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SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

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Union County declares drought due to low snowpack

Emergency declaration first for county since 2015

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — An alarming snowpack report and low precipitation levels spurred the Union County Board of Commissioners to declare a drought emergency on Wednesday, June 9, and begin its regulated fire season two weeks early on June 15.

The emergency drought declaration was made after

Union County Emergency Manager Nick Vora told the commissioners that the Grande Ronde and Powder Valley basin snowpacks are zero percent of normal at some measuring sites.

This is believed to be the first time since 2015, Vora said, that Union County has declared a drought emergency.

On the bright side, Vora noted that the Grande Ronde and Powder River basins will still be receiving some snowmelt.

“There is still snow in the mountains, it is just in places where we do not measure,” he said, adding that measuring sites are



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

A sharp divide between two fields near Imbler show the effects of the drought on Friday, June 11, 2021. Drought conditions for Union County were officially declared on June 9, joining with nearby counties including Walla Walla, Umatilla, and Wallowa in declaring a drought emergency.

located in areas that are accessible, while some

areas with snow are much harder to reach.

Early runoff

Drought conditions developed when much of the snowpack ran off earlier than normal and there was no significant additional snow or rain, according to Mike Burton, Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist.

“We were not recharged,” he said.

Burton said that in February the snowpacks in Grande Ronde and Powder River basins were solid.

“We had a better than average year, but it came off faster than normal,” he said. Warmer nights, Burton said, are one of the reasons

the snowpack ran off faster.

Vora also said that the snowpack situation looked good in February.

“It had caught up to near-or above-normal levels at mid and low elevations,” the emergency services manager said.

Vora said there is reason to hope that the drought conditions could ease.

“There is still a lot of spring left. We still could receive some rain,” he said.

Taking a toll

The Union County Board of Commissioners, in making its drought

See, **Drought/Page 5A**



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Daniel Corsini works on the white queen for his chess set that he is making at La Grande High School during art class on Thursday, May 27, 2021.

The tentacled queen

Local high school student makes gargantuan chess set out of clay

By **ALEX WITTWER**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A local high school student has spent a year building a chess set during art class. He’s almost finished.

Daniel Corsini, a sophomore at La Grande High School, has been working on building a chess set during the hour-long class under the tutelage of Rich

McIlmoil, the art teacher at the school. But these aren’t ordinary chess pieces.

The extra-large pieces are all hand-made, unique, alien designs with intricate details and faces. Pawns resemble gargoyles, and the queen’s massive presence is announced by its tentacles.

“I think about something that would look like an alien, and have alien features, and make it into that,” Corsini said. “I thought it would be a neat concept

to make these things,” he said. “I like a lot of creative freedom on what you make, but it might make it harder to tell (the pieces) apart from mine.”

Because of their size, the pieces can take several days to finish — but it only takes a few hours at most for the young artist to sculpt the clay.

“The big ones, it takes about a whole

See, **Queen/Page 5A**

OR30 wolves kill sheep on Mount Emily

By **KATY NESBITT**
For The Observer

MEACHAM — Wolf numbers in the northern Blue Mountains continue to increase as does the risk to livestock and the dogs that protect and herd them.

According to a June 2 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife livestock depredation investigation report, a sheep herder on Horseshoe Ridge outside of Meacham reported seeing four wolves near his sheep on a 1,200-acre, timbered private pasture. He soon found one dead and five injured lambs. A herding dog also was wounded and had a 1-inch tear in the hide and fresh blood in the armpit of the right front leg.

The investigation said the dog was injured at the same time and in the same area as the lambs, but lacked diagnostic evidence to determine the cause. The dog has since recovered.

A second lamb died before the investigation. The carcasses had multiple teeth punctures

See, **Wolves/Page 5A**

Serving up free lunches

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon feeding children and teens

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Children and teenagers in Union and Wallowa counties can again enjoy weekday lunches at no cost this summer.

The free meals will be

available in several towns, including La Grande, Elgin, Wallowa, Enterprise and Joseph.

The La Grande lunches will be served at the Riviera Activity Center each weekday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. by Community Connection of North-

east Oregon through Aug. 27. The lunches, which started Monday, June 7, are free to anyone age one to 18 regardless of where they live or their family’s income level. The cost for people older than 18 is \$4.

The meals will be available on a grab-and-go basis. Nobody will be allowed to eat meals inside the Riviera

See, **Lunch/Page 5A**



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Families and kids line up inside the gymnasium at Riviera Activity Center to receive free lunches on Thursday, June 10, 2021. The lunch program is available to anyone under 18 who shows up, with no questions asked. Those older than 18 will have to pay \$4 for the meal.

INDEX

Classified.....2B	Lottery.....2A	Outdoors & Rec...1B
Comics.....5B	Record.....3A	Sports.....7A
Crossword.....2B	Obituaries.....3A	Sudoku.....5B
Horoscope.....2B	Opinion.....4A	Weather.....6B

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight		Sunday
	56 LOW		87/56
	Partly cloudy		Warmer

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