

FLOOD

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week before they began to rise again a few days later. The Grande Ronde River at Perry is now a little less than 2 feet below flood stage, but at Troy the river is at capacity.

Snowmelt brought on by warming temperatures this week is causing rivers to rise. The rate they are rising could accelerate this weekend because rain is in the forecast, Smith said.

Wallowa County was hit by so much rain last week that its board of commissioners declared a state of emergency April 9. The flooding forced the closure of several roads, some of which remain closed, said Wallowa County Road Supervisor Lon Andrade. Wildcat Road between Promise and Troy and a portion of Whiskey Creek Road in the Wallowa area are closed except for local residents.

The roads are shut down because of flood damage and muddy conditions, which are making it impossible to bring in the heavy equipment needed to repair them.

"The ground is too soft," Andrade said.

He said Wallowa County was fortunate not to have suffered more damage than it did. He credits the installation of small embankments along the side of some roads to guard them against flood-

water, reducing damage.

However, he is now worried that heavy snowmelt could trigger another flooding episode.

"We fared pretty well, but there is still a lot of snow in the mountains," he said, adding that most of the snowmelt that caused flooding last week was from lower elevations.

Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) and Rep. Greg Barreto (R-Cove) asked Gov. Kate Brown to declare a state of emergency for Wallowa and Umatilla counties on Monday morning. Brown's office, however, announced on Monday afternoon that conditions in Wallowa and Umatilla counties were not serious enough to warrant an emergency declaration, Hansell said.

Union County also experienced flooding last week but it appears to have avoided major damage. Sites hit hard by flooding included Hilgard State Park, much of which was under at least a foot of water. Matt Rippee, Eastern District Manager for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, said Hilgard State Park emerged from the flooding intact.

"It is a very resilient park," Rippee said, noting Hilgard State Park, which is along the Grande Ronde River, floods to some extent almost every year.

One reason the park can with-



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Much of Hilgard State Park, which sits next to the Grande Ronde River, flooded last week.

stand high waters is that it does not have modern conveniences like electrical hookups, which can be damaged by flooding.

"It is rustic," Rippee said.

He said no ice boulders floated into the park during the flood, reducing the potential for damage. Rippee said one year a large ice boulder was carried into the park by floodwaters and damaged a power line.

Union County Public Works Director Doug Wright said the county's roads also escaped major

damage. Wright did note the edge of several roads, including Haefler Lane in the Cove, area were washed out.

"We will be building their shoulders back up," Wright said.

Brock Eckstein, the City of Elgin's city administrator, said the flooding his city experienced would have been worse if not for preventative steps taken by his staff. The work included keeping the catch basin of Elgin's north storm drain clear of snow. This allowed floodwater to enter the

storm drain system. Another step that paid dividends was digging extra ditches alongside some roads, which reduced the stress on ditches already in place.

"(The ditches) only had to carry half the load they did before," Eckstein said.

Cherry Street, which is along Clark Creek in Elgin, often floods — and it did again last week. Eckstein said to prevent Cherry Street from flooding in the future, his staff will have to elevate it by two or three feet. ■

ELGIN

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But his love for philanthropic ventures didn't truly spark until his two children were growing up, as he found himself running the Union County Little League organization and forming a Boy Scouts troop in Elgin. His activity in the community snowballed, especially when his time freed up, until he eventually seemed to have a hand in almost everything in town.

"It makes me feel good to help people," Grandeen said. "And when they're appreciative of it, that just makes you want to do more to help."

Between his roles as a Lion's Club member, the vice president of the Elgin Museum and Historical Society and a volunteer at GRH, Grandeen's schedule is quite full. But Kathy Oliver, president of the Lion's Club chapter in Elgin, said

Grandeen always makes time if something needs to get done.

"Everett is a very busy man. He's always doing something," said Oliver, who has known Grandeen for more than 40 years. "You could call him at whatever time and he would do whatever you asked."

During his speech at the banquet, Gerald Hopkins, president of the Elgin Museum and Historical Society and man of the year in 2018, listed many of the outstanding acts of service Grandeen has provided to the community: building sets for the Elgin Opera House, working with the Lion's Club on roadside cleanup programs and collecting nonperishables for the food bank were only a few among them.

As soon as Hopkins mentioned Corning in the beginning of his speech, Grandeen said, he knew he was about to be named

man of the year, and he could hardly believe it.

"In my heart and in my gut, I felt 'oh this can't be,'" he said. "It feels fantastic to follow so many people you respect and look up to."

However, during an interview with The Observer, it was difficult for Grandeen to admit to all of the work he's put into serving the community over the years, as he avoided the topic by circling back to the other "vibrant" Lion's Club members and their efforts instead. Both Hopkins and Oliver praised Grandeen for his humility, and said this recognition is well-deserved.

"I would call him a very quiet, modest person who works very hard to help others, and a person you can rely on," Hopkins said. "He's kind of one of those unsung heroes where he goes about and does things when the spotlight's not on him."

As Lion's Club president, Oliver said it's members

like Grandeen who really make the organization shine.

"We have a fantastic club, and it's people like Everett who make it that way," she said. "He doesn't draw attention to himself — ever. But he's a hard worker and he loves people. He's a helper."

And Grandeen wasn't the only Lion's Club member to receive an "of the year" title at the 2019 Chamber Banquet Awards. In fact,

the entire organization was honored at this year's event for its dedication to the City of Elgin and its citizens.

"The Lion's Club is just a fantastic organization. They do so much for Elgin," Rysdam said. "For any group that needs help, the Lions are there."

Among the other honored Lion's Club members were Elgin City Councilor Risa Hallgarth as "woman of the year," Cowboy and Angel's Place co-owners

Teri and Dave Fuhrman for "business of the year," and Elgin Family Dental staff member Lezlie Reid as "employee of the year."

Oliver could barely hold in her excitement when recalling the feeling of pride she had for the Lion's Club and all of its members the night of the banquet.

"The tables were even decorated in our colors, and I am just so proud of our club," she said. "It was very heartwarming." ■

FAIR

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if proposed legislation that would significantly increase funding to county fairs in Oregon would be approved by the Legislature during the current session.

Commissioner Matt Scarfo said it does not appear this will happen.

"Those bills (that would help county fairs) are struggling," Scarfo said at Wednesday's meeting.

Horn said the Union County Fair Association's financial state has been hurt in previous years by declining fair attendance, and the loss of revenue has made it difficult to finance maintenance work. Fortunately, attendance has increased the last two years, jumping by more than 800 fair-goers.

"I think that a trend is starting," Horn said.

The UCFA president also said the fair's financial outlook is being brightened by new sponsors it has picked up this year.

Horn said the county commissioners' decision to cover the UCFA's liability insurance premium means the UCFA will be able to devote more money to replac-

ing the electrical system in the fairground's exhibit hall and other projects.

In another action item on Wednesday, the board of commissioners voted to write a letter expressing its support for House Bill 2402, legislation that would raise the state's aviation fuel tax by 2 cents per gallon. The bill would also stop the state's aviation tax from being sunsetted in 2021. The legislation that created the aviation tax several years ago calls

for it to be discontinued two years from now.

The county's letter in support of HB 2402 will be written to the Oregon Joint Committee on Transportation.

The commissioners voted to support HB 2402 at the request of Union County Public Works Director Doug Wright. He said that all funds raised by the tax go to airports in Oregon. This means the increase in the tax would benefit the La Grande/Union County Airport. ■



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