



THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



Follow us on the web

THURSDAY • February 11, 2021 • \$1.50

Good day to our valued subscriber Robert Kelly of La Grande

12 counties will see COVID-19 restrictions loosened

Union County remains at 'extreme risk' level in line with state metrics

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Twelve counties will see fewer COVID-19 restrictions on businesses and activities beginning Friday, Feb. 12, as the state dropped risk level ratings for counties due to a decline in new infections.

Ten counties moved out of the extreme risk category, some for the first time since November. That list include Deschutes, Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, and Linn, which all moved from extreme risk to high risk.

Union County, however, remains in the extreme risk category. Umatilla, Crook and Jefferson also remain at extreme risk.

Baker County fell two spots, moving from high to lower risk. Morrow County made a two-tier drop from extreme to moderate risk. Grant County went from moderate to lower risk.

The biggest news statewide was the move of the Portland tri-county metro area of Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, also going from extreme to high risk.

"This is welcome news, as we'll start to see more businesses open up and Oregonians being able to get out a bit more," Gov. Kate Brown said Tuesday, Feb. 9, in announcing the updated risk levels.

The announcement ends a streak of sustained extreme risk levels for most of the populous areas in the state, going back to November.

Through Monday, Oregon has reported 147,219 COVID-19 infections and 2,024 deaths. After peaking at over 1,500 cases per day over a one-week average in early December, the infection trend wobbled through the holiday season before beginning a steady drop at the beginning of 2021.

The current seven-day average is just above 584 new cases per day, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

OHA data also show Union County's total number of cases as of Tuesday stood at 1,222, and the county's death toll from the virus is 18.

The risk level moves means that beginning Friday, counties can loosen restrictions on indoor

See, Risk/Page 5A



Ellen Morris Bishop/For The Observer

The Grande Ronde River flows here below Troy. A bill from Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley would expand the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, designating about 42 miles of the Grande Ronde River as Wild where it runs through the Umatilla and/or Wallowa Whitman national forests.

SAVING STREAMS

Bill from Oregon's U.S. senators adds wildfire planning, protection to newly designated rivers

By ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP
For The Observer

ENTERPRISE — Northeast Oregon is wild, scenic and recreational. If a new bill in the U.S. Senate becomes law, more local streams will officially become Wild, Scenic or Recreational, too.

Oregon's U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, cosponsored the River Democracy Act of 2021, which would add nearly 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system, bringing the total length of protected rivers in Oregon to almost 6,900 miles, or 6.2% of the state's 110,994 miles of streams.

That includes more than 700 miles in Wallowa, Union, Baker and Grant counties. The new designations include many tributaries important to fish, as well as portions of main stem rivers here and across Oregon.

"Rivers and streams are Oregon's lifeblood," Wyden said. "More protected rivers and clear management objectives means more jobs, improved wildfire resiliency and a guarantee for the livability of Oregon."

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage expressed concerns about duplicating protection for endangered species and increasing wildfire threats.

"This proposed act has the potential to restrict customary use, limit economic opportunity and erode the multiple use character of Union County," she said. "It will not provide any economic benefit and will have negative impacts on legal water users."

Wallowa County Commissioner John Hillock was cautious about the proposed designation, especially on private lands.

"It looks as though there will be some

See, Rivers/Page 3A



Ellen Morris Bishop

The Imnaha River flows here through private lands 10 miles upstream from the town of Imnaha. The River Democracy Act of 2021, which Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley cosponsored, would redesignate 58 miles of the river from Indian Crossing to Cow Creek, including this area, as a Recreational River, and label 4 miles of the river, from Cow Creek to the mouth of the confluence with the Snake River, as Scenic.

ABOUT WILD, SCENIC AND RECREATIONAL RIVERS

- Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1968 to preserve certain rivers with outstandingly remarkable natural, cultural and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The original act covered 27 rivers. Read it online at www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/anps/anps_6f.htm.
- The 2021 River Democracy Act from Oregon's U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley would expand the federal law. The text of the proposal is here: www.wyden.senate.gov/download/river-democracy-act-of-2021-bill-text.

Censures and security top agendas in Salem, D.C.

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

With January's ceremonial start of the year out of the way, both Congress and the Oregon Legislature have moved on to sometimes turbulent issues, including disciplinary action against their own members.

Bentz backs Cheney on secret vote

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, has confirmed he backed U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyoming, in a secret GOP vote on



Bentz

Feb. 4 to decide if she should retain her position as House Republican Conference Chair. Cheney was one of just 10 House Republicans to vote Jan. 13 for impeachment of then-President Donald Trump on the charge of "incitement of insurrection" for agitating a mob that attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, resulting in five deaths and injuring over 140 police officers.

The impeachment, the equiv-

alent of an indictment, passed 232-197. The trial of Trump, now out of office, begins this week.

Angry Trump loyalists wanted Cheney removed from the No. 3 post in House GOP leadership. But she won the conference vote 145-61. Cheney, the eldest daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, did not back down from her vote.

Asked about the conference challenge, Cheney said on Fox News Sunday she had no apologies.

"The oath that I took to the Constitution compelled me to vote for impeachment and it doesn't bend to partisanship, it doesn't bend to political pressure," she said. "It's the most important oath that we take."

During a break in the debate, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., had signaled that he backed Cheney.

"Liz has the right to vote her conscience," McCarthy said. "At the end of the day, we'll get united."

See, Politics/Page 5A

INDEX

- Business..... 1B
- Classified..... 3B
- Comics..... 7B
- Crossword..... 3B
- Dear Abby..... 8B
- Horoscope..... 4B
- Letters..... 4A
- Lottery..... 3A
- Obituaries..... 3A
- Opinion..... 4A
- Spiritual..... 6A
- Sports..... 8A

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight
16 LOW
Snow, 3-6"; cold

Friday
25/22
Snow, up to 1"

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 18
3 sections, 24 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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

