

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

February 5, 2022

WEEKEND EDITION

\$1.50

Permanent is far from permanent

New status of OHA school mask rule is not what it may seem to be

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Oregon Health Authority's adoption of permanent rules last month requiring masks to be worn in schools is creating confusion and causing some people to be unduly worried.

Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain Education Service District, whose service area includes Union County, said some people mistakenly assume that the adoption of the permanent rules means students will be required to continue wearing masks after the pandemic is over. Mulvihill said this will be far from the case. OHA intends to rescind the mandate, he said, once the pandemic is over. Mulvihill said



Mulvihill

the word "permanent" in this case is misleading. "It is a question of semantics," he said. North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon agrees the word adds an element of confusion. "It is not really permanent. It is only permanent until they repeal it," he said. The state adopted permanent rules on Friday, Jan. 28, requiring

See, **Schools/Page A5**



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File
A sign reminds students to wear a mask in class at La Grande High School on Monday, Aug. 23, 2021. The Oregon Health Authority adopted permanent rules on Jan. 28, 2022, requiring masks in school settings, replacing the previous temporary ruling.

Elgin mourns loss of leader

Ty Hallgarth helped the Elgin Stampede reach new heights

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

ELGIN — Elgin has lost a popular and successful community leader.

Ty Hallgarth, a man whose steady and tireless leadership helped spur the Elgin Stampede to new heights, died unexpectedly of natural causes on Monday, Jan. 31, at St. Alphonsus Regional Medical Center, Boise.



Hallgarth

"He was a wonderful person. He enjoyed finding ways to help people," said Bud Scoubes who, like Hallgarth, is a member of the Elgin Stampede, the volunteer organization that puts on Elgin's rodeo each year.

Hallgarth, 53, had been president of the Elgin Stampede since 2017 and a member of the Stampede board since 2013. He was president of the Stampede when the Elgin rodeo was named the best small rodeo on the Columbia River Circuit in 2017.

Lara Moore, the secretary for the Elgin

See, **Hallgarth/Page A5**

Up and running

Thinning and logging underway on controversial Red Apple Forest Management project

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A disputed forest management project is underway at Mount Emily Recreation Area.

After months of back-and-forth between Union County and those opposed to the plan, boots are on the ground with the Red Apple Forest Management Project. The project is aimed at improving forest health and preventing future fires, with logging to also take place across the 300-acre Red Apple segment of MERA.

The recreational area, which was purchased by Union County in 2008, encompasses more than 3,500 acres of land outside La Grande. Union County Parks Coordinator Sean Chambers and forester Chuck Sarrett are heading the Red Apple Forest Management Project, which the county put in their hands.

The time frame of the project relies heavily on the weather, as frozen ground creates better working conditions for the heavy machinery involved. After awarding the bid to ReedCo Forestry on Jan. 5, the county announced that the company will be doing its thinning work in the winter of 2022 and additionally in 2023.

Chambers emphasized that the project is very weather dependent, with four more weeks as a likely maximum amount of time the work



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group
Wyatt Kandle, an employee with ReedCo Forestry, inspects a timber harvester as forest improvement operations commence along upper Igo Lane on the Mount Emily Recreation Area on Friday, Jan. 28, 2022.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group
A ReedCo Forestry timber harvester clears branches from a small harvested tree on Friday, Jan. 28, 2022, as logging operations begin along Igo Lane in the Mount Emily Recreation Area.

could continue this winter. "I think, looking at the forecast, there's a good two more weeks of weather

coming up," Chambers said. "Hopefully the work will be done in a week, maybe two beyond that. It's very

variable." ReedCo officially started on Wednesday, Jan. 26, when a small crew of about five workers began hauling logs, with typically two or three trucks transporting the trees every day. The work is expected to take place mainly from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day, but due to the log truck operators' schedules, there could be occasional loads picked up during the night. ReedCo is currently working on the northern part of the project area, with mastication set to begin soon. The project originally called for work to be done via the Owsley Canyon Trailhead, but a slight increase in temperatures affected working conditions and led to the

See, **Forest/Page A6**

STATE OF THE STATE

Gov. Brown sees positives amid turmoil

Governor delivers final state of the state address

By **PETER WONG**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown called on lawmakers to approve more money for job training, low-

er-cost housing and child care in her final state of the state address Thursday, Feb. 3.

In her seven years as chief executive, Brown has governed during the 2020 Labor Day wildfires that devastated Oregon, racial justice protests and a coronavirus pandemic that sent



Brown

the state's economy into a tailspin — but now is at near record-low unemployment. "Too many Oregonians have struggled to find good-paying careers," she said, particularly the poor, people of color and rural residents who have not shared in the recovery. "Our economy is strong, and

we must keep it humming. Most importantly, we have to make sure that every Oregonian feels it." Brown renewed her call for \$200 million for Future Ready Oregon — a plan to target job training in health care, construction and manufacturing — plus

See, **Brown/Page A6**

INDEX

Classified.....B2	Horoscope.....B2	Outdoors & Rec...B1
Comics.....B5	Lottery.....A2	Sports.....A7
Crossword.....B2	Obituaries.....A3	State.....A8
Dear Abby.....B6	Opinion.....A4	Sudoku.....B5

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight		Sunday
	21 LOW		41/27
	Cold		Mostly sunny

CONTACT US

541-963-3161	Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com . More contact info on Page A4.
Issue 16	
2 sections, 14 pages	
La Grande, Oregon	



8 51153 00100 6

TUESDAY

TOMATO SOUP: COLD-WEATHER CURE

Online at lagrandeobserver.com