they could get additional help if it’s needed.

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