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## Public input sought on Umatilla Depot plan

By Annette Cary, Herald staff writer

HERMISTON -- Dividing up the Umatilla Chemical Depot into areas for open space plus industrial, commercial and military use as envisioned by the Local Reuse Authority is the preferred plan in a new draft study open for public comment.

As the last of the Army chemical weapons stored at the depot are being incinerated, plans are being made by the Umatilla Army Depot Reuse Authority for the future of the depot's 20,000 acres. All the chemical agent could be incinerated by spring 2012. About 1,100 people are employed at the depot.

A public forum is planned April 15 for public input. Comments will be heard at the meeting at 10 a.m. at the Umatilla Electric Co-op, 750 W. Elm St., Hermiston, or can be submitted at [www.missionumatilla.com](http://www.missionumatilla.com), where the draft report is posted.

Under the preferred alternative in the Draft Land Reuse Alternatives Report, the National Guard would use the northern portion of the depot. Land in the central, south-central and northeastern portions of the depot would be managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to preserve shrub steppe habitat.

Commercial and industrial applications could be developed in the far southeast corner along Interstate 84 and industrial use would be emphasized in the southwestern corner near interstates 82 and 84 and along the existing rail line.

One concept being considered for the administrative area of the depot is institutional use, perhaps by the state for the Oregon National Guard, Oregon Department of Transportation, the state police and emergency services.

The Local Reuse Authority, a board appointed by the governor, has received 16 requests from organizations interested in using the depot's land, buildings or surplus equipment.

They include a request by the Hermiston School District for land to be used as a future high school, a request by a homeless service provider for two igloos -- once used to store chemical weapons -- to store household goods, and a commercial proposal to establish an algae farm.

The Land Reuse Authority has identified renewable energy production as the top redevelopment opportunity for depot land. Wind is at the margins of viability for power production there and the land would be suitable for solar energy development, according to the draft report.

The draft report also looked at more than 20 additional options suggested for the depot.

Telecommunications is being considered because the depot already can handle 1,000 phone lines and has expansion capabilities to 69,000 lines, the draft report said.

Because of the depot's location at the nexus between interstates 84 and 82 it's an ideal location for a transportation distribution center, the draft report said. Hermiston already serves as a Walmart distribution center.

The land has been suggested as the site of a fairgrounds to serve all of Eastern Oregon. Its 1,000 igloos, which maintain a temperature between 60 to 70 degrees throughout the year, have been suggested for long-term storage of records or other products.

Some short-term revenue might be gained by leasing some of the depot's 52 miles of railroad track for rail car storage. Rail companies have been looking for places to store extra rail cars in the current weak economy, the draft report said.