

# Hard winter doubles county Road Dept.'s usual expense to clear snow and ice

Submitted by GARFIELD COUNTY ENGINEER GRANT MORGAN

Garfield County would like to thank our community for bearing with us during this very difficult winter season. Winter conditions have hit our community hard. We would like to extend special thanks to Mike Ledgerwood for bringing pizza lunch in to the crew and thanks to all of you who have called, emailed, stopped by the shop, sent cards and goodies. We appreciate getting feedback from our community, especially when it is positive.

So far, from December 1 to January 20, Garfield County Road Department has expended more than \$270,000 total dollars and 550 man hours of overtime on Snow and Ice. In a typical year, Garfield County budgets to expend approximately \$130,000. So far in 2017, as of January 20, the county has expended \$93,600 not including the cost of fuel.

During a typical county-wide snow event, Garfield County deploys 11 operators, who operate 4 road graders, 2 front end loaders and 5 tandem axle trucks with sanding boxes and plows. We maintain 134 miles of paved roadway and 251 miles of gravel roadway. On a good day, when the wind is not blowing, causing the snow to drift, the road graders can each cover 25 miles of road for a total of 100 miles. The 5 trucks cover 134 miles of the paved road system and sometimes, if conditions are right and we won't damage the gravel road, we can utilize our trucks on the gravel roads also.

There are a significant number of variables that effect how we may approach or alter our day to day operations. Our priorities are emergencies first, school bus routes second, mail routes third and lastly the remaining rural road system. If we have a major county wide storm event and the wind starts blowing and drifting the snow, it can become all but impossible to keep the road system open for any length of time. Our operators face extremely dangerous conditions every day, including driving in zero visibility and white out conditions. There are times where operators have no idea where the road is in front of them. Also, the wind and blowing snow can be so bad that the road drifts shut an hour after a plow passes by.

Just think back to the last 20 or 30 years and look at how much our county rural road system has improved. Since 2003, we have made significant road and safety improvements, including but not limited to reconstructing and widening many miles of roadway as well as the adding fog striping and roadside delineators on our paved road system. If you take a look at other rural county roads, outside of Garfield County, you will notice most of them do not have fog stripes or delineators. A delineator costs the county \$23 each installed and we budget approximately \$45,000 each year for striping.

In 2012, the wind project taxes came online to the county. As a result, we have been able to significantly improve our level of ser-



County equipment operator Willie Ruchert clearing Lewis Rd. south of the city.

Photo provided by Grant Morgan.

vice. Prior to that, we struggled financially just trying to maintain our road system to a minimum standard. In fact, many years, we were forced to defer a significant amount of maintenance activities, including deferring graveling and seal coating programs.

We are very fortunate to be living in the rural Northwest. Many of us have all but forgotten the kind of winters we used to have, where many rural residents were guaranteed to be snowed in for weeks at a time. Granted some of us were not around back then so you will have to take our word for that. And, occasionally, every 7 years or so, we get a whopper of a winter.

Those of us who have chosen to live in our wonderful rural north-west community, with limited resources, have to remember to "Be Prepared", expect it to snow, expect it to blow, expect icy roads, expect drifting snow, expect extreme winter driving conditions, expect we cannot sand every inch of our roadway system, expect it may take some time for county plows and emergency personnel to get there, expect blowing dust, expect rough roadways, expect flooding, expect to have to slow down and last but not least, expect that farming and ranching is going to continue to happen, just as it has for the last 100 years.

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Most importantly, please expect that all of us in our little rural community will continue to do the best we can within our limited abilities and resources. Our intentions are always good, the door is always open and input is welcome. So if you have questions, ask around, ask your neighbor, call us or just stop in.

**Walter G. Morgan,  
Garfield County native  
and County Engineer.**

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At left, Willie Ruchert plows  
Knottgrass Rd.

**Photo provided by Grant Morgan**

