

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

July 6, 2021

TUESDAY EDITION

\$1.50

## WHAT.A.BLAST.

Fireworks fill the sky over Buffalo Peak Golf Course in Union



The Nilson family and hundreds of other spectators watch as fireworks light up the night sky at the Buffalo Peak Golf Course in Union Sunday, July 4, 2021. The "Thunder at the Peak" fireworks display was mostly without incident, with only a small fire erupting and quickly doused by firefighters on scene.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer

## Excursion train back on track

Eagle Cap Excursion Train starts 2021 season after year-long break

ELGIN — The Eagle Cap Excursion Train, which has been closed to the public since the onset of the pandemic, commenced its summer season on Saturday, July 3, with 88 passengers onboard.

The train, which has run every year since 2004 — except last year because of COVID-19 — is scheduled to complete 16 rides between July and October. The excursion train is based out of the Elgin Train Depot and will offer rides most weeks during the summer.

"It was a hard, tough year without rides, because you have to keep the train maintained even when it's not running," David Arnold, one of the locomotive engineers, said. "We've been doing a lot of preparation, so it feels good to be back and running the train. This is the easy part."

Passengers on the season's inaugural train enjoyed scenic views along the Grande Ronde River and parts of the Wallowa River for a 38-mile round trip, which takes about three and a half hours.

"I loved it. I would definitely do it again," Jon Richards, a first-time passenger, said. "It's pretty neat they have this here. It's a good way to enjoy the views that you don't get to see in a car."

The excursion is entirely operated by volunteers from the Friends of the Joseph Branch, although the engineers all have years of experience operating trains.

"I've been working with trains for about 40 years now," Matthew Sirrine, another engineer, said. "I'd guess I've operated over 6,000 trains in that time."

The railroad also offers several extended trips, including a six-hour round trip to Minam. On most rides, food and drinks are provided.

According to Ed Spaulding, president of the Friends of the Joseph Branch, the organization will remain cautious while COVID-19 regulations are still in place.

"We've spread seats out for the COVID-19 regulations, and we still are telling people to wear masks, because we're technically public transportation, which still has those rules," Spaulding said.

See, Train/Page A5

## Union County asks for 'seat at the table'

Commissioners express opposition to expanding Wild and Scenic Rivers

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Union County Board of Commissioners is taking a stand against proposed federal legislation that would



Beverage



Scarfo



Wyden



Merkley

significantly expand the Wild and Scenic River system in Oregon.

The commissioners have written a letter to be sent to Oregon Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden expressing opposition to the legislation

Wyden and Merkley, would add 4,684 miles to the Wild and Scenic River system in Oregon, including 135 miles in Union County.

The letter will be sent to Merkley and Wyden on Tuesday, July 6, according

to Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage.

Beverage said the board of commissioners is troubled by the lack of communication between county leadership and the senators over the draft bill. She said the county has not had a chance to enter into discussions with Wyden's or Merkley's staff about which rivers and creeks in Union County should be designated as wild or scenic under the act.

The bill was introduced Feb. 3 and a hearing on it was conducted June 23 in Washington, D.C., by the National Parks Subcommittee, which is part of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Beverage does not believe the bill should go forward until Union County commissioners and other elected officials have a

See, Rivers/Page A5

### INDEX

Classified.....B4	Horoscope.....B4	Records.....A3
Comics.....B7	Local.....A2	Sports.....A7
Crossword.....B4	Lottery.....A2	State.....A8
Dear Abby.....B8	Obituaries.....A3	Sudoku.....B7
Home.....B1	Opinion.....A4	Weather.....B8

**WEATHER** Full forecast on the back of this issue

Tonight: 62 low  
Mildly clear

Wednesday: 88/54  
Mostly hot

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2 sections, 16 pages  
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THURSDAY

RARE APPLE FOUND IN WALLOWA COUNTY

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