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Observer staff

A plane crash in Summerville that left one person dead Tuesday evening is under investigation, according to a press release from the Union County Sheriff's Office, and the National Transportation Safety Board is leading the investigation. The UCSO responded to the

scene about 7:43 p.m. June 4. The NTSB and UCSO are investigating the incident along with the Union County District Attorney's Office and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Terry Williams, a spokesman for the NTSB, told The Observer Wednesday afternoon the Tican II

airplane, which crashed, was an "experimental aircraft."

Williams said the NTSB's investigator arrived on scene midday Wednesday and has done a preliminary review of the aircraft and the engine. Three witnesses have also been identified and will be interviewed by the agency, he said.

"Right now we are in the very early stages of the investigation," Williams said, adding that the agency will look into everything from the weather to the aircraft and the pilot in the NTSB investigation.

The UCSO press release initially called it a "single occupant, fatality plane crash."

The name of the deceased individual has not yet been released by authorities.

Additional follow-up information requested from UCSO was not available by press time.

The Observer will continue to cover the incident as more information becomes available.

Council discusses B2H backup plan

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The discussion of — and the eventual vote for — mitigation should the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line project ultimately move forward was the primary action item taken by the La Grande City Council during its Wednesday night meeting.

The action, City Manager Robert Strobe said in addressing the council, does not conflict with the city's continued position of opposing the B2H project. Rather, the proposed mitigation — a term defined by Merriam-Webster as "the process or result of making something less severe, dangerous, painful, harsh, or damaging" — would give the city a possible fall-back option and an ability to negotiate a less damaging siting plan should the B2H project be approved.

Documents provided at Wednesday's meeting explained that the Department of Energy, in its Draft Proposed Order, rejected the city's submitted objections to the possible Mill Creek route for requested mitigation, but did accept the city's requested conditions for H-frame towers instead of lattice towers in the Morgan Lake area should the Morgan Lake alternative route be chosen.

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WesCom News Service file photo

A firefighter is shown silhouetted during a fire in central Oregon in 2017. Area authorities are anticipating a normal fire season for Northeast Oregon this summer.

EARLY INDICATIONS POINT TO 'NORMAL' FIRE SEASON

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

While it is still too early to make accurate predictions, residents of Northeast Oregon can likely expect a "normal" fire season for the summer of 2019.

Both the National Weather Service and the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center are projecting Northeast Oregon will have higher than average temperatures for the

next few months. In fact, much of the West will be experiencing higher temperatures. That forecast, though, is much different from the Midwest states, which are actually set to have lower than normal temperatures for the summer. The Eastern U.S. can expect higher than normal temps.

"What it tells me is the seasonal average would indicate there is more of a trough over the (middle) part (of the country), and a ridge of high pressure

on the east and west," said meteorologist Joe Solomon of the NWS in Pendleton.

Much of Eastern Oregon should fare better on the temperature end than the western side of the state. A three-month forecast for June through August on the NWS climate prediction center webpage shows Western and Central Oregon with a 50% probability of being warmer than

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Barrett to sing at state commencement

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Autumn Barrett, an Oregon Connections Academy senior from Summerville, is accustomed to performing before large audiences, but not anything like the size of the one that will greet her this weekend.

Barrett, 18, has been named the featured singer for this year's Oregon Connections Academy commencement ceremony Saturday in Salem. A veteran of six musicals performed at the Elgin Opera House, Barrett does not anticipate being nervous even though an audience of between 1,500 and 2,000 is

anticipated. This will be far more than the Elgin Opera House's capacity of just less than 300.

"(My experience with musicals at the Elgin Opera House) has definitely built on-stage character," said Barrett, who appeared in musicals including Mary Poppins and Hairspray.

The Summerville senior will be singing the National Anthem at the beginning of the graduation ceremony. Barrett will be among the Oregon Connections Academy graduating seniors at the ceremony. ORCA is the state's longest running online public charter school. Barrett said attending

an online school has been ideal for her in part because it has allowed her to work at her own pace and to concentrate on her classes without being distracted by classmates.

"It has definitely let me hyper focus on classes and given me scheduling flexibility," Barrett said, noting it has allowed her to do more extracurricular activities, such as her participation in the Opera House's productions.

Barrett is graduating as someone excited about the prospect of being a lifelong learner.

"I think we (should) never stop learning, and I

don't plan to stop anytime soon," the senior said.

She sounds like a commencement speaker when talking about the value of learning, urging everyone to dive deep intellectually. "Knowledge is great, and it's a right we have fought for since the beginning," Barrett said in an ORCA news release. "Take the chance you're given, learn all you can, and then take that knowledge and put it to good use."

Barrett's many passions include volunteering at the Blue Mountain Humane Association, Union County's animal shelter. For her

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Camping area becoming a trouble spot

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Elkhorn Campground in the Elkhorn Wildlife Area, 11 miles west of North Powder, is becoming a magnet for suspicious characters and activity.

Dan Marvin of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and his wife, Michele, are learning this firsthand.

The Marvins live 100 yards north of Elkhorn Campground in a home next to the ODFW's Elkhorn Wildlife Area headquarters. The couple told the Union County Board of Commissioners Wednesday that they continually see or hear gunfire, apparent illegal drug activity, homeless people camping, unauthorized ATV use, littering, drunk and disorderly conduct, loud parties, and much more.

"People try to steal our gas," Michele Marvin said. "They are shooting firearms and screaming and yelling."

Marvin said she worries about the safety of her young family and added that her family never leaves for the weekend, fearing that people from the campground will break into their home.

"It is a public party spot," she said.

Dan Marvin, a wildlife areas program manager who helps manage Elkhorn Wildlife Area, shares these concerns.

"The safety of our family is at stake," he said.

Oregon State Police Sgt. Chris Hawkins told the commissioners that his office has responded to 20 calls for service over the past year in the Elkhorn Campground area. Hawkins said that in some cases they have found the people there doing nothing illegal but with backgrounds that raised red flags. These included a sex offender, an armed career criminal and

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Friday 40 LOW Mostly cloudy
Saturday 63/38 Clouds and sun
Sunday 74/45 Sunshine, warmer

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