

OUR VIEW

It's your call — sports officials needed

Becoming a sports referee looks like a thankless job. Emotions during a high school basketball game or football contest can run pretty high, and there is never any shortage of sideline second-guessers who — for at least a short time on a Friday or Saturday night — suddenly become experts on the rules and regulation of a particular sport. Those self-proclaimed experts are never hesitant to let the men and women in the stripes know it either.

Yet, high school and middle school sports are the lifeblood of many small communities across rural Eastern Oregon. Each game represents a minor gathering of the tribe where parents and relatives can convene to watch their son or daughter or grandson or granddaughter or cousin compete against other youth.

For those games to continue, for that traditional part of our life to prosper, we need men and women who will officiate those contests. Right now, that's a problem.

In a recent story, George Gillette, the Blue Mountain Basketball Officials Association commissioner, indicated there has been a decade-long drop in the number of basketball officials, and the shortage is beginning to make an impact.

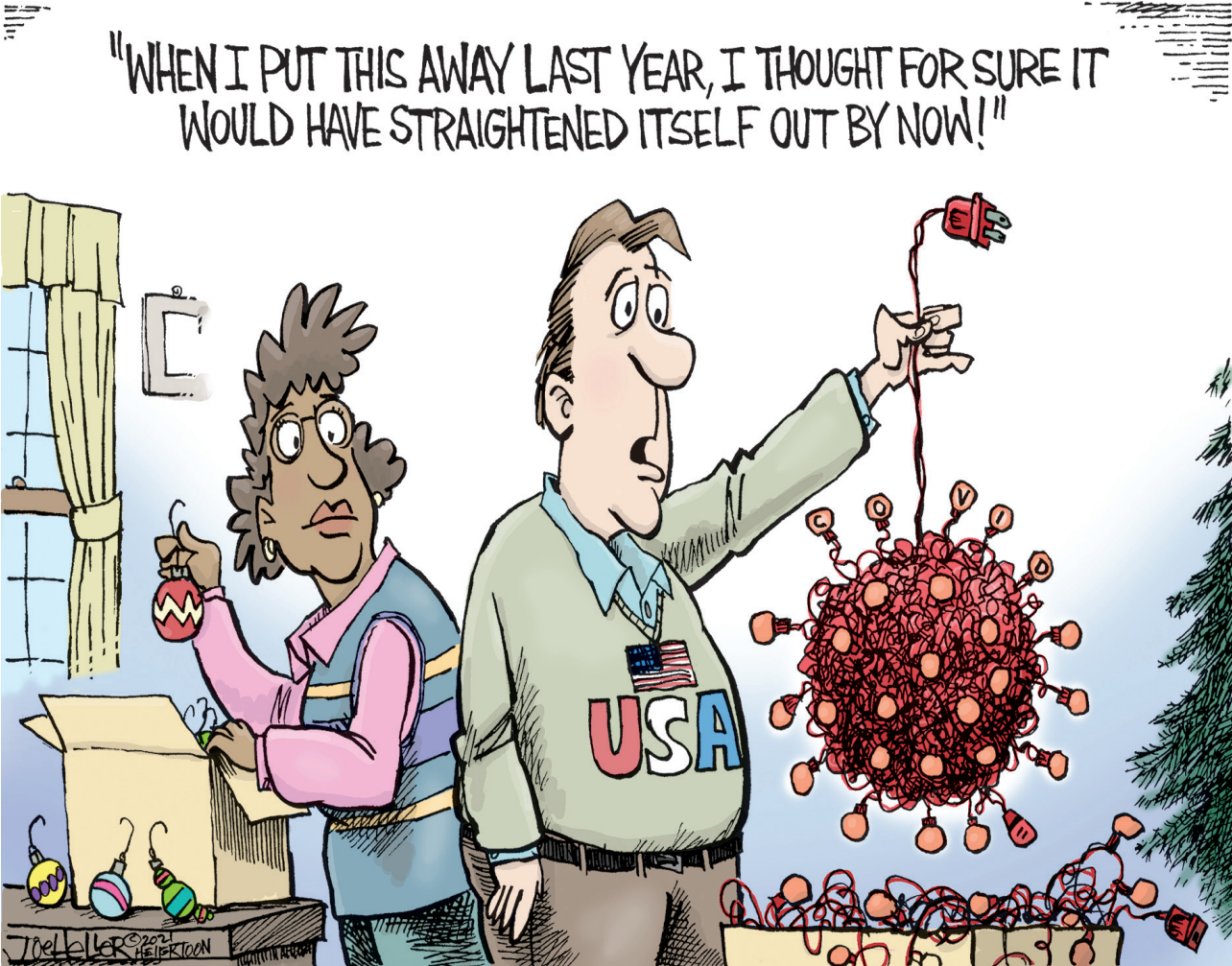
Gillette's association can usually expect 45-50 basketball officials to work games across the region, but last spring the number dropped below 20. That meant games were rescheduled or even canceled.

Lack of sports officials may not seem like an urgent news story to rival a Middle Eastern war or the federal budget, but for those of us who live in the small towns across Eastern Oregon, the absence of the men and women in the stripes is sort of important.

Sure, all kinds of arguments can be made about whether the proper emphasis for high school youth should be shifted from sports to academics, and there is plenty of room for debate. Yet that isn't the issue at hand.

High school sports play a big role in our lives, whether we know it or not, and to know that games could be canceled this season because there are not enough officials is troubling.

It may be a difficult job with low pay but we need men and women in our area to step up and get involved. And we need to remember as we watch those games and hear the calls of the officials that they are us, men and women from our region who are essentially donating time to help.



Work with leaders to get river bill right



KARL FINDLING
OTHER VIEWS

As a lifelong Oregonian, and one raised in Malheur County, I've spent over 50 years in the Owyhee Canyonlands, and would like to offer a different viewpoint than Joel Hasse ('Saving' the Owyhee, Nov. 13).

I, too, am a hunter, hiker, rafter and camper who has enjoyed the Owyhee River and its uplands. My next-door neighbor, and uncle, was a Malheur County historian. I traveled extensively from about age 9 throughout the county. I took my first buck near Iron Point in the mid-1970s, and was a Vale District, BLM employee, in the mid-1980s, stationed in Burns Junction.

The anti-government sentiment that Mr. Hasse portrays may be his opinion, but it is short on facts. His "crystal ball" tells us of dire straits if any designation is approved for this remarkable piece of Oregon. It is in desperate need of protections from invasives, a lack of funding for active management and restoration activities at a landscape level scale, and ever-increasing pressures in the form of motorized recreation, among other existential threats, which this bill can include.

The bill proposed by Sen. Ron Wyden would not close existing roads to access the wilderness areas that would be designated, which are broken into 33 units. In between most units would be a road that would allow continued access to the areas to enjoy for hunting/fishing while at the same time limit any future road development and con-

tinue to offer security for big game that reside in the region such as mule deer, pronghorn bighorn sheep and elk.

The fact is, creating wilderness locks up nothing. Any man, woman and child can enter wilderness, sans mechanized propulsion. Mr. Hasse has an ax to grind, when he describes the past "failures" of government designations, and his views are one-sided. The Idaho Initiative (Owyhee Wilderness Bill) still allows cattlemen access to their allotments for administrative purposes and wilderness grazing.

It's ironic that he describes the wasteland of the Stockades and the Salmon River Corridor, with its prolific and "untouchable" invasive weed problem. A June 2021 study by SageCon Partnership, utilizing new mapping technology, shows spatial datasets starting between 1985 and 2019. If one focuses primarily on the area that Mr. Hasse frequently spends time enjoying, near Jordan Valley, you will see the greatest increase in "poor range conditions" on the Vale District BLM.

This equates to the largest increase in invasives, and the largest decrease in good condition grasslands.

One needs to know the real story on the Vale District BLM. This is just one report of many documents available highlighting the range conditions, and are free to the public. Educate yourself about the Owyhee, before believing the opinions of anti-government sympathizers.

Even though the public comment period has closed, tell the Vale BLM to act. In the latest Draft RMP, Vale District chose a "take NO action alternative" (Alternative A), and

that continued nonaction will provide 20 more years of declines in rangeland health standards. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife chose Alternative D, a position that the Oregon Natural Desert Association also chose, as it is in dire need of habitat restoration.

The Oregon Hunters Association chose Alternative C, a modest compromise between doing nothing and doing the most amount of land protections, road closures and habitat restoration.

The Owyhee Sportsmen organization will continue to work with Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley as well as Rep. Cliff Bentz to work toward solutions for the Owyhee region that maintain and restore this valuable habitat that's critical to our hunting and fishing heritage. To us, it's not about the name of the protections, it's simply about ensuring the fish and wildlife have the resources needed to remain abundant long into the future.

To say that the landscape is better off being left alone is simply not true. If we want the next generation to have the opportunity to chase big desert muleys in the sagebrush canyons, we need to voice our concerns to the government by working with our elected leaders to ensure we get this right.

Make your voice heard and become a part in crafting solutions by following the Owyhee Sportsmen.

Karl J. Findling was born and raised in Ontario and lives in Bend. He is an avid sportsman and former Lands Conservation Director for the Oregon Hunters Association, and former Owyhee Sportsmen coordinator.

EDITORIALS
Unsigned editorials are the opinion of The Observer editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of The Observer.

LETTERS
• The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.
• Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will not publish

anonymous letters.
• Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.
• Longer community comment columns, such as Other Views, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot and a one-sentence biography. Like letters to the editor, columns must refrain from complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Submissions must carry the author's name, address and phone number.
• Submission does not guarantee publication, which is at the discretion of the editor.

SEND LETTERS TO:
letters@lagrandeobserver.com or via mail to Editor, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50
You can save up to 55% off the single-copy price with home delivery.
Call 800-781-3214 to subscribe.

Subscription rates:
Monthly Autopay\$10.75
13 weeks.....\$37.00
26 weeks.....\$71.00
52 weeks.....\$135.00

THE OBSERVER
An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

The Observer retains ownership and copyright protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising copy, photos and news or ad illustrations. They may not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

COPYRIGHT © 2021

Phone: 541-963-3161
Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214
Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Observer,
911 Jefferson Ave.,
La Grande, OR 97850

STAFF

Regional publisher.....	Karrine Brogotti	Home delivery advisor	Amanda Fredrick
Interim editor	Andrew Cutler	Advertising representative	Kelli Craft
News clerk	Lisa Lester Kelly	Advertising representative	Amy Horn
Reporter	Dick Mason	National accounts coordinator	Devi Mathson
Reporter	Davis Carbaugh	Graphic design	Dorothy Kautz
Multimedia journalist	Alex Wittwer	Page design	Martha Allen

A division of

eoMEDIA
eomediagroup.com
group