

DISEASE

Continued from Page 1A

“Still, tularemia is rarely transmitted to humans so we are surprised to see two cases in Union County in such a short period of time.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tularemia is a bacterial disease of animals and humans, most common in summer. Typically, animals such as rabbits, hares and rodents are especially susceptible; the disease is rarer in humans. Humans can become infected with tularemia through several routes, including tick and deer fly bites, skin contact with infected animals (which can occur when hunting or skinning infected animals), ingestion of contaminated water and inhalation of contaminated aerosols or agricultural dusts. The bacterium that causes tularemia is highly infectious and can enter the human body through the skin, eyes, mouth or lungs.

Signs and symptoms of tularemia vary depending on how the bacteria enter the body, though all forms are accompanied by fever. Symptoms of tularemia are flu-like and also include chills, severe headaches, body aches, weakness

or fatigue, sore throat, abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting and skin ulcers at the point of contact or site of a bite.

Tularemia can also be contracted through airborne transmission, causing cough or shortness of breath. Symptoms usually appear three to five days after exposure, but can take as long as 14 days to appear. Due to its rarity, tularemia can be difficult to diagnose, as its symptoms can be mistaken for more common illnesses. Most infections can be treated successfully with antibiotics.

“Tularemia can be very serious, but it can be treated,” said Elizabeth Sieders, communicable disease nurse at CHD. “This is why we want people to know what to be looking for.”

Sieders noted that with greater awareness of tularemia symptoms and subsequent treatment, there may be an increase in the number of cases officially reported.

“It is possible there have been human cases that were not identified as tularemia because providers and patients did not have this on their radar as something to look for or test for,” Sieders said.

“Oregon has such a robust variety of wildlife. Unfortunately, this also increases the probability of

having vector-borne diseases,” said Chris Law, Union County Vector Control district manager. “It only makes sense that the more species of wildlife in an area, the greater the chance of diseases being spread by the wildlife.”

According to Law, vector-borne diseases are an expanding concern in Eastern Oregon due to climate change. With milder winters and increasingly dryer, warmer summers, hotter climates permit species of mosquitoes and ticks to survive in environments previously too harsh to support them. Higher temperatures can also accelerate the time it takes for pathogens to develop within a mosquito or tick, meaning they can become infectious faster and transmit the illness sooner, Law said. Warming trends in the weather have contributed to longer vector activity seasons, as well as higher altitude distribution of vectoring species.

“Coming into contact with vectors is much easier than most people think,” Law said. “We often encounter vectoring organisms, many of which may have disease causing pathogens.”

However, according to Law, most immune systems are able to fight the pathogens before symptoms occur.

“Activities such as hunting, camping and harvesting wild berries usually requires spending time in areas where ticks and mosquitoes are prevalent,” he said, “thus increasing one’s risk of vector borne disease.”

To reduce your risk of contracting tularemia when hiking, camping or working outdoors, use insect repellents containing 20 percent to 30 percent DEET, wear long pants, long sleeves and long socks to keep ticks and deer flies off your skin, remove attached ticks promptly and don’t drink untreated surface water. When mowing or landscaping, don’t mow over sick or dead animals.

If you hunt, trap or skin animals, use gloves when handling animals, especially rabbits, muskrats, prairie dogs and other rodents, and cook game meat thoroughly before eating.

Also, note any change in the behavior of your pets or livestock and consult a veterinarian if they develop unusual symptoms.

Anyone exhibiting symptoms of tularemia should contact their primary care provider immediately. Medical care should be obtained as soon as symptoms appear. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/tularemia.

HORSES

Continued from Page 1A

ations in school. “It’s like life coaching a little bit,” Brittany said.

Brittany said horses are willing to accept people for who they are.

“Horses are completely authentic,” she said, noting horses will know if you are angry, upset or afraid.

One type of equine-assisted therapy Brittany facilitates is called “liberty work,” in which an individual learns to use his or her body language and motions to lead a horse around the arena. Essentially, the individual is learning how to communicate without words, and the horse, who is at liberty, chooses to follow. It can seem almost magical. Brittany does it seamlessly, getting a horse to trot around the arena, then stop in its tracks and reverse direction.

Brittany and her clients also play the “taking space game.” Participants walk around the arena with their horses and try to stand where their horses are standing in order to teach themselves about boundaries.

Clover Haven has a policy of not turning away participants because they are unable to pay.

The organization is partially funded by sponsors and client fees, and Wyatt said he and Brittany are also willing to donate their time.

“As long as you can make it out here, we’ll make it happen,” he said.

Clover Haven operates on Lloyd Ranch on High Valley Road between Union and Cove. Lloyd and Linda Reagan own the ranch and have lived on it for 42 years. On Lloyd Ranch, the Reagans and Hersoms together own approximately 40 head of cattle. Linda was a founding member of Clover Haven.

Brittany said selling calves helps pay for the equine center.

For the extra funding Clover Haven needs to remodel their bathroom to make it accessible to individuals with disabilities, the equine center is hosting “Boots-n-Lace,” a gala fundraiser that includes dinner, live music, an art auction and an informative presentation on Clover Haven. Brittany will be cooking the meal herself, and attendees are allowed to bring their own bottle of wine. The gala will be held at 6 p.m. Aug. 25 at the Sheehy Barn, 61111 High Valley Road.

Tickets are \$30 for adults, \$15 for ages 5 to 14, and children younger than 5 may attend for free.

Wyatt said both he and Brittany have lofty aspirations for the equine center and stressed the need for donations and volunteers.

“We have a lot of ambition and the will to expand and grow,” he said. “We’d love to be the headliner for this half of the state.”

TRANSIT

Continued from Page 1A

The Observer that the first disbursement of the new payroll tax will be in April 2019. The tax, which also will help fund road maintenance, will total \$122,000 locally for that initial year. The second year NEOPT expects to receive \$290,000, and \$339,000 the third year.

Peters said 90 percent of the taxes collected must be given back to the community it came from. A year’s worth of taxes will be about what it would cost to buy one pizza, but Peters said to some lower income families, who utilize the public transit system the most, that amount of money could really hurt them. This tax is also meant to mitigate some of the money they will lose through this new expenditure.

There are some regulations on how local transits like Union County’s spend

the money, she said. The funding must be spent to expand or enhance services. It can increase the frequency of the routes or add to routes provided.

One percent of the money also must go toward benefiting students in high school — whether that be offering discounts for rides or having a route go past the high school.

Peters said the enhancements must help those who will be affected by this change the most, including lower-income workers who will be impacted by the additional payroll deduction.

Peters went to Tuesday’s meeting, which was not attended by anyone from the community, with a list of proposals for consideration.

Likely the major proposal of Peters’, which may have the biggest impact on the community and on NEOPT is providing the fixed and paratransit routes for free to the public.

She said based on the number of riders NEOPT now has, offering free public transportation would cost approximately \$22,000, which would be covered by the payroll tax money. The proposed changes still allow the transit organization some wiggle room to add more to the program. That’s why participation from the community is vital.

In addition, she told The Observer she’d like to split NEOPT’s fixed route. Right now, she said, it takes an hour to go through the entire transit route. She suggested splitting the current fixed route into two 30-minute routes. Two drivers would be working and the buses would run Monday through Friday, as they do now.

Another idea Peters has for expanding NEOPT’s service is adding more stops to the route, including medical locations, Bearo Loop and more lower-income housing apartments,

which would not only be more convenient for those living there but would cover the requirement of using the tax-generated funds to help that population.

With either of those options, if ridership increases, the transit organization would be able to consider expanding the operating hours. Currently, the hours are 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. With the expanded hours the buses would run from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The final major proposal presented at the meeting was to offer a demand response for the entire county meaning those who live outside of the La Grande city limits could call the transit company and request a ride to La Grande.

Peters said in the past, there has been a lack of ridership for just the intercity routes. The demand response would collect riders who utilize the buses for Rides to Wellness,

which gives patients rides to their medical appointments when they don’t have the means to get there themselves.

Peters said they would transition this particular proposal in gradually and offer it Tuesdays and Thursdays. If it was successful, they could add Wednesdays to the schedule.

Peters will be traveling to the towns in the county to present these proposals and hear what the public has to say about them. The next meeting will be at 6 p.m. tonight in Elgin.

The other meetings, which each begin at 6 p.m. are: Aug. 21, Union City Hall, 342 S. Main St.; Aug. 22, Summerville City Hall, 301 Main St.; Aug. 23, Imbler High School, Sixth and Esther Avenue; Sept. 5, Cove High School, 803 Main St.

For more information, contact Angie Peters, Public Transit Manager, at 541-963-2877.

STARKEY

Continued from Page 1A some want attention,” Dick said of the elk, who are all named.

They were raised by Rachel and John Cook, researchers with the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement. Dick gives the Cooks a lion’s share of the credit for the success of the taming project. They devoted countless hours to raising and developing bonds with the animals that today are stronger than ever.

“The Cooks are like mom and dad to them,” Dick said.

During Dick’s tenure, the Starkey Project was the site of more than 80 studies conducted in collaboration with more than 60 research and management partners. The studies resulted in more than 400 publications in research journals.

Results of a number of the studies have played a major role in changing how

big game are managed. For example, a breeding bull study more than 10 years ago determined young spike elk take twice as long to impregnate cow elk as older branch-antlered bulls. After this study was released, the state placed greater limitations on harvesting branch-antlered bulls — resulting in more calves being born earlier in the spring and thus having a better chance of surviving their first winter than calves born weeks later.

Dick helped coordinate all studies at the Starkey Project. He was responsible for making arrangements so the studies could be conducted without interference from other activities at Starkey.

“This was no small feat,” said Mike Wisdom, lead scientist for the Starkey Project, noting a wide range of studies are conducted at Starkey, many of which involve a variety of scientific disciplines and large

expanses of land.

Wisdom credits Dick with having the ideal personality for providing the direction needed to prevent conflicts among researchers working in the same area.

“You have to have a lot of diplomacy and tact and still be assertive,” Wisdom said.

Dick’s role went beyond that of coordinator of field research. He was also charged with the annual care of wintering herds of mule deer and elk. He routinely captured and handled hundreds of animals each winter to collect data on their physical condition. Animals were weighed and measured and blood samples were taken.

The data Dick collected was an integral part of many studies at the Starkey Project.

“It is one of the most valuable sets of data ever collected on wildlife,” Wisdom said.

Dick’s many other responsibilities included man-

aging a telemetry system in which the movements of elk, deer and cattle are continuously monitored via radio collars. He also monitored weather stations that have provided long-term acid rain data now being used for a number of studies.

The Starkey Project operates in a 25,000-acre area enclosed by an eight-foot-high fence. It is an insurmountable barrier for deer and elk but not cougars, coyotes, bears and wolves.

“The fence is not a barrier to any predators,” Dick said. “They have a range inside and outside. They come and go at will.”

Bears and cougars climb over the fence, and wolves and coyotes go under it, Dick said. Dick and his staff took a number of steps to discourage predators from going inside the Starkey Project site. For example, they removed animal carcasses from the site when possible.

Whether talking about

predators or anything else related to the Starkey Project, Dick has a base of knowledge like nobody else regarding the research station, and he is a master of sharing that knowledge with the public.

“He has taken great pride in leading tours and working with educators,” Wisdom said.

He noted that Dick, who lives in Union with his wife, Jana, is adept at explaining scientific concepts in clear, entertaining fashion.

“He is a good communicator. He speaks in a language anyone can understand,” Wisdom said.

Dick has agreed to maintain ties with the Starkey Project by serving as a consultant. Wisdom said this will help fill the void that Dick left behind.

“A lot of institutional knowledge is walking out the door,” Wisdom said. “He is really going to be missed.”

Starkey Project research started in 1989

The Starkey Project is a joint wildlife research project conducted by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the USDA Forest Service at the Starkey Experimental Forest and Range, 28 miles southwest of La Grande. The project is designed to measure the population response of deer and elk to the intensively managed forests and rangelands of the future. Research began at the Starkey Experimental Forest and Range in 1989, and there are now hundreds of wild elk and deer in its 25,000-acre fenced facility. The Starkey Project was founded by the late Jack Ward Thomas, a U.S. Forest Service biologist who was based in La Grande for many years before serving as the chief of the U.S. Forest Service from 1993 to 1996.

— U.S. Forest Service

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