

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

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Two men vie for one seat on LG School Board

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The 2021 school board election is underway in Union County.

Voters are beginning to cast mail ballots for candidates running for 17 school board seats across Union County. Four of the races in the May 18 mail election are contested, including one in the La Grande School District in which Elijah Romer is challenging incumbent Randy Shaw for Position 4.



Romer



Shaw

There are four board positions on the La Grande School Board up for election. The others — Positions 1, 2 and 5 — are uncontested. Incumbent Danelle Lindsey-Wilson, the owner of a hair salon, is running for reelection to Position 1; incumbent Bruce Kevan, a retired educator, is the Position 5 candidate; and Jake

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15 counties back under extreme risk

By **GARY A. WARNER**
and **BRYCE DOLE**
EO Media Group

SALEM — Union and Wallowa counties remain in the lower risk category for the spread of COVID-19, but 15 other Oregon counties find themselves categorized as extreme risk.

Gov. Kate Brown on Tuesday, April 27, announced changes to county risk levels under the state's public health framework due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 in Oregon.

"With hospitalizations rising above 300 people statewide, threatening to overwhelm doctors and nurses, 15 counties will move to the extreme risk level effective Friday, April 30, through Thursday, May 6," according to Brown's announcement.

In addition, nine counties will be in the high risk level, four at moderate risk, and eight at lower risk.

Baker County joins the 15 under the extreme risk category. The others are Clackamas,

See, **Risk/Page 5A**

Fire season fears



A firefighter air tanker drops a load of fire retardant in 2018 into a draw in Harrington Canyon southwest of Pilot Rock to help control a large wildfire. In 2021, Oregon could be in for another bad fire season.

East Oregonian, File

Union, Baker and Umatilla counties have declared droughts; some snowpack holding up well

By **KATY NESBITT**
For the East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Despite rain showers over the weekend in much of Northeast Oregon, fire officials say the region is still ripe for wildfires.

"It's dry," said Joe Hessel, a forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry's Northeast Oregon. "I think, statewide, Oregon Department of Forestry protected lands have had four times the average number of fires."

Not only are the number of fires higher for this time of year but, Hessel said, the number of acres burned is three times higher than normal.

Besides dry conditions, the National Weather Service in Pendleton predicts high winds as being the new normal for the region as the climate continues to warm.

"If we're looking ahead, temperatures are gradually warming, which gives the possibility for thermal gradients across the Cascades to set up, creating greater westerly winds," said Brandon Lawhorn, a meteorologist at Pendleton's NWS office. "If they set up more often, we will see more of these high-wind events or wind advisories, but how impactful they will be is in question. However, it doesn't take much of a breeze and dry conditions to create that greater fire weather concern."

The extended forecast for later in May, June and July throughout the Blue Mountains calls for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation.

"In June and July, across the Columbia Basin and into Central Oregon, there is an above normal significant wildfire potential," Lawhorn said.

Closer in, Lawhorn said, severe weather is

predicted for late April and early May.

"The question is, for the rest of this spring, will there be enough precipitation to hamper the drought outlook we are seeing in the area?" he said.

"In June and July, across the Columbia Basin and into Central Oregon, there is an above normal significant wildfire potential."

— **Brandon Lawhorn**, National Weather Service meteorologist

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously earlier this month to declare a drought disaster and asked Gov. Kate Brown and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to do the same. Baker and

Union counties already declared a drought. One bit of good news is two sources of increased funding for the state's fire suppression efforts. Hessel said short-term funding

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Union County voters to decide on weed control levy

County's weed control program treats 3,000 to 5,300 acres each year

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Union County voters now are starting to weigh in on the fate of a measure addressing a local issue sometimes overlooked but always critical — the control of invasive noxious weeds.

Measure 31-104 is a five-year local option operating levy that would raise close to \$230,000 a year for noxious weed control. It is the only levy on the Union County ballot for the May 18 election. Ballots for the mail election were sent out Wednesday, April 28.

The measure would cost Union County property owners 12 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. This means the owner of a \$100,000 home would pay \$12 a year for the levy, said Alan Guttridge, a member of the Union County Weed Advisory Board. The new local option



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

A sign along Wallowa Lake Highway north of Imbler on Wednesday, April 28, 2021, asks residents to control noxious and invasive weeds in the area, such as leafy spurge, tansy ragwort and hound's-tongue. Union County voters in May decide on a five-year local option operating levy that would raise close to \$230,000 a year for weed control.

operating levy would have the same tax rate as the present one.

Passage of Measure 31-100 would renew an operating levy that has been in place since 2016, when voters first approved a five-year operating levy of the same rate. Guttridge said passage of the 2016 local option levy allowed Union County to hire a full-time county weed super-

visor, Brian Clapp. Guttridge credited Clapp, now finishing his fifth year as Union County's weed supervisor, with doing an outstanding job.

"He has developed a successful and comprehensive weed management program covering all of Union County," Guttridge said.

The county weed supervisor

works with private landowners and public land management agencies to take inventory of, map and monitor weed infestations, treat weeds, administer a cost-share program with landowners, provide public education on noxious weed issues, enforce state and local laws pertaining to weed control, write applications for grants and more, according to information from the Union County Weed Board.

Guttridge said the weed management program is continuing to become more effective. The program treats between 3,000 and 5,300 acres in Union County each year for noxious weeds.

One reason controlling noxious weed is critical in Union County, Guttridge said, is that certified seed crops are an important part of the local economy. He said the sale of seed crops brings \$25 million to \$30 million annually to Union County. If weeds contaminate a seed crop its value may be reduced dramatically, Guttridge said.

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section	
Tonight	Friday
50 LOW	75/53
Mainly clear	Partly sunny

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