

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

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## Getting a break from the heat

Cooling stations around La Grande offer respite from record-breaking temperatures

By CARLOS FUENTES  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — With recently high temperatures forcing residents to turn their air conditioners to full blast, several organizations in the area have opened their doors to the public as cooling centers, with cool air, water and charging stations readily available.

The Union County Warming Station, 2008 Third St., La Grande, is offering space for anyone who wants to cool off. The station opened Monday, June 28, from noon to 5 p.m. on any days that are over 90 degrees.

Taylor Gould, chair of the warming station's board, said the building has the capacity for 20 people and has snacks, water and entertainment readily available.

"We will be open on these hot days as long as we can get two volunteers, and we have books and puzzles and we're looking to set up a movie projector so people can come inside and cool off a bit," Gould said.

According to Matt Callihan, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton, several cities in Union and Wallowa counties have broken temperature records for the month of June.

"We're seeing these high temperatures much earlier than we would normally expect them," he said. "For example, in La Grande, there've been two instances in the past of temperatures being over 100 degrees for consecutive days, but they've always been in July, not June."

La Grande reached a high of 106 on June 29 — the fifth overall hottest day in the city's recorded history.

Wallowa County has also seen record highs. Temperatures in Enterprise on June 29 peaked at 102 — the eighth highest in city history and the hottest temperature recorded in the month of June.

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## UNION COUNTY FOURTH OF JULY



City of Union/Contributed Photo

Fireworks will be launched from Buffalo Peak Golf Course in Union for the 2021 Fourth of July display and a portion of the course will be available for people to watch the show.

## A festive Fourth

For first time, Buffalo Peak will be site of Fourth of July fireworks show

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

UNION — Pioneers were still trekking to the Northwest on the Oregon Trail when one of the first documented Fourth of July fireworks shows in the Grande Ronde Valley took place in 1876.

The show was conducted in Union after a ball attended by 101 people at Union's old Centennial Hotel. An advertisement for the formal dance, whose writer may have been prone to hyperbole, stated that the ball would "eclipse anything of the kind ever given east of the Cascades," according to the book "Oregon's Flamboyant Fourth" by Doris Huffman.

No formal dances are scheduled in Union County during this year's Fourth of July celebration, still it will be memorable — and historic.

This year's fireworks show will be held for the first time at Union's Buffalo Peak Golf Course after being run in the vicinity of Union High School's sports complex in 2018 and 2019. Fireworks will be launched from the golf course and a portion of the course will be available for people to watch the show.

The location of the Union fireworks show, not conducted in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, was moved to Buffalo Peak because the course is on higher ground so fireworks launched there can be seen throughout the town.

"It is a perfect spot," said Donna Beverage, a Union County Commissioner and president of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, which is in charge of the county's fireworks show.

The fireworks show is one of two major Fourth of July events set to be conducted in



The Observer, File

Fireworks light up the night sky July 4, 2018, over Union. The 2021 fireworks show will be held for the first time at Buffalo Peak Golf Course after being run in the vicinity of Union High School's sports complex in 2018 and 2019.

Union County. The first will be the annual Fourth of July parade in Imbler, which starts at noon. The event was canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic. The Imbler Christian Church, following the parade, will be providing free hot dogs, soda pop, chips and cotton candy.

Many people attending the parade will likely also travel to Union for the fireworks show. Sites from which people are being encouraged to observe the fireworks show include Union High School's athletic complex.

"That would be a great place for people to bring blankets and chairs and watch the show," Beverage said.

Previous fireworks shows in Union included a small family-oriented festival at the UHS athletic complex, which featured live music and the awarding of prizes. No such

festival will be conducted this year, though, because of the pandemic. Doug Wiggins, Union's city administrator, said that because it was unclear what COVID-19 safety restrictions would be in place on the Fourth of July until recently, there wasn't enough time to organize pre-fireworks activities.

Those arriving early for the fireworks show will have an opportunity to visit a number of evening yard sales and enjoy dinner in Union, Beverage said. She said that at least two restaurants will be open in Union prior to the fireworks.

The fireworks show will launch just after dusk and run 30 to 40 minutes. It will be put on by Western Fireworks Display, a Portland-area company that has run all of

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## La Grande bans all fireworks

City bans fireworks, as well as outdoor recreational fires for foreseeable future

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The city of La Grande Fire Department announced on Tuesday, June 29, that fireworks and outdoor recreational fires will be prohibited in La Grande until further notice.

The ban comes in the wake of abnormally high temperatures for this time of year in Eastern Oregon. The use of fireworks and all outdoor burning will be prohibited for the foreseeable future, with citations being given to violators of the ban.

"I know it's upsetting to some people or probably frustrating, but I just feel like it's the right thing," La Grande Fire Chief Emmitt Cornford said.

The decision comes just days before the Independence Day holiday, which is the main focus of the fire department's ban on fireworks. The department is aiming the ban toward lowering the risk of fire due to the current state of temperatures and high risk of wildfire.

"We have shut down burning in the past early, but I can't recall a season where it's been this dry this early and we've had temperatures like this," Cornford said. "It's just extra precaution to make sure we don't have any unwarranted problems in town."

According to the La Grande Fire Department, the decision is preemptive and does not address any rise in wildfires caused by fireworks or open fires throughout the month of June. However, the department typically deals with a steady flow of firework-related incidents throughout the summer months and officials are worried the extreme temperatures can expand the potential damage exponentially.

"My concern would be that wildfires would be more extreme this year and could get more out of hand than years in the past," Cornford said.

The fireworks sales that normally take place in tents in front of Safeway in La Grande and Walmart in Island City have also been shut down this year. They are usually run by the La Grande High School band program as a fundraiser for trips and other fees.

"Because of extreme heat and fire risk, the LHS Band has decided to cancel its sale of fireworks this summer to support the LG Fire Department and to be as safe as possible," Alex Justice, the director of the LHS band, said in a statement. "This annual fundraiser has been crucial for paying for trips and festival costs on a yearly basis. If you are interested in supporting

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

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