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MILTON-FREEWATER

**New water control board steps up to the plate
Group hopes levee solution still possible**

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Four men in Milton-Freewater have volunteered to serve on the water control board, offering those wanting to fix the levee system a ray of hope.

In December, the five-person board resigned when the board members learned they couldn't get insurance to protect themselves if the board was sued.

Larry Givens, Umatilla County Commissioner, Linda Hall, Milton-Freewater city manager and Dick Townsend, the leader of the Oregon Solutions group trying to fix the levee system, worked to find both insurance and replacement board members.

As of this week, Givens said four men had applied for the position: Sam Hopkins-Hubbard, Brad Humbert, Roger Cosner and Manford Anliker. Humbert and Hopkins-Hubbard are also city councilors. They will hold an organizing meeting and start in their role as water control board members on Feb. 24.

"They're gung ho and willing to serve," Givens said.

Which is precisely why Cosner said he volunteered.

"I assure you, I am going to dig and I'm going to try, and I'm hoping that we people in Milton-Freewater can get ourselves out of this mess," he said.

The mess is the damage to the levee system. The water control board, which was supposed to maintain the levees, has been unable to do so with its limited budget. The Army Corps of Engineers deemed the levees unsatisfactory and the Federal Emergency Management Agency has redrawn the flood maps in the area as if the levees didn't exist. People in Milton-Freewater are now trying to fix it, and Cosner now counts himself among them.

"I live right next to the river, we're affected by it," he said. "I want to see if I can help."

Meanwhile, Townsend contacted the Special Districts Association of Oregon, which usually insures groups like the water control board. He asked it to issue limited liability insurance to the board, and it agreed to do so.

The water control board isn't totally covered. If there is a flood, those on the board could still be held liable. But the insurance covers them for other instances.

"If somebody is walking or biking on the riprap and falls into the river, that sort of liability would be covered," Townsend said. "Or if they're burning blackberry bushes and the fire gets away and burns a shed, it would be covered."

Givens commended the men who stepped up to save the board.

"These four individuals are well aware of the risk," he said. "Admirably they've stepped up in the community, they want to see this problem get solved."

Cosner is aware of the risk, but rather than worrying about liability insurance, he's more concerned about the insurance his neighbors will need to pay if the FEMA maps go through.

"A friend of mine said they told him his insurance will be nearly \$200 a month on his home because he lives over next to the river," Cosner said. "He's going to pay nearly \$200 a month flood insurance - \$2400 a year. We don't know if we need that insurance."



Damage to the Milton-Freewater levee system in areas like this one below Nursery Bridge caused the Milton-Freewater Water Control Board to lose insurance and the board members to resign. The board has regained some insurance and four new board members will begin serving this month.

Staff photo by Samantha Bates