



Hospital reports COVID-19 outbreak

Island City Elementary staff tests positive for COVID-19

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande on Wednesday, Nov. 18, made the Oregon Health Authority’s weekly report for workplace outbreaks for COVID-19. According to the report, six employees there have COVID-19.

Hospital spokesperson Mardi Ford said in a press release Tuesday the hospital anticipated the listing and the outbreak is unlikely to cause any major disruptions in care, and the hospital is managing staffing levels to compensate.

“The good news is that the internal processes we follow for tracing COVID-19 among our staff has worked well,” according to the press release. “Unfortunately, we are not completely immune from the spread in our community.”

The weekly report also shows the outbreak at the long-term care facility Wildflower Lodge, La Grande, now stands at 36.

The La Grande School District on Tuesday reported a staff member at Island City Elementary was diagnosed with COVID-19, the district’s third employee to test positive for the virus in the last three weeks. And local law enforcement on Tuesday announced plans to continue the focus on educating residents about Gov. Kate Brown’s mandates that went effect Wednesday to restrict gatherings and social activities to help curb the rising spread of the outbreak.

The school district in a press release stated it will not close buildings but likely will have to move learning to back to online formats.

“In order for us to move forward as a school district with students and staff in our buildings, our reality is we will likely need to shut down class cohorts, close and sanitize classroom locations, etc.,” the release stated.

The district also reported the staff member has not been at Island City Elementary since Friday, Nov. 13, and the areas where they were working have been sanitized.

The reports came as cases continued to skyrocket across the state.

The Oregon Health Authority on Wednesday reported another 1,099 cases statewide, increasing the state total to 59,669. Another

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Frontiers in Forests and Global Change/Contributed Photo

Large trees — those 21 inches in diameter or bigger, such as those among this stand of ponderosa pines and Douglas fir — make up 3% of national forests in Central and Eastern Oregon, yet they store 42% of above-ground carbon in their trunks, stems and branches, according to a study published Nov. 5 in the journal *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*.

Bigger is better

Study shows a few large trees in E. Oregon store most carbon

By George Plaven
Capital Press

JOSEPH — When the U.S. Forest Service recommended lifting a 25-year-old ban on logging large trees in six national forests across Central and Eastern Oregon, the idea was to create healthier landscapes better adapted for drought, disease and more intense wildfires.

New research suggests the proposal could, however, undermine the forests’ role in mitigating climate change by absorbing carbon from the atmosphere.

Large trees, defined as 21 inches in diameter or bigger, make up 3% of the forests, yet they store 42% of above-ground carbon in their trunks, stems and branches, according to a study published Nov. 5 in the journal *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*.

David Mildrexler, an ecologist with the Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands in Joseph led the study to inform future forest management decisions.

“Providing this information, I hope, will allow everyone to understand that these large trees play a very important role in our forest ecosystems,” Mildrexler said. “We should think very carefully before we start with widespread removals of them.”

Earlier this year, the Forest Service proposed amending its rule forbidding cutting 21-inch-diameter trees in the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur, Ochoco, Deschutes and Fremont-Winema national forests — part of a broader set of environmental regulations known as the Eastside Screens.

Instead of a blanket ban, the amendment would turn the 21-inch standard into a guideline, allowing for some logging of large trees in areas where land managers say it would benefit the forests.

For example, the Pacific Northwest Research Station issued a report in February that concluded removing some large trees, especially undesirable shade-tolerant species, could help protect old-growth ponderosa pine and Douglas fir by reducing competition for moisture and eliminating ladder fuels that drive larger, hotter wildfires.

But Mildrexler said the role large trees play as a carbon sink cannot be understated.

“As these trees continue to grow over the next 10-20 years, they will continue to rapidly accumulate more carbon,” he said. “Letting these big trees grow bigger is absolutely important to solving climate change. It would also be good for protecting water and fisheries, habitat and wildlife, and cultural values that we value for our forests.”

Mildrexler and his team analyzed 3,335 forest inventory plots across the six national forests as part of the study. Specifically, they were interested in looking at the size and composition of five main species, including ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, grand fir and western larch.

Using that data, Mildrexler said they could use species-specific equations that allowed them to determine how much above-ground carbon was stored in the larger trees.

“You can see there is a very disproportionate amount of carbon that is stored in these large trees,” he said. “That is consistent with other studies globally, that in some forest systems we find as much as half of the above-ground carbon is stored in the largest 1% of the trees.”

Stephen Baker, a spokesperson for the Forest Service’s Pacific Northwest Region office in Portland, said the agency recently finished its public comment period for the Eastside Screens revision, and a final rule is expected by spring 2021.

Carbon storage is one of the topics that will be analyzed in the final environmental assessment, Baker said.

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La Nina likely to bring some wet weather

Winter system is predicted to bring more precipitation across the Pacific Northwest

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association is predicting a wetter-than-average winter season across much of the northern United States, including the Pacific Northwest. While nearby Great Basin states are bracing for winter drought, Oregon’s La Nina forecast has residents readying



The Observer/File

A snowplow gets an early start in December 2016 in Union County. The La Nina winter of 2016-17 inundated La Grande with 32 inches of snow, more than a third of which fell in December alone. Officials are urging residents of Northeast Oregon to prepare for extra-wet weather as the La Nina winter of 2020-21 looms.

for a potentially snow-packed season.

“We’re pretty confident it’s going to be wetter than normal,” said Marc Austin, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Pendleton. “There’s no guarantee that it’s going to be frozen precipitation, a lot of it could just be liquid, but people should always be prepared just in case.”

Austin said he has calculated La Grande’s average annual snowfall to be 18.6 inches. While he stressed La Nina seasons tend to be wetter, they don’t inevitably lead to high-

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
27° Low
Mainly clear



Friday
44/24
Mostly sunny

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Issue 138
3 sections, 20 pages
La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.



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