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Helping people who need it

Group provides grocery gift cards and services to families isolating due to COVID-19

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — In difficult times, a community-based organization is providing some relief to families impacted by COVID-19.

Northeast Oregon Network, a nonprofit based in La Grande, provides support to families whose incomes are impacted by a quarantine or isolation by offering grocery gift cards and other services. Funded by the Oregon Health Association and other partners, the nonprofit health collaborative aims to provide financial and non-financial support to families in need.

“We just want to help people make it through their quarantine or isolation safely because it’s a really stressful time,” Executive Director Liberty Avila said.

Local outreach

The Oregon Health Association began funding the program in July 2020, while the Center for Human Development, La Grande, also works with the organization on a local basis. According to Avila, Northeast Oregon Network has assisted roughly 300 families with groceries and other services since the start of the pandemic. The organization’s outreach spreads across Union, Baker and Wallowa counties.

For families in need due to quarantine, the program can provide up to \$120 in grocery gift cards per family member. Northeast Oregon Network also helps families retrieve their groceries if necessary, transport family members

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‘We are definitely concerned’

Jim Ward/Contributed Photo

A female adult elk licks her calf in this undated photo. A Starkey Project study is helping to determine if climate change is hurting Rocky Mountain elk reproduction by leaving less time in the spring and early summer to build up fat reserves, which are critical for having successful pregnancies and producing the milk needed to raise their calves.

Biologists study how climate change affects Rocky Mountain elk

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

STARKEY — Rocky Mountain elk in Northeastern Oregon may fall prey to climate change.

U.S. Forest Service research biologist Mike Wisdom and Casey Brown, a research biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, are among a growing number of people who are concerned about the role climate change is playing in nature. Wisdom and Brown are helping conduct a Starkey Project study aimed at determining if climate change will hurt Rocky Mountain elk reproduction.

The study is not complete and intensive data analysis remains to be done, but its preliminary findings indicate that climate change could cause elk populations to decline in Northeastern Oregon and other areas.

“We are definitely concerned,” Wisdom said.

The reason for the worry is that rising temperatures resulting from climate change are reducing the amount of



U.S. Forest Service/Contributed Photo

A Starkey Project study is helping to determine if climate change is hurting Rocky Mountain elk reproduction.

time quality vegetation is available to elk.

“The nutrition window for elk is shifting,” Wisdom said. “It is more compressed.”

Climate change’s impact

Wisdom said cow elk now have less time in the spring and early summer to build up fat reserves, which are critical for having successful pregnancies and producing the milk needed

to raise their calves.

“Lactating females have higher energy demands and thus are more sensitive to climate change,” he said.

Brown said that in the past the most nutritious vegetation available to elk, grasses and forbs flush with new growth, were available in Northeastern Oregon from early spring to early summer. This vegetation is now available on a less nutritious — but still valuable level

— from early summer to mid-summer, followed by a brown period when there is little precipitation, from mid-July through the fall, a time when most of the vegetation available is dried out and offers little nutritional value.

Today, the best forage for elk is available for about two fewer weeks than before, and the “brown” periods runs three to four weeks longer.

“There is now a more pronounced period of low precipitation during the summer and fall,” said Wisdom, co-project leader of the Starkey Project with Darren Clark of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Brown anticipated, when she and research biologist Priscilla Coe started their plant study at Starkey in 2015, that they would find less forage was available to elk than three decades ago. But she was surprised by how much it had decreased.

“It was greater than I thought it would be,” she said.

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Anger over mandate prompts protest

Hundreds rally for medical freedom in La Grande

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — “Just say no.”

Those words echoed through downtown La Grande as former Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives Mark Simmons led chants to a crowd of over 200 gathered in front of City Hall on Saturday, Aug. 28.

The demonstration was organized by several groups in Union County to rally for members of



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Demonstrators congregate on the sidewalk in front of La Grande City Hall during the medical freedom rally on Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. A crowd of over 200 displayed signs and flags as speakers voiced their opinions on the City Hall stairs.

the community against COVID-19 vaccination requirements. The outcry comes in the wake of Gov. Kate Brown’s vaccine mandates for state employees, school staff and health care workers. Citizens gathered along the sidewalk on Adams Avenue to demonstrate, voice their concerns and display signs to ongoing traffic.

“At some point we’ve got to say, Kate Brown, I will not comply,” said Kyle Hove, one of the rally organizers from Silent No More Union County.

The former Oregon State Police sergeant with 20 years of service helped

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La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
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THURSDAY THE HISTORY OF A LOCAL BAND

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