

LOCAL BRIEFING

From staff reports

**OTEC board meets tomorrow**

BAKER CITY — The Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. Sept. 17 at OTEC headquarters, 4005 23rd St., Baker City.

**Translator district board meeting set**

LA GRANDE — The Blue Mountain Translator District Board of Directors will hold a regular meeting at noon Sept. 17 in the meeting room at Umpqua Bank,

1215 Adams Ave., La Grande. The board packet is posted at [www.bmtd.org/public-notice](http://www.bmtd.org/public-notice).

**Literacy Center's fall hours begin this week**

LA GRANDE — Beginning Sept. 17, the Literacy Center at Cook Memorial Library, 2006 Fourth St., La Grande, will be open from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The Literacy Center offers free tutoring to all

ages. Walk-ins are welcome. Sessions may also be arranged in advance by calling the library at 541-962-1339.

**IMESD board meeting includes executive session**

PENDLETON — The Board of Directors of the InterMountain Education Service District will have a regular board meeting at 2:34 p.m. Sept. 18 at the IMESD, 2001 SW Nye Ave., Pendleton. There will also

be an executive session pursuant to ORS 192.660(2)(e) to negotiate real property transactions.

**Awards will honor local teachers**

JOSEPH — During the month of September, Community Bank is collecting nominations for its new Apple Appreciation Awards. The award is meant to acknowledge amazing teachers in the local community as well as support school clubs. The winning

teacher in each town where Community Bank has a branch will be presented with an Apple Award. The teacher will choose a club or student organization at their school to receive a \$200 donation from the bank.

Nominations must be for those actively teaching in grades K-12 and employed at a public or private school. Anyone can nominate a teacher.

Nomination forms are available on Community Bank's Facebook page and

at local branches in Joseph, Enterprise, Wallowa, Elgin and La Grande. Nominations will be collected through Sept. 30. For complete rules visit [www.communitybanknet.com](http://www.communitybanknet.com) or your local branch.

**LHS Class of '54 has lunch**

LA GRANDE — The members of the La Grande High School Class of 1954 will meet for lunch at the Flying J Restaurant at 11:30 a.m. Sept. 18.

— OBITUARIES —

**Dennis Carr**

Union  
Dennis Carr, 64, of Union, died Sept. 14 at his residence. An obituary is forthcoming. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

**Jordy Erickson**

La Grande  
Jordy Erickson, 4 months, of La Grande, died Sept. 11 in a car accident. A funeral will be held at 11 a.m. Sept. 22 at Daniels-Knopp Funeral, Cremation & Life Celebration Center. An obituary is forthcoming.

**Jeraline B. Follett**

La Grande  
Jeraline B. Follett, 91, of La Grande, died Sept. 14 at a local care facility. An obituary is forthcoming. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

**Ronald Gillis**

La Grande  
Ronald "Ron" Gillis, 67, of La Grande, died Sept. 13 at his home. A celebration of his life and potluck reception will begin at 3:30 p.m. Sept. 21 at the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City. An obituary is forthcoming. Memorial donations may be made to Heart 'n Home Hospice (Opal Foundation) in care of Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home and Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway 97834. Online condolences can be shared at [www.tamispinevalleyfuneral-home.com](http://www.tamispinevalleyfuneral-home.com).

Northeast Oregon stays cool during fire season



U.S. Forest Service/ Courtesy Photo

The Granite Gulch fire burned over about 5,555 acres. Fire managers say the lightning-sparked blaze was beneficial to the Eagle Cap Wilderness, reducing the amount of fuel on the ground.

**By Jayson Jacoby**  
EO Media Group

For the second straight summer Northeastern Oregon, even as it broiled beneath a scorching sun, stayed comparatively cool through the wildfire season.

But though both years were tranquil, there were significant differences between the 2019 season and its immediate predecessor.

Most notably was the number of fires.

The 2018 season stands out for the scarcity of blazes, said Noel Livingston, fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Lightning, which starts most fires on the forest, ignited just 26 blazes last year, the fewest since at least 1970. Those fires burned just 17.3 acres, which ranks as the third-lowest annual total in the past half century on the Wallowa-Whitman.

The 2019 season has been much more active, with 68 lightning fires on the Wallowa-

Whitman — exactly the annual average from the previous 10-year period.

But with the exception of the Granite Gulch fire in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, which has spread across 5,555 acres, none of this summer's lightning fires has burned more than 30 acres.

(The Granite Gulch fire is an anomaly because the Wallowa-Whitman has been managing the blaze rather than trying to put it out as quickly as possible. The forest has a policy that allows a variety of strategies for lightning-sparked fires inside the Eagle Cap Wilderness. Fire managers say the Granite Gulch fire has had beneficial effects, including reducing the amount of combustible fuel in the forest and creating a natural firebreak that could slow or stop a future blaze.)

The total burned acreage from the Wallowa-Whitman's 67 fires, again not counting Granite Gulch, is 98.5 acres.

That's well below the average of 22,000 acres burned annually, and fewer burned acres than all but 12 years in the past 50.

"Obviously it's a fairly quiet year from a large fire standpoint," Livingston said. "Our starts were way up from last year but we had good success with initial attack."

Livingston is referring to the early phase of firefighting, when the difference between succeeding and failing can mean the difference between a fire that burns a tenth of an acre and one that burns 10,000.

Livingston attributes this year's success to a few factors in addition to firefighters' prowess.

For one, the relative lack of large fires across much of the West meant firefighting resources, including helicopters and retardant planes that can be vital during initial attack, were readily available this summer.

"There was not much competition for resources," Livingston said.

The situation was similar over much of Oregon, although there were a few larger blazes, including the 9,700-acre 204 Cow Fire on the Malheur National Forest about 17 miles southwest of Unity. It was sparked by lightning on Aug. 9.

Fire danger was lower this summer than last as well, Livingston said.

During the summer of 2018, when the Baker City Airport set all-time high temperature records on consecutive August days at 108 and 109 degrees, fuel moistures and other measurements of fire danger

also reached record highs, Livingston said.

But because lightning was relatively rare, as reflected in the record-low number of fires, the region avoided what could have been a catastrophic fire season.

This summer, by contrast, a damp spring and comparatively cool temperatures kept fire danger indexes near or below average for most of the season, Livingston said.

And the lightning storms, of which there were several, also spawned rain showers that both prevented fuels from turning into tinder and gave firefighters an assist.

"Almost without exception the lightning storms came through with moisture," Livingston said.

One of Livingston's colleagues, Steve Meyer, agrees that that combination — relatively moist fuels and rain — contributed greatly to placid behavior of most fires this summer.

"We were fairly busy off and on with lightning fires but there was enough rain with the storms that came through that they all stayed small for us," said Meyer, who is the wildland fire supervisor for the Oregon Department of Forestry in Baker County.

Meyer said this is the only summer he can remember during his 23-year career in which the fire danger never reached the "extreme" level.

The Forestry Department's Baker unit has reported six lightning fires and one human-caused fire this season. The agency's La Grande unit handled 12 lightning and four human-caused blazes, and the Wallowa unit 22 lightning and six human fires.

The lack of human-caused fires in the Baker unit — only one this year — was welcome, Meyer said.

Al Crouch, fire mitigation/education specialist for the BLM's Vale District, echoed that sentiment.

There have been nine human-caused fires on the Vale District this year, which burned 535 acres.

That's below the District's 10-year average of 13 human fires, and it ends a three-year stretch with more of those blazes than average, including 18 in both 2017 and 2018, Crouch said.

Fire managers fear human-caused fires because they're so unpredictable, Meyer said.

Officials can track lightning strikes by computer almost in real time, and divert fire crews relatively quickly to new blazes, he said.

But a fire started by a person, whether intentionally or by accident, can show up without any warning.

"You just have no way of knowing when something like that's going to happen," Meyer said.

Crouch said that despite a couple of intense lightning storms, the number of downstrikes on the Vale District was below the 10-year average.

So was the number of lightning fires, although the difference was not large — 30 blazes this year compared with a 10-year average (2009-18) of 35.

This year's fires didn't burn nearly as many acres as in many years in the past decade, however.

The 2019 total of 4,435 acres burned by lightning fires compares with the 10-year average of 158,000 acres.

PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

**LA GRANDE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Arrested: Gregory Brian Turner Jr., 35, unknown address, was arrested by the Owyhee County Sheriff's Office on a bench warrant charging a probation violation. The alleged probation violation was connected to an original charge of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle.

Arrested: Conner Alexander Fry, 26, La Grande, was arrested on charges of unauthorized entry into a motor vehicle, four counts; first degree theft, three counts; fraudulent use of a credit card, two counts; identify theft, two counts; and second-degree criminal mischief.

**UNION COUNTY SHERIFF**

Arrested: Tia Carman, 33, unknown address, was arrested on a Union County warrant charging contempt of court, four counts.

Arrested: Nobody was injured in a traffic accident Wednesday at Bean Coffin Lane and Summerville Road

in the Summerville area. The accident was reported at 10:54 p.m.

Arrested: Nobody was injured in a traffic accident Thursday on Highway 203 in the La Grande area. The accident was reported at 10:10 a.m.

Arrested: Michael Ray Crawford, 43, Island City, was arrested on a Union County bench warrant connected to an original charge of contempt of court, five counts.

Arrested: Jeffrey Hamilton, 55, Elgin, was arrested on a charge of harassment.

Arrested: Tanner James Free,

20, unknown address, was arrested on a charge of first-degree trespassing.

**OREGON STATE POLICE**

Arrested: Matthew Richard Godsill, 26, Nampa, Idaho, was arrested on charges of driving under the influence of intoxicants-alcohol and reckless driving.

**LA GRANDE FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Firefighters responded to eight calls for medical assistance on Sunday, nine on

**UPCOMING FUNERALS AND VISITATIONS**



**Sept. 17**  
**Barbara Roberts:** 10 a.m., funeral, Enterprise Christian Church, followed by a meal at the VFW Hall.

**Sept. 20-21**  
**Oliver Hopkins:** 6-8 p.m. Sept. 20, viewing, Loveland Funeral Chapel, La Grande; 10:30 a.m. Sept. 21, celebration of life, Riverside Park.

**Sept. 21**  
**Mary Meyer:** 11:30 a.m., memorial service, Lighthouse Pentecostal Church, Island City.

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