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La Grande, Pendleton schools back in the same conference

Pendleton will join Tigers, Baker City, Ontario in 4A Greater Oregon League

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton Athletic Director Mike Somnis knew about six weeks ago the Bucks were destined to drop from 5A to 4A and join the Greater Oregon League.

The executive board of the Oregon School Activities Association made that final Monday, Dec. 13, when it approved the last recommendation of the Classification and Redistricting Committee. The decision will bring changes to several leagues throughout the state starting with the 2022 fall season.

"I think everyone is excited and ready to make the move," Somnis said. "We have been very competitive at the 5A level. The reality of it is, with Hermiston going to the WIAA, and Hood River going to 5A and to the Northwest Oregon Conference, if we stayed, we would be in the Bend league. It will be a seamless fit."

Pendleton will join GOL teams La Grande, Baker City and Ontario. McLoughlin is moving down to the 3A Eastern Oregon League.

La Grande and Baker are ecstatic that Pendleton is joining the GOL.

"We are very pleased to have Pendleton in our league," La Grande AD Darren Goodman said. "It will help strengthen our league. Everyone will have to raise their game, for sure."

Baker AD Buell Gonzales added there is now more balance in the league.

"The GOL will definitely be more competitive now," Gonzales added. "The issue with the scheduling is still there with just four teams. Losing Mac-Hi and gaining Pendleton, our league is more competitive and balanced. We didn't want to lose La Grande. This worked out the best for everyone involved."

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S. John Collins/Baker City Herald, File

Rocky Mountain elk munch on alfalfa hay during a previous winter at the Elkhorn Wildlife Area feeding site along Anthony Creek west of North Powder.

The elk arrive

Snow or no, the animals instinctively know when state-run feeding sites are closed to the public

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

NORTH POWDER — Elk don't need calendars. Dan Marvin is convinced of that.

He can't vouch for the animals' ability to recognize, say, Christmas or Independence Day or any other holiday observed by humans.

But elk certainly know when

December arrives.

Some elk, anyway.

Marvin can attest only to the chronological acumen of the elk that congregate each year at the Elkhorn Wildlife Area.

'They know where that feed is'

That's the series of 10 elk-feeding stations, ranging from Old Auburn Lane in the south to Shaw Mountain in Union County, operated by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Marvin is starting his fourth winter as the Elkhorn Wildlife Area manager.

The publicly owned portions of the Wildlife Area (some stations are on private land for which ODFW has leases) close to public entry on Dec. 1, and remained closed through April 10.

Marvin said elk start to show up at some of the feed sites — most notably the meadow

along Anthony Creek, west of North Powder — on Dec. 1. And the animals stroll into the meadow even in years, such as the current one, when the fall has been mild, snow is scarce and the elk have no particular need for handouts of alfalfa hay.

"These elk, they know where that feed is," Marvin said on Friday morning, Dec. 10. "They have a phenomenal memory of where they've wintered in the past, and they can migrate for many miles overnight to be here at the feed site the next morning."

To be clear, Marvin and his crew distribute several hundred tons of alfalfa to elk each winter not because the animals wouldn't survive without the supplemental feed. Elk are tough and hardy, capable of digging through deep snow to get at the meager winter forage.

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La Grande discusses crime, homelessness

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — About 10 downtown La Grande business owners, city and police leaders and other community members met Tuesday, Dec. 14, to discuss concerns over a rise in crime and homelessness in the downtown area.

The hour-long meeting, which was open to the public, was organized by the city of La Grande and was held at Brother Bear Cafe. City Manager Robert Strope, Police Chief Gary Bell, Parks and Recreation Director Stu Spence and Economic Development Director Timothy Bishop attended the meeting to open a dialogue for solutions to recent concerns.

"It's an interesting dynamic. I think the mission tonight is that we treat these people as humans, which is what they are," Spence said. "They have a



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

La Grande Police Chief speaks with downtown business owners at Brother Bear Cafe regarding recent concerns over crime and loitering at Max Square on Tuesday, Dec. 14, 2021. Bell was joined by City Manager Robert Strope, Parks and Recreation Director Stu Spence and Economic Development Director Timothy Bishop.

right to do certain things, but they don't have a right to do criminal activity."

The meeting follows a letter of concern signed by numerous downtown entities over reports of crime and loitering, as well as a letter in response from Bell on Nov. 29. The issues have been brought up at city council meetings and have caught the atten-

tion of a number of downtown residents.

"We genuinely have a safe community. It's safe for you to take a walk at night. But, a component of public safety is also perception and what is felt," Bell said. "That contributes to what we talk about as 'livability.'"

The downtown business owners in attendance

gave examples of negative interactions that their business or its customers have experienced.

A handful said they have witnessed drug usage at Max Square, which they found alarming. One business owner mentioned that a car was broken into, while another spoke about a time in which a car was stolen. While those in attendance agreed on supporting resources for those in need, they collectively emphasized that the issue is negatively impacting their businesses and the overall state of downtown La Grande. In addition, several spoke up regarding ways the city can address the worries.

Aaron Grigg, the mental health director for the Center for Human Development, gave input and took questions at the meeting. Grigg discussed trends within the community that CHD has observed as well as local resources and options

available for homeless individual.

"One thing we've learned is that if, over time, we can develop that relationship with those individuals, oftentimes it will come to the point where they decide that it's time to get help," he said. "Who are they going to go to when they need help? They're going to go to the ones that they trust."

Grigg and Bell both said the majority of homeless individuals in La Grande are local to the area. A common trend in the meeting was Bell and Grigg pointing out ways that CHD and law enforcement are looking to encourage the use of local resources to individuals who may be causing concern in La Grande.

"We have more resources locally, in the span of my career, than we've ever had," Bell said. "But, we also have more

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 29 LOW A little snow		Friday 39/26 A morning flurry
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SATURDAY TACTICS FOR TAKING A TURKEY

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