

Our View

# Brown needs to better explain risk categories

Some restaurants in Union County are serving sit-down meals to patrons. Union County remains in Oregon's extreme risk category for spreading the coronavirus. So these establishments are not following the state's orders prohibiting dining in. But they are not waving flags in defiance, either.

We understand what they're doing and why. These businesses — really, their owners and the people who work there — are trying to survive. This is not about gaming a system because we're out here in Eastern Oregon or throwing shade at Gov. Kate Brown or making a hullabaloo about some kind of assertion of rights.

This is about finding opportunities to stay in business until business can resume as normal.

This also is not like what was happening in late 2020 with Anytime Fitness, which we reported was operating in open defiance of state mandates regarding the pandemic.

From the accounts we've gathered, these restaurants in Union County are operating at low capacities so patrons can remain socially distant, and their staff are wearing masks, washing their hands and cleaning tables between customers. They're taking all the precautions they can to make their businesses and thus customers and employees safe.

Save one, of course — closing down to in-person dining.

We hold our breath every two weeks in Union County when the latest update on the state's risk categories comes out. And every two weeks we are disappointed. Union County just keeps missing out on dropping from extreme to high risk. And with that, we remain in a continual lockdown on businesses and social interactions and any kind of life that looks a little more like it used to.

That has been the story for almost a year straight here and in much of Eastern Oregon. Meanwhile, Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties in the most population-dense area in the state have been allowed in-person dining since Feb. 12.

Sure, it's at 25% of capacity, but it still leaves plenty of us in Eastern Oregon scratching our heads. Why can those restaurants serve patrons indoors when so many other places can't?

We have editorialized before that the governor's office needs to do a better job of informing the public about why it is making the decisions on the coronavirus that it does. We've even heard from Eastern Oregon lawmakers who have asked for those explanations and haven't received decent answers.

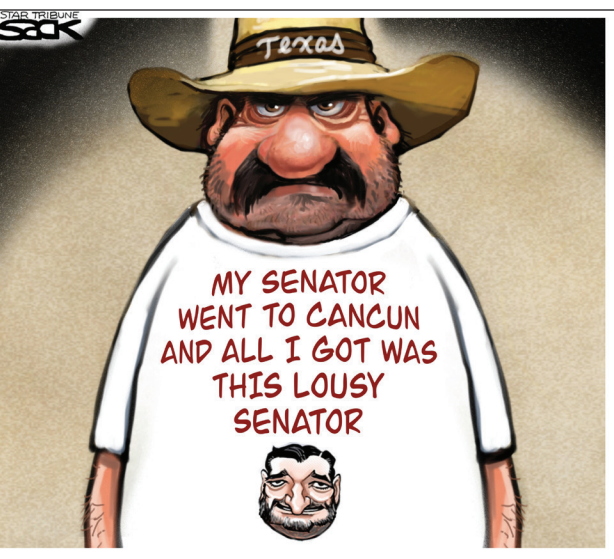
How does Brown and her team derive the standards for the risk categories? Why is two weeks better than one week or five weeks when it comes to reevaluating? All of it seems arbitrary. What's the science that supports any of this?

We're not calling out the local restaurant owners and operators for making the decisions they are making. We also are not encouraging people to defy state mandates that aim to curtail the spread of this virus. But we do encourage locals to order takeout from these establishments when they can.

We want our local restaurants to survive — and get back to thriving as soon as possible. While government grants and low-interest loans have been necessary to help any number of businesses, regular patrons are probably the best answer for their success.

But the governor and the Oregon Health Authority need to better explain the reasons behind the risk categories and evaluation period. She and her administration owe that to the public.

## An Arrest of Progress for the Vaccine Express



Other Views

# The Blue Mountains are important to us

**JEFF BLACKWOOD**  
EO CLIMATE CHANGE COALITION

These lands where we live help define us as individuals and communities. With warming temperatures there are changes happening, however, to these lands we love.

The Blue Mountain Adaption Partnership was developed to identify climate change issues relevant to resource management in the Blue Mountain region. It is a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service, Oregon State University and the University of Washington. In 2017, the original findings were published by the USDA Forest Service in a report entitled "Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation in the Blue Mountains Region." The 330-page report focused on hydrology, fish, upland vegetation and special habitats, chosen as areas of primary concern to our communities.

The vulnerability assessment concluded that "effects of climate change on hydrology would be especially significant." Climate scientists predict that although overall precipitation may not change significantly in the mountains, more rain will mix with snow, especially in the mid-elevations. Spring snowmelt and runoff is already happening earlier, resulting in low summer flows occurring sooner in the summer. Coupled with longer, drier summers, this will affect downstream water use, fish and other aquatic environments. Infrastructure, such as roads, trails, culverts and communities, will be impacted by more intense runoff from severe storms and rain-on-snow events.

Over the next few decades, species such as Chinook salmon, red band trout, steelhead, bull trout and other aquatic life may be drastically reduced

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in abundance and distribution. This will depend on local conditions of reduced streamflow and warmer water and air temperatures.

Increasing air temperatures, drier soils and longer summers are projected to cause changes in vegetation, favoring those species that are more drought tolerant, such as ponderosa pine. A warmer climate will increase natural disturbances, such as insects, disease and wildfire. The assessment predicts that with current trends, the annual acreage burned in the Blue Mountain region could be as high as six times the current average by 2050. Grasses and shrubs, so important for wildlife and livestock, are maturing earlier in the summer. While providing some protection from late-summer drought, this seasonal change means reduced nutrition for those dependent on fall forage for winter health. Drought-tolerant invasive grasses will continue to increase in abundance in forests and rangelands.

Finally, the assessment examined "special areas," mainly wetlands and groundwater-dependent ecosystems, predicting additional stresses as temperatures rise. Although these special areas make up a small portion of the landscape, they are rich in biodiversity and are key components of healthy watersheds.

Along with assessing vulnerabilities, the BMAP process recommended a host of adaptive practices. While they will not necessarily reverse current climate trends, these practices would be helpful in buffering and potentially reducing some adverse effects of climate change. These primarily focus on managing

for healthy watershed and riparian conditions. Many of the recommended practices are being applied today by the various public agencies, tribes and landowners. Thinning small trees, reducing fuel loads, prescribed burning and streamside protections are activities being implemented today. It will take persistence, commitment and funding to invest in sustaining more resilient landscapes in the Blues.

These mountains and canyons are so valuable to so many of us, as well as being cornerstones for our regional cultures. Many of us had our first experience in the outdoors in these mountains, creating lifelong memories. These places and experiences embody our history, culture and who we are.

Nature is not static. Over the past several decades, however, we have accelerated the pace of change. This will impact us all, whether our interests are in First Foods, recreation, making a living or the many more experiences yet to come. By understanding the changes, threats and opportunities with a changing climate, and applying the best science in practices and policies, we will be more successful in sustaining what we value in these nationally treasured lands.

Free copies of the report are available by contacting USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, 1220 SW Third Ave., Suite 1400, Portland 97208-3890, or by contacting local Forest Service offices.

*Jeff Blackwood retired from a career with the U.S. Forest Service. He is a member of the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition.*

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# THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801  
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays  
(except postal holidays) by EO Media Group,  
911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850  
(USPS 299-260)

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