

News Article

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Freeze on county video lottery proceeds extended

By Pamela Brust, Senior Staff Writer

Wood County commissioners have decided to extend the spending freeze on expenditures from video lottery funds through at least November.

The freeze was imposed last November after commissioners decided to use money from the video lottery proceeds to help pay for the county's new touch-screen election equipment.

The total cost for the election equipment is \$328,441. Up to half the cost of the new technology could be borrowed from a 5-year, interest-free Help America Vote Act federal revolving loan fund made available through the secretary of state's office. Wood County officials chose to take advantage of the loan. The county then had to come up with the remaining half of the funds, which was not in the budget.

Originally the commissioners made the freeze in effect until the county's new budget year July 1.

"Being that the commission has made annual commitments out of those funds, such as the employee fitness program and funding for firefighter life insurance, the commission decided to be fiscally responsible and extend the spending freeze from that account until such time as our commitments are fulfilled," Commissioner Rick Modesitt said.

The county continues to receive more requests for the video lottery funds, which are designated as a special projects account.

The new election equipment was delivered around the end of December and the machines were used in the May primary.

Wood County, along with 27 other counties in the state opted to go with touch screen technology. All counties were required to comply with the federal Help America Vote Act. Wood County was using an optical scan voting method. Out of 55 counties, 28 went with touch screens, 25 chose optical scan and two counties, Braxton and Wyoming will use paper ballots.

The county receives an average of \$20,000 monthly in video lottery proceeds.

Since the video lottery funds became available in 2003, the commission has funded numerous projects and entities including volunteer fire departments, school groups, youth organizations, Actors Guild, tourism and economic development activities, nonprofit groups, veterans, airport projects, Red Cross, seniors, Wood County Solid Waste Authority, Blennerhassett Museum, cities to sponsor special events, 4-H groups, Local Emergency Planning Commission, Fort Boreman Park, area police departments for equipment, 911 center, sheriff's department for vehicles and K-9 unit, new furniture for some county offices, West Nile Virus informational campaign, Juliana Square walking tour and a wellness program for county employees. Modesitt said \$1,100 monthly is used to help pay a contract for lobbying/advocacy services from Burdette Consulting Group.

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