

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

Weekend Edition

SATURDAY - MONDAY • March 6, 2021 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscribers Becky and Jeff Weaver of La Grande

Dead air

EOU student radio may go silent in 2021-22

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University's student-run FM radio station, KEOL, may go silent after the school year.

KEOL is receiving \$33,481 in 2020-21 from the university's Student Fee Committee and asked for \$33,606 for 2021-22. But the committee voted not to fund KEOL in 2021-22.

"It was a very tough decision," said Keegan Sanchez, vice chair of the Student Fee Committee and Eastern's student body president.

The Student Fee Committee, which voted to defund KEOL on Feb. 5, determines how much money from student incidental fees is go to 20 student organizations and programs on campus. The student senate earlier this week approved the recommendations. They must next receive the approval of EOU President Tom Insko and the EOU Board of Trustees.

Sanchez said the SFC had to trim the money it allots to student programs because declining enrollment is reducing the amount of incidental fee money. This forced the committee to cut funding for all but one of the programs and operations — referred to as units — the fees pay for.

"Almost every unit took a hit," said Zachary Cahill, the chair of the Student Fee Committee and the director of financial affairs for EOU's student government.

Units that received cuts included athletics, which was trimmed \$31,000 to \$513,000, and the Hoke Union Building, which was cut \$7,500 to \$304,000.

Cahill said the committee wanted to cut more from the Hoke Union Building's budget but could not because there are so many fixed operational costs, such heating, plumbing and maintenance staff. The building is the home site of about 50 EOU clubs.

The SFC received requests for \$1.4 million in funding for 2021-22 but could allot only \$1.2 million because of the projected decline in incidental fee revenue.

A big portion of KEOL's budget covers the cost of paying its two student employees, who will receive a combined total of about \$20,000 in the 2020-21 school year, said Zachary Cahill, the chair of the Student Fee Committee and the director of financial affairs for EOU's student government. The station also has about four student disc jockeys who work as volunteers.

Cahill said KEOL, based in the Hoke Union Building, was defunded in part because studies indicate radio is a fading industry

See, Radio/Page 5A



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Steve West on Thursday, March 4, 2021, looks toward a forest on the Ponderosa Ranch property he has been working to own. West has been grooming the forest near La Grande for wildlife as part of the agreement that places 250 acres into a conservation easement in exchange for the rock quarry on the property.

ROCK FIGHT: ROUND TWO

Ranch operator counters arguments against quarry

By PHIL WRIGHT
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Steve West has a goal to own the Ponderosa Ranch in the Mount Emily area overlooking the Grande Ronde Valley.

But to accomplish that, he said, he needs to get the OK from the Union County Planning Commission for a rock quarry with railroad access at the bottom of Robb's Hill Road near Perry and about a couple of miles from La Grande.

Plenty of locals, however, don't want the quarry, fearing it will produce numerous negative effects, from noise and dust pollution to harming the nearby Grande Ronde River. West, who produces the TV series Steve's Outdoor Adventures, said he has been working diligently the past two years to ensure that is not going to happen if the quarry becomes reality.

"We're going to have everything there to not negatively impact the valley," West said. "This has been blown



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Steve West, who manages the Ponderosa Ranch near La Grande, pauses in front of a thicket of trees that were cut over the winter Thursday, March 4, 2021. West says the goal was to thin the forest and make the area more appropriate for wildlife.

way out of proportion."

West and others get to make their cases on the quarry project to the planning commission during a public hearing Monday, March 8, at 7 p.m. via teleconference.

Keeping the ranch intact

West explained he is friends with Jim Smejkal of Banks, who bought the ranch in

See, Quarry/Page 5A

Counties in 'extreme' risk receive grace period

Union County's total number of cases hits 1,305 as Wallowa, Baker counties see more deaths

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Counties that might fall back into the state's most restrictive extreme risk level for COVID-19 spread will be given a two-week grace period on heightened restrictions, Gov. Kate Brown announced Thursday, March 4.

Brown said the state's low overall infection rates and its steep trend downward since the winter holidays allowed for "a bit more time" for some state trouble spots. The state

COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS

- Union County: 1,303 cases; 19 deaths
 - Wallowa County: 143 cases, 5 deaths
 - Baker County: 666 cases, 9 deaths
 - Oregon: 156,673 cases; 2,284 deaths
- Source: Oregon Health Authority

ranks 49th of the 50 states in new infections per 100,000 people — only Hawaii scores better. With a positive test rate of 3.9%, Oregon is firmly on track for numbers to continue downward statewide, and 1 million vaccine shots have been administered to residents.

The governor said she made the decision to waive the restrictions "recognizing the challenges businesses encounter when facing

a switch back and forth between extreme risk and other risk levels."

The drop to the higher risk level meant restaurants could offer limited indoor dining, a key change during the cold, wet winter months that have stretched into March.

Higher numbers would have required a return to the tighter restrictions on businesses, dining and activities. Brown's message did not include any changes to rules covering counties already in the extreme risk level.

Brown had announced Feb. 23 that 10 counties had dropped out of the extreme risk level, the highest of the four-tier rating system that also includes high risk, moderate and lower. The higher the risk level, the more

See, Cases/Page 5A

INDEX

- Classified..... 2B
- Comics..... 5B
- Crossword.... 2B
- Dear Abby 6B
- Horoscope..... 3B
- Letters..... 4A
- Lottery..... 3A
- Obituaries..... 3A
- Opinion..... 4A
- Outdoors..... 1B
- State..... 8A
- Sudoku 5B

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
33 LOW
Mostly cloudy



Sunday
46/24
A few showers

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 28
2 sections, 14 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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



8 51153 00100 6

TUESDAY EARLY HEAD START

Online at lagrandeobserver.com