



# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



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Good day to our valued subscriber Robert Sunderman of La Grande

## Ag reps says dam breaching a 'nonstarter'

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
 Capital Press

BOISE, Idaho — U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson said his plan to end all salmon litigation and remove four Snake River dams would offer agriculture unprecedented legal protection, but industry stakeholders said it's a nonstarter.

Simpson, R-Idaho, has not proposed legislation, but on Feb. 7, released a \$33.5 billion concept for salmon recovery, which includes removing the Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams on the lower Snake River in 2030 and 2031.

"It's such a different approach," said a Simpson representative, speaking on background. "We're not saying, 'Take the dams out and save salmon.' We're saying, 'Save agriculture, replace everything, and then save salmon.'"

If the dams are removed, each interest group would need sufficient resources to replace the benefits they currently receive, the representative said.

Replacement power generation

See, **Dams**/Page 5A

## Poll: Oregon eager for gas self-service, not sales tax

By **ZANE SPARLING**  
 Oregon Capital Bureau

PORTLAND — Hands off that gas pump!

The quirks of life in the Beaver State might bemuse outsiders, but surely true-blue Oregonians cherish our time-honored idiosyncrasies, right?

It's just not so, according to a new survey.

A poll by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a project of DHM Research, found a majority of state residents are ready to pump their own gas and buy a bottle of spirits at the local supermarket.

Just don't expect them to vote in a sales tax, which three out of four here oppose.

"Support tends to increase among higher-income Oregonians, but no demographic groups

See, **Poll**/Page 5A



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

The most recent winter storm over Elgin adds an additional 2 inches of snow Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Snow- and ice-covered branches have been a cause for weather-related power outages across the state.

# More snow ahead

But National Weather Service says winter weather may start winding down soon

By **DICK MASON** and **ALEX WITTWER**  
 The Observer

LA GRANDE — Winter weather storms will continue to deliver more snow in the Grande Ronde Valley through Friday.

While not record breaking, a few sites already have landed in the top 10 range, according to the National Weather Service.

Cove has received near record snow totals. The National Weather Service reported Cove received 22.6 inches of snow from Thursday to Monday, Feb. 11-15 — with 15.4 inches falling Feb. 13-15, its 10th highest three-day total ever.

And from Feb. 12-15, Cove received 18.2 inches of snow, its sixth highest four-day total ever.

"It was an impressive amount over the five days," said Dan Slagle, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton. "We usually get one system and then a break, but this is multiple days of more moderate snow."

Other noteworthy local totals include 28.8 inches from a site 9.8 miles north of Elgin from Feb. 11-17, and 12.5 inches of snow in Union from Feb. 11-17. Reports from La Grande were not available at press time.

Wallowa County also received its share of snow during a similar time frame, with Wallowa reporting 16.7 inches and Lostine



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Gene Hardy gets ready to drive a plow-equipped tractor down Hardy Road on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Hardy is a member of a multigenerational farming family that has lived in Elgin for nearly a century.

reporting 12.5 inches from Feb. 11-17.

Tollgate, which has already received plenty of snow over the week, could gain another 8-12 inches as the week ends, with more coming over the weekend. Severe winter weather conditions, high winds and drifting snow there led the Oregon Department of Transportation to close Highway 204

between milepost 0 near Weston and milepost 39 near Elgin.

ODOT reported the evening of Tuesday, Feb. 16, crews were working to clear as much snow as possible, focusing on the highway lanes.

See, **Snow**/Page 5A

# Recovery continues for 2020's flood victims

Events set Saturday in La Grande, Pendleton to help ranchers replace fencing lost in floods

By **DICK MASON**  
 The Observer

ELGIN — Many in Umatilla County and Walla Walla County in Washington continue to struggle to recover a year after devastating floods in early February.

The many trials that came later in 2020 may have blotted out that plight for some, but it will come to light again this weekend.

A fundraiser set for Saturday, Feb. 20, in La Grande and Pend-

leton will speak loudly to the desperate circumstances many people in Umatilla and Walla Walla counties still face. The event will be at the Les Schwab tire centers in each city from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. to collect donations and materials for five Umatilla and Walla Walla county ranchers who need money and materials to replace fencing they lost in the flood.

The fencing is critical.

See, **Floods**/Page 5A

### FLOODING IN 2020 ALSO HIT UNION COUNTY

UNION COUNTY — Union County was not spared the wrath of the 2020 early February flood. The portion of Union County hit the hardest was its northern edge along Highway 204, also known as Tollgate Highway. A 10-mile stretch of the roadway, much of which was in Union County, was closed for two weeks in early February after being extensively damaged, said Tom Strandberg, spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Transportation. ODOT reopened the highway after two weeks, but several portions were down to one lane.

The state transportation agency conducted major work that summer to restore portions of the road.

"The highway had to be rebuilt," Strandberg said. Other portions of Union County also hit hard included Elgin, where Mayor Allan Duffy declared a state of emergency. Elgin closed all of Hemlock, South Fifth, Sixth and Cedar streets and Hu Na Na RV park due to flooding. And Imbler School District Superintendent Angie Lakey-Campbell canceled classes there for a day because the floodwaters posed a risk to school buses.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declared a state of emergency on Feb. 7, 2020 in Union, Umatilla and Wallowa counties due to severe flooding.

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	<b>Tonight</b>		<b>Friday</b>
	<b>31</b> LOW		<b>40/26</b>
	Snow, 1-3"		A snow squall

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