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County to move out of extreme risk category

Move comes after successful appeal

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian



Fiumara Guzman Maloy Murdock Sidelinger

SALEM — Umatilla County has been moved from the extreme coronavirus risk category to the high risk category after county officials appealed to the state this week regarding a recently reported backlog of tests that for months was mishandled by the Oregon Health Authority.

A joint statement from OHA and

Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center at the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation on Wednesday, Feb. 24, announced that the state had failed to electronically record more than 1,400 tests reported by Yellowhawk between June 2020 and Jan. 2021.

The error occurred when the state switched from manual data entry to a new electronic system, causing “data processing issues” that resulted in the backlog. The state said it “regrets the error and has since been working closely with the (CTUIR) to prevent these errors from happening again.”

After the backlogged tests were reported, county officials successfully appealed to Gov. Kate Brown’s office on Feb. 22 and on Feb. 23 the state announced that the county would be moved to high risk.

“In the end this is wonderful news for our local businesses and for our schools,” Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said in an email. “We won’t be able to get back to full operation, but every step counts.”

The change allows indoor and outdoor recreation, entertainment and shopping and retail establishments to reopen at limited capacity. It

also allows faith institutions, funeral homes, mortuaries and cemeteries to reopen at limited capacity. Lastly, it allows indoor and outdoor visitation at long-term care facilities and only recommends, rather than requires, that office work be done remotely.

The county’s move from the extreme risk category to the high risk category becomes effective on Feb. 26. Since the state started the four-tiered risk categories in December, Umatilla County has been firmly entrenched in the extreme risk category. This is the county’s first move

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Corporal John Shown with the Oregon National Guard administers a COVID-19 vaccine to Mary Freeman during a COVID-19 vaccination run by Yellowhawk Tribal Health Care Center at Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Mission on Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021.

BMCC appoints interim president

Connie Green served the school in same capacity for six months in 2018, 2019

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Blue Mountain Community College turned to a familiar face to hold down the fort while it searches for a new president. But Connie Green’s second tenure leading the college will be under very different circumstances.



Green

At a special meeting on Monday, Feb. 22, the BMCC Board of Education unanimously voted to appoint Green as interim president starting on March 1.

Green will temporarily replace former President Dennis Bailey-Fougner, who cited a recent cancer diagnosis when he abruptly resigned on Feb. 11. Jane Hill, the chair of the board, said Green’s appointment will affirm BMCC’s commitment to stability during the presidential transition.

In Green, BMCC is hiring a veteran college administrator who served for six years as the president of Tillamook Bay Community College before retiring in 2017. For six months in 2018 and 2019, Green came out of retirement to serve as the interim president of BMCC between Cam Preus, who left the college to become the director of the Oregon Community College Association, and the eventual arrival of Dennis Bailey-Fougner.

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FINAL PUSH

Officials with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation push to vaccinate 2,000 people by mid-March

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Sean Soaring Eagle cannot count how many of his family members live on tribal land.

An enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Soaring Eagle joined the Oregon National Guard to learn discipline, motivation and become active in the community where he grew up. It has brought him closer to family, but during the pandemic, that essential lifeline was cut short, bringing with it a feeling of isolation.

“My biggest struggle is being alone

when I am,” he said. “I’m usually with my own thoughts, not talking to anyone, not doing anything. So that’s hard to be like that. To be in your own little pot by yourself.”

A tall, sturdy but soft-spoken 20-year-old who loves cold weather and reading fantasy novels, Soaring Eagle has witnessed the loss the pandemic has brought to his community.

“It’s hard seeing my friends and family who have had family very close to them die — mothers, brothers, friends,” he said. “It’s hard to know that there is not a lot I can do to comfort them. There’s not a lot I can say to them that could make them feel better.”

But on Tuesday, Feb. 23, his desire to

serve took a newfound meaning. Soaring Eagle was called to help his fellow Guardsmen assist health officials from Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center in an unprecedented two-day mass vaccination clinic at Wildhorse Resort & Casino. He was also one of hundreds of individuals to get their second shot at a coinciding effort at the health center just down the road, as tribal officials moved closer to their goal of effectively immunizing the reservation and all who are connected to it in the coming months.

His job for the day was simple — inputting basic information into a computer

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Court arguments heard over controversial transmission line

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

SALEM — Opponents of a 300-mile transmission line in Eastern Oregon claim the U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s approval of the route across its property violated federal laws.

The Stop B2H Coalition — which is challenging the high-voltage power line between Boardman and the Hemingway substation in Idaho — is asking a federal judge to overturn BLM’s permission for the project.

Among the transmission line’s critics, the agriculture industry has raised concerns about the project taking prime farmland out of production and impeding farm practices.

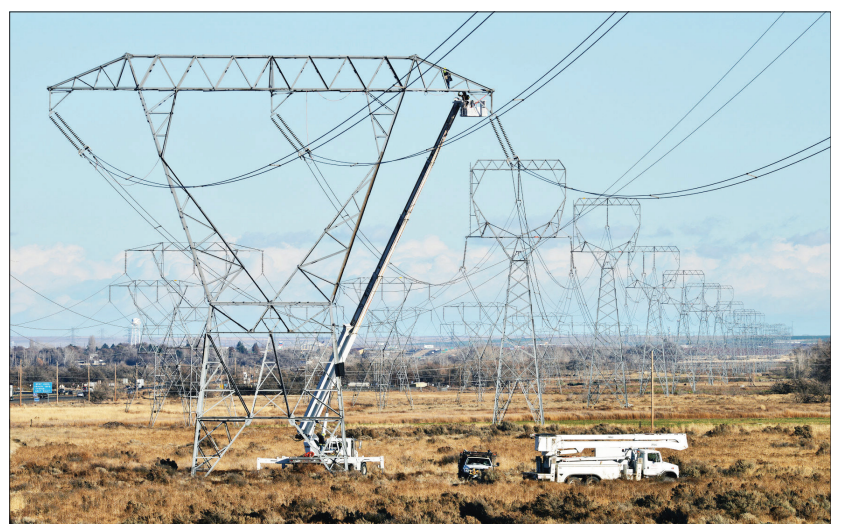
The agency didn’t comply with the National Environmental Policy

Act by selecting a preferred route and a variant in 2017 that were different than what it had analyzed in a draft environmental study, according to the coalition.

The newly chosen route is problematic because it’s only one-half mile from La Grande, runs across an intact portion of the Oregon Trail, and passes near ecologically sensitive areas, critics say.

“The public had no way to anticipate the two new routes that would run through that area. It deprived residents of La Grande and Union County of the right to weigh in on disproportionately adverse effects,” said David Becker, attorney for the coalition, during Monday, Feb. 22, oral arguments.

The coalition also argues that BLM



EO Media Group, File

A crew works on a transmission line tower outside Boardman. Oral arguments were held in federal court over a proposed transmission line between Boardman and the Hemingway substation in Idaho.

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