



Union County Search and Rescue/Contributed Photo, File  
**The Wallowa Mountains stand covered in snow in October 2021. According to the National Weather System's extended forecast, the northern Blue and Wallowa mountains will likely get a break from the snowstorms until the end of January into early February.**

## Drought conditions marginally better

Late December snowstorms help improve Wallowa County's outlook

By RONALD BOND  
 Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Drought conditions that have heavily impacted Wallowa County — and, really, the entire West — are starting to show a little improvement, but there is a ways to go before the drought lifts entirely. In recent weeks, the U.S. Drought Monitor website — which is “produced through a partnership between the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,” has shown the severe drought conditions slightly improving in the state in recent weeks.

Wallowa County saw its largest movement in late December and early January, as the Dec. 30 update showed the county with 58.84% of its territory in the “extreme drought” range, down from 78.87%, where it had been the previous week, and down from more than 82% just two weeks earlier.

And on Jan. 6, the percentage of the county in the extreme range was down to 38.1%. The number was the same on the Jan. 13 report.

The remainder of the county is still in drought conditions, but is categorized as “severe” rather than “extreme.”

The drought monitor has six stages that a region is categorized in, ranging from “none,” or no drought, all the way to D4, the worst, which is considered “exceptional drought.” In between are D0 (abnormally dry), D1 (moderate drought), D2 (severe drought) and D3 (extreme drought).

The state saw its worst conditions in 2021 in the Sept. 14 report, which showed the entire state in at least D1 and more than 99.3% of its territory in D2, or a severe drought. That report was also the third in a row to show 76.69% of the state in extreme drought — including most of Wallowa County — and was the third of seven straight weeks that showed 26.59%

of the state in an exceptional drought, marked on the monitor's map with a streak of crimson cutting through the middle of the state.

At its worst this past summer, Wallowa County had 83.22% of its range in either D3 or D4, where it stayed from Aug. 31 to Oct. 19. During that stretch, there was a sliver — 1.43% — of the state marked as D4, or exceptional drought. That D4 percentage, in fact, held from the first report in August until the last report in November.

The county first moved into D2 on the June 8, 2021, report, and the entirety of the county has been in D2 or worse since July 6.

One winter ago, in December 2020, 61% of the county was considered to be abnormally dry, but the other 39% was rated as having no drought. In 2020, the worst conditions, in fact, actually happened in the first month of the year, when the entirety of the county was in at least D0 and only 4.17% was in D1.

According to the drought monitor website, the last time conditions were even close to this bad in December was in 2015, when the month started with the whole county in at least D2 and nearly 98% of the county in D3. By the middle of the month, the whole county was still in severe drought, but the extreme drought conditions were wiped out.

That summer, the county was considered in extreme drought from Aug. 25 to Nov. 24.

Other than 2015, the last times the website shows drought conditions close to the current level were in 2007 and 2001. The site has data going back to 2000.

Snowy conditions in the county — which included near-record snowfall earlier in December in Joseph — have helped. The National Weather Service reported 27.3 inches of snow in Joseph in December 2021, which is more than three times the monthly average. There was 2.29 inches of precipitation during the month, an inch above the average of 1.29 inches.

Wallowa County is in an area that the Climate Prediction Center believes will remain in a drought through mid-March, though it expects the conditions to improve.

# Bentz alleges 2020 election was ‘bought’

Congressman concerned about parent participation at school board meetings

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
 East Oregonian

LA GRANDE — Oregon U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, does not believe former President Donald Trump's claim that the 2020 presidential election was won by President Joe Biden because of voter fraud.

“The election was not stolen, it was bought,” Bentz, a first-term congressman, said during a meet-and-greet Thursday, Jan. 6, in La Grande.

It was one of several statements Bentz made during the La Grande event and then later expanded on in a Wednesday, Jan. 12, interview.

### ‘It was bought’

Bentz said Democrats had an enormous edge in funding donors with deep pockets, including one who donated \$400 million to Biden's campaign. Bentz said that the Democrats spent several times more money per vote than the Republicans did.

Bentz referenced a large donation made by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and suggested it benefited Biden and Democrats.

In September 2020, Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, personally made a \$300 million donation to two groups — the Center for Tech and Civic Life and the Center for Election Innovation & Research. The money was specifically designated to recruit poll workers, supply them with personal protection equipment and set up drive-thru voting. The rest was distributed to state election officials throughout the country. According to a press release, the Center for Tech and Civic Life received an additional \$100 million from Zuckerberg and Chan in October 2020.

In an interview, Bentz said he based his comments around an October 2021 article from The Federalist, a conservative media website, entitled “Zuckerbucks 101: How a Media Mogul Took Over



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File  
**Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, speaks to a group of residents during a meet-and-greet Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022, at Brother Bear Cafe in La Grande.**

the 2020 Election and Why GOP Leaders Must Never Let It Happen Again.”

The article, mostly citing other conservative sources, argues that the Center for Tech and Civic Life “corrupted” elections by sending money to election offices in Democratic-leaning areas and by facilitating the mail-in voting process.

Referencing the article, Bentz said the nonprofit was not apolitical because the founders had once worked for an organization with Democratic ties.

“That money was used to prompt Democrat voters to vote,” he said. “And it was used to design and translate ballots. It was used to staff curing and counting ballot operations. Those kinds of things, all according to various articles you can easily find, trended toward turning out more Democrats than Republicans.”

Both groups that Zuckerberg donated to are 501(c)(3) nonprofits, which are legally prohibited from political campaign activity.

The Center for Election Innovation and Research advertises itself as a group with “a proven track record of working with election experts from around the country and from both sides of the aisle.”

Bentz said their actions during the 2020 elections could lose them their 501(c)(3) status, an important designation that exempts them from taxes.

“As a lawyer I have

helped form 501(c)(3)s and I've been involved with 501(c)(4)s ... I'll just say that the fact that you enjoy that designation does not mean, does not in any way prove, that you've complied with the requirements of such a designation,” he said.

### Inflation distraction

Bentz spoke in La Grande on the one-year anniversary of the day Trump supporters rioted at the Capitol Building in an attempt to reverse the results of the 2020 presidential election. Bentz said he believes Democrats are blowing the Jan. 6 riot out of proportion in an attempt to divert attention from the issues people are really concerned about.

“It is a huge opportunity for them to distract the nation from inflation,” Bentz said.

In the interview, Bentz said he condemned the violence that afflicted the Capitol a year ago, but he reiterated that Democrats were focusing on a partisan investigation into former President Donald Trump's role in the insurrection rather than important issues like inflation or the border.

### The Garland memo

Bentz also spoke about U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland asking the FBI to investigate a rise in harassment and threats of violence against school board members nationwide.

Bentz told the audience that it is not the FBI's place to do this.

“This is what communities should be looking into,” he said.

On Oct. 4, Garland released a memo directing the FBI to meet with federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement to develop strategies to address “harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence” against school board members and school employees.

Later that month, Garland defended the memo at a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting after Republicans accused the attorney general of overreach, according to The Associated Press.

“The obligation of the Justice Department is to protect the American people against violence and threats of violence and that particularly includes public officials,” Garland said.

In the interview, Bentz said he did not condone threats of violence directed at school officials. But as a former school board member for both a private Catholic school and the Ontario School District, Bentz said he was concerned that Garland's memo would have a “chilling effect” on parent participation.

He added that if people threatened or harassed school officials, local law enforcement could handle those situations without getting the federal government involved.

**Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics proudly welcomes:**  
**Mari Dominguez, PMHNP-BC**  
 to the Behavioral Health Team at the Regional Medical Clinic as a  
 Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner.



Mari Dominguez, PMHNP-BC

Join us in welcoming Mari Dominguez, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner to the Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics team. Mari is a lifelong learner, with a master's degree from Frontier Nursing University. Her clinical experiences include inpatient mental health and community mental health in Eastern Oregon. She is a graduate of Montana State University, Bozeman, College of Nursing, and the University of California at San Diego in communication. Mari is passionate about improving access to evidence-based mental health care and teaching patients and family members about behavioral health. Specific interests are depression, anxiety, and transforming habitual behaviors. Mari and her family moved to the Grande Ronde Valley from southwest Montana in 2018. She and her spouse are parents of adolescent and young adult children. Mari is an avid gardener, reader, and servant to various pets.

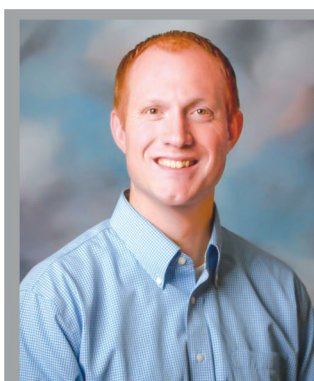
## GRH Regional Medical Clinic

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To learn more about Mari and the rest of the Behavioral Health team, take a look at our online provider directory at [grh.org](http://grh.org).



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