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COVID-19

Union County cases rise to 383

By Phil Wright
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County added four cases of COVID-19 to its tally over the weekend, increasing the total number of official cases to 383.

The Center for Human Development, La Grande, reported no new cases in the county Monday.

The Oregon Health Authority on Monday reported 277 new confirmed and presumptive cases statewide, bumping Oregon's total to 14,847. The Monday count is a drop from Sunday when the state reported 436 new cases.

The daily record for newly reported cases in Oregon is 437, set on Thursday. The state had set new records for the last three consecutive weeks. Monday marked the first day since Wednesday the state did not top 300 for new cases.

The number of cases has climbed as Oregon reopened business and public life. State and local public health authorities also have reported more cases are the result of community spread rather than workplace outbreaks or people coming into contact with known cases.

While Union County's number of cases has been flattening, the county remains the state's fourth worst per capita, according to the Oregon Health Authority, with 142.7 cases per 10,000 people. Neighboring Umatilla County, which continues to see its case total spike, is the worst in the state per capita, with 170.2 cases per 10,000.

Umatilla County also now has 1,381 total cases, good enough for fourth most of any county, with only Marion (2,170), Washington (2,246) and Multnomah (3,566) having higher totals.

The number of hospital patients with COVID-19 stands at 233 in the state, the Health Authority reported.

The Oregonian/Oregon Live reported on Friday hospitalizations have climbed to levels not previously seen during the pandemic, indicating more people are suffering the most severe

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Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

Elk cows and calves line up along a fence on The Nature Conservancy's Zumwalt Prairie Preserve. According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the population of elk on the preserve has declined in recent years.

Elk numbers decline

Ranchers are pleased but hunters find tags harder to come by

By Ellen Morris Bishop
EO Media Group

WALLOWA COUNTY — Rocky Mountain elk have often been a controversial animal in Wallowa County, but one long-standing issue — the number of elk on Zumwalt Prairie's private lands — has finally been brought under control.

The consequence? Ranchers are happier, but elk tags on the Zumwalt and in the Chesnimnus hunting unit have been reduced for the 2020 season.

Elk numbers have see-sawed from abundance to near extinction and back to abundance. On Zumwalt Prairie's mostly private land, the 2020 population estimate for elk in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Chesnimnus unit, which includes the prairie, is 3,500 elk. But as recently as 2015, the number of elk on the unit approached 4,500, according to ODFW data.

"There were herds of 400 to 500 animals,"

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Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

In early morning, elk mosey up a slope on private lands on Zumwalt Prairie for their post-breakfast nap.

"Both sides — the ranchers and the hunters — think elk are important. No one wants to see the numbers too high or too low."

Chad Dotson, biologist at The Nature Conservancy

Elgin summer lunch program a midday hit

By Dick Mason
The Observer

ELGIN — Oregon schools remain closed because of the coronavirus pandemic, but each weekday members of the staff at Stella Mayfield School in the tiny town of Elgin open their hearts to its children.

Two Elgin School District employees distribute free lunches at Stella Mayfield's east entrance between 11 a.m. and noon, Monday through Friday. Anyone 18 or younger can grab a lunch for free, but the majority of the 50 or so youth who come each day are Stella Mayfield students, according to Megan Myers of the Elgin School District, which has about 400 students.

Myers, a preschool educator, prepares and distributes the meals each day along with Candy Marago, a food service employee. Myers said providing the meals to children is a labor of love.

"It is my favorite part of the day because I get to see the children and interact with them," Myers said.

Main entrees include turkey



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Anji Schmittle and her children, Thorin (red shirt) and Morigin (green shirt), exit Stella Mayfield School, Elgin, with free lunches last week. The family lives in Elgin but the brothers do not attend Stella Mayfield. Even so, the lunches are available to anyone age 18 and younger.

bologna and cheese sandwiches; beef, bean and cheese burritos; turkey salami and cheese sandwiches; mini corn dogs; and pizza. Milk, fruits and vegetables

also come with the meals.

Myers said the youth have a clear favorite for the summer's most popular entree.

"Stuffed cheese sticks," she

said, speaking of breaded mozzarella cheese.

Rod Spikes, a member of the Elgin School Board, said the meals provide a greater service than ever for children because of how the economy is impacting families.

"For some of these kids it may be the only really good meal they get (in the day)," Spikes said. "It is a great thing for them."

Spikes added the meals could provide a financial benefit as well. "It reduces the burden on their families," he said.

The Elgin School District's summer lunch program, which food service supervisor Kim VanCleave heads up, receives funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The federal agency reimburses participating school districts for the meals they serve.

The Elgin School District has been offering free summer lunches through this USDA program for at least a decade. The local program was cut several

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WEATHER

 Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 59 Low Clear
Wednesday 91/57 Mostly sunny

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THURSDAY ABUSE REPORTING

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