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LA GRANDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Budget looks solid

District's budget committee proposes \$44M budget for adoption

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande School District's budget picture looks solid despite having 140 fewer students since 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The La Grande School District's budget committee voted Wednesday, June 2, to recommend that a total budget of \$44.345 million, \$3.180 million more than its current year's budget, be adopted by the school board.

The recommended budget would call for no program reductions or layoffs and a net increase of .55 of one full-time employee position.

The district's budget is solid because of \$7.01 million in federal funding it has available to it to offset the impact of the pandemic. This is funding the La Grande School District has qualified for and will be reimbursed for once it is spent, according to La Grande School District Budget Director Chris Panike.

A significant portion of this COVID-19 relief funding would be put in the school district's reserve fund, helping offset the money the school district lost due to declining enrollment.

The school district receives about \$8,600 from the state for each student. The loss of 140 students since the pandemic hit has cost the school district about \$1.2 million in state funding.

Typically, a loss in funding would mean the school district would be forced to make cuts in staff and programs to balance its budget. That is not the case now because the school district's reserve fund is strong

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The Observer, File

On the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest over the past half century, lightning — not careless or intentionally destructive people — has sparked almost eight of every 10 blazes.

DEVASTATING COMBINATION

Lightning starts most fires in Northeastern Oregon, but human-caused blazes pose serious risk as well

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Noel Livingston and Joel McCraw ponder the coming fire season with not a small amount of dread.

In this sense the pair shares something in common with people across Oregon, and indeed across the West, whose task it is to deal with wildfires.

The combination of the drought afflicting much of the region and fresh memories of the fires that destroyed sections of several towns and killed 11 people in western and southern Oregon in September 2020 is a troubling concoction.

Livingston and McCraw work on the 2.3-million-acre Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Livingston is the Wallowa-Whitman's fire staff officer, and McCraw the fire management officer for the Whitman District in the southern half of the forest.



Bureau of Land Management/Contributed Photo, File

The unpredictability of human-caused fires — when they might happen, as well as where — is one reason the Forest Service and Oregon Department of Forestry institute restrictions on campfires, the use of chain saws and other activities when fire danger is high or extreme.

When they consider the threats they'll likely deal with during fire season, Livingston and McCraw worry more about what's going to happen thousands of feet up in the atmosphere, where electrical storms sometimes brew on hot summer afternoons, than what will transpire on the ground.

On the Wallowa-Whitman over the past half century, lightning — not careless or intentionally destructive people — has sparked almost eight of every 10 blazes.

That's quite a different situation, Livingston said, than what prevails in national forests closer

to metropolitan areas — the Mount Hood, for instance, parts of which are less than an hour's drive from Portland, or the Willamette, a similar distance from both Salem and Eugene. In those forests the percentages are nearly reversed, Livingston said, with human-caused fires predominant.

The Mount Hood and the Willamette national forests have fire staff who spend much of their time patrolling, particularly in popular areas, such as campgrounds, so as to be ready to douse human-caused blazes, he said.

On the Wallowa-Whitman, by

contrast, those sorts of "prevention patrols" are what Livingston describes as a "collateral duty" for firefighters.

"We don't typically do that except in extreme conditions," Livingston said. "We don't have to do it in a normal year."

He conceded, though, 2021 isn't likely to be a normal year. At least not as that word was defined until 2020.

Livingston said the pandemic-driven trend of more people recreating outdoors in 2020, a phenomenon seen across the West, was noteworthy on the Wallowa-Whitman.

"Any time we get more people in the woods, the risk goes up," Livingston said. "We're going to pay more attention to that."

Despite bigger crowds at campgrounds and other recreation sites on the Wallowa-Whitman in 2020 — and the expectation for similar scenes this summer — Livingston said he was "pleasantly surprised that we didn't get more human-caused fires than we did."

Indeed, the Wallowa-Whitman's 12 human-caused fires, which burned a total of just 23 acres, was less than half the yearly average of 30 fires amassed from 1970-2019.

Lightning fires also were rarer than usual, with 60 blazes

See, **Fire/Page 5A**

EOU to mandate coronavirus vaccines on campus

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University announced Thursday, June 3, it will require students and employees to be vaccinated in order to take part in on-campus learning.

Eastern will officially require COVID-19 vaccinations when the FDA fully approves one or more of the vaccines. Both Pfizer and Moderna have started the months-long process of securing full approval, and the FDA has indicated they're "highly likely" to be approved later in 2021. But school officials don't want members of the campus community waiting for that, emphasizing in a news release that it "strongly encourages students, employees and partners to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible."

"We are focused on pro-



Insko

Reynolds

Seydel

tecting the safety and health of the EOU community and returning to a highly engaged, in-person, on-campus experience that upholds our mission and shared values," said Eastern Oregon University President Tom Insko.

EOU will allow students to attend courses virtually if they choose not to receive one of the COVID-19 vaccines. Additionally, the university will make accommodations for medical and non-medical exemptions as those decisions are made accordingly by program personnel.

With EOU's announcement, every public university in the

state of Oregon now requires the COVID-19 vaccination for on-campus participation. Oregon Institute of Technology made a similar announcement June 2.

Tim Seydel, vice president for university advancement, said the feedback from many students at the school during the last year indicated a desire to get back to an in-person experience.

"Students came to college for that experience of living in residence halls, going to football games, seeing live entertainment," he said. "They're not able to do that right now."

According to Seydel, Eastern will likely be able to host outdoor events in full next fall, as well as tracking state guidelines for indoor gatherings.

Since the 2020 fall semester, Eastern Oregon has been holding classes at roughly 50% capacity.

With approximately 3,000 students enrolled, the La Grande university managed to avoid going fully remote like many other colleges and universities across Oregon and the rest of the country, according to Seydel.

Seydel said the conversation with other universities about vaccination requirements has been ongoing at the state level for quite some time. While EOU is the last public university in the state to mandate vaccinations, many students approved of the diligence.

"It's nice that they're waiting until it's FDA approved, since a lot of other colleges aren't doing that," said EOU junior Anna Kestie.

Junior Mary Ellen Buxton echoed Kestie's sentiment and noted both she and Kestie already have been vaccinated.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 40 LOW Mainly clear		Sunday 70/39 Sunny
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La Grande, Oregon

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



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TUESDAY

LHS SENIORS SAY FAREWELL TO HIGH SCHOOL

Online at lagrandeobserver.com