



SPORTS

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Good day to our valued subscriber Marie True of La Grande

Meteorologists help crews fight fires

By Jayati Ramakrishnan Associated Press

As they sit at their screens in a small office outside Pendleton, a group of meteorologists can already tell what the rest of the population is soon going to find out the hard way: it's another smoky day in Oregon.

Dan Slagle looks at the high-resolution rapid-refresh smoke map on his screen and laughs.

"It's not going anywhere," he said.

While those on the ground fighting fires are most associated with stopping the blaze, local meteorologists from the National Weather Service are busy behind the scenes, communicating with firefighters and emergency agencies to help them anticipate what's coming next.

Recently, they go over what they're expecting that day — deteriorating air quality, smoke pouring in from Canada, and a chance of thunderstorms over the mountains.

Later, meteorologist John Peck advises fire agencies and other groups about the fire weather forecast in a series of conference calls.

"They'll go over what they think the concerns are with air quality, how bad they think the smoke's going to be," Slagle said.

Meteorologists can also do a forecast report for a specific location, called a "spot forecast," to provide specific advice about temperature, moisture and wind. This helps firefighters determine which angles to avoid or focus on when attacking a fire.

Though most meteorologists are not at the scene, there are incident meteorologists who will travel to a fire, giving updates and forecasts for the weather

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Judge upholds Lostine Corridor Safety Project decision

By Katy Nesbitt For The Observer

Federal Magistrate Judge Patricia Sullivan's decision in a case to stop the Lostine Corridor Safety Project was upheld last week by U.S. District Judge Michael Simon.

Simon's order ends a suit brought against the U.S. Forest Service and Wallowa Mountains Office District Ranger Kris Stein in 2017 by Greater Hells Canyon Council and Oregon Wild. The suit aimed to halt the agency's use of an expedited environmental analysis called a categorical exclusion to harvest timber along the upper Lostine River corridor. The special authority, allowed under the 2014 Farm Bill, gives the Forest Service the ability to treat areas smaller than 3,000 acres without going through a lengthy environmental impact statement process.

On Aug. 17, Simon upheld Sullivan's recommendation that the court deny the plaintiffs' motion for summary judgment, strike their extra-record evidence and grant the defendants' cross motion for summary judgment.

Under the Federal Magistrates Act, the court "may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the magistrate judge."

In June, Sullivan, who is magistrate

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Cherise Kaechele/ The Observer

Union County Sheriff's Deputy Tony Humphries speaks to Union Elementary School Principal Chris Dunlap, who also serves as the school district's athletic director, and Superintendent Carter Wells on Thursday. Humphries is stepping into the role of school resource officer in Union, Cove and North Powder.

ADDING A MEASURE OF SECURITY

■ Sheriffs Deputies will serve as school resource officers in La Grande, Cove, North Powder and Union school districts

By Dick Mason The Observer

The La Grande, Cove, North Powder and Union school districts have a new staff member walking their halls — one who wears a badge but gives high fives to students instead of tardy slips.

The new face in the hallways will be Union County Sheriff's Deputy Tony Humphries, who is beginning a stint as a school resource officer for the four school districts. Humphries is the first school resource officer the Cove, North Powder and Union school districts have had.

Carter Wells, superintendent of Union School District, is delighted to have Humphries on board.

"We are very excited about it," he said. "The safety and security of the school district (will benefit from Humphries' presence). He will also enforce attendance rules and regulations, which will help

reduce the drop-out rate."

Humphries has served as a Union County Sheriff's Deputy for 13 years and before that was an officer for the former Union Police Department. He is no stranger to many local students, since he has taught Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education classes to fifth- and sixth-graders for many years in Union County. He made lasting connections with many of the students he taught.

"I'm still in contact with some of (them)," Humphries said.

Humphries was named a school resource officer last spring and since then has been meeting with the staff of the four school districts he is assigned to. He began working with students this week when classes started in the Cove School District. He made a point to exchange high fives with many students and played in one of their kickball games as part of his

familiarization process.

"The students have been great," Humphries said.

Wells anticipates Humphries will be a hit with students in Union when classes start Aug. 27.

"He is a very kind individual who cares about kids. It really shows in how he has run the D.A.R.E. program in Union," Wells said.

Humphries and his wife, Merry, who live in Union, are the parents of two daughters, the youngest of whom is a senior at Union High School this year, and a son. They also have a granddaughter.

In the La Grande School District, Humphries will be working with fellow Union County Sheriff's Deputy Cody Bowen, who has served as the district's full-time school resource officer for four years.

"He is a huge resource for me," See Security / Page 5A

U.S. vows to work more closely with states to fight wildfires

By Matthew Daly Associated Press

As wildfires choke California and other Western states, the Trump administration pledged Aug. 16 to work more closely with state and local officials to prevent wildfires from ever starting.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the Forest Service and other agencies will step up efforts to cut down small trees and underbrush and set controlled fires to remove trees that serve as fuel for catastrophic blazes, including a series of deadly fires that have spread through drought-parched forests and rural communities in California.

Six firefighters have died in those wildfires.

Perdue, who toured the California fires last week, said they were "stark reminders of the immense forest-fire health crisis in this country, and the urgent need to dramatically increase our preventative forest treatments."

While officials have boosted forest management efforts in recent years, more needs to be done, Perdue said.

"To truly protect our forests, we must increase the number and the size of our (prevention) projects across the local landscape and across boundaries, and frankly we can't do this by ourselves," Perdue said at a news conference at the Capitol.

Perdue pledged a "shared stewardship" approach in which the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies work with state, local and tribal officials to fight and prevent wildfires.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, meanwhile, said national forests have suffered from See Wildfires / Page 5A

Local author starts new chapter with publishing company

■ La Grande native launches A.B.Baird Publishing, highlights social media poets

By Audrey Love The Observer

Austie Baird describes the experience as "surreal" — holding a physical copy of her home-grown publishing company's first anthology, "Tending Broken Stems." Baird — who as a 16-year-old put pen to paper creatively for the first time, and later as a mother of four posted her work anonymously under the Instagram handle @glass_walls_life — said the road to actualizing a literary career still felt like a dream.

An Eastern Oregon University alumni and La Grande native, Baird started publishing on a smaller scale in 2016 through the social media platform Instagram — initially posting her personal works of poetry anonymously, then testing the waters by occasionally posting her unattributed Instagram work to her Facebook account, and eventually signing her work with her initials. But when a U.K.-based publishing company, Time is an Ocean, saw her posts and asked her to contribute to an anthology, Baird knew she had to publish under her own name.

"There's something really powerful about writing and then having it actually be heard," she said of the experience, which would serve as a catalyst for her endeavors with A.B.Baird Publishing, launched this April. "Being published was bigger than just being published — it gave me a sense of 'I could do this,' and I want to give other authors that feeling."

By July, her company's first poetry anthology, "Tending Broken Stems," was being shipped to customers — with plenty more in the incubator to follow. Baird has also written the first in a series of children's books, which she originally planned to self-publish.

"I thought if I was going to follow my dream and self-publish, it would be really amazing if I could help others to achieve their (dreams)," Baird said of establishing the company. "I wanted to present another option — to take Instagram authors and give them a platform and produce something they can physically

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Courtesy photo

Austie Baird launched her publishing company, A.B.Baird Publishing, in April, with a string of poetry anthologies set to release within the next year.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Friday 44 LOW Turning out clear Saturday 77/49 Clouds and sun Sunday 68/48 Partly sunny

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