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New virus subvariant is now in Oregon

Despite appearance of omicron subvariant, surge is not necessarily on the horizon

By **FEDOR ZARKHIN**
The Oregonian

SALEM — The omicron subvariant fueling COVID-19 surges in Europe has been found in the wastewater of at least four Oregon communities, according to Oregon State University analyses of wastewater collected as part of a statewide early warning system. The findings from early March don't guarantee a surge in cases, but they could underscore the potential benefits — and shortcomings — of a state-funded wastewater testing system billed as a way to reliably know the state of the pandemic in various corners of Oregon.

Oregon health officials hired Oregon State University to analyze wastewater samples from more than 40 wastewater plants statewide, providing officials with measures of how much virus is in a community and the particular variants of the virus that are most common.

The method has taken off locally and nationwide, with federal health officials using wastewater analyses from across the country to track rising cases and an increase in the omicron subvariant BA.2. But one state official involved in the project indicated the full benefits of the program are yet to be seen.

"This is all very much emerging science," said Dr. Melissa Sutton, the Oregon Health Authority's medical director for respiratory viral diseases who is working with Oregon State University analysts.

The core theoretical benefit behind wastewater testing is that it can provide officials and the public advance notice of rising cases, faster than can be identified through traditional testing.

But it's not yet clear exactly how much lead time the program will provide. While an OSU researcher said the university produces test results twice a week, state health officials post results to a public website once a week, and with a one-week delay.

And, speaking Tuesday, March 22, Sutton referenced data for

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Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group
Cattle graze the field at a ranch on Airport Lane, La Grande, on Thursday, March 17, 2022. A controversial animal rights initiative, known as IP13, appears to have stalled as organizers failed to gather the signatures necessary to put it on the ballot this November.

OFF THE TABLE

Animal rights proposal likely won't show up in this year's ballot, organizers say

By **ALEX WITTWER**
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — A controversial proposal on animal cruelty laws appears to be off the table, for now, but proponents of the initiative say their campaign isn't over yet.

"We just submitted the initiative for 2024 and are waiting for confirmation from the state," an organizer with the Yes on IP13 campaign said. "At this point, it does not look like we will gather enough for 2022. I believe the plan is to shift gears to the newly numbered initiative as soon as we have it."

Initiative Petition 13, otherwise known as the Abuse, Neglect and Assault Exemption Modification and Improvement Act, would remove exemptions to the Oregon animal abuse laws that protect hunters, farmers and anglers from abuse violations. That means hunters could possibly be prosecuted for killing and harvesting wild animals, as could farmers who send their livestock to slaughterhouses.

David Michelson, the author of the initiative and the lead organizer for the campaign, acknowledged the proposal's long road, and said that like other social justice reforms throughout history, it will take time.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

A cow and calves rest in a field along Peach Road, La Grande, on Thursday, March 17, 2022. Initiative Petition 13, otherwise known as the Abuse, Neglect and Assault Exemption Modification and Improvement Act, would remove exemptions to the Oregon animal abuse laws that protect hunters, farmers and anglers from abuse violations.

"This is asking for quite a shift from the norm, and I think, like with any social change, it's controversial," he said. "But every social justice movement in history has been met with controversy, unfortunately."

Michelson noted a petition to allow women to vote in Oregon faced similar political headwinds in the early 20th century, but the story of how women fought for suffrage in Oregon has been inspirational to the Portland-based activist, who said he would "like to see this (initiative) as being part of that history of progressive

ballot measures that push us forward." But even if the initiative fails to muster the signatures necessary to reach the ballot this November, Michelson has his eyes set on 2024.

"We are planning, as we have always planned, to submit our initiative for 2024 with the anticipation that even if we qualify for 2022, it is unlikely that it'll pass on the first attempt," Michelson said. "Speaking back to the initiative that gave women the right to vote, it was voted on

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Earth Day Oregon heads east for 2022

Annual event increases its presence by partnering with Eastern Oregon nonprofits, businesses

By **ALEX WITTWER**
EO Media Group

JOSEPH — Eastern Oregon is joining in Earth Day Oregon for the first time.

Wallowa Land Trust joined the nonprofit coalition this year, and has

partnered up with Terminal Gravity Brewing, Moonlight Graphics and Wild Carrot Herbals. As well, Greater Hells Canyon Council and Farmers Ending Hunger — which has several participating farms in Hermiston and Echo — have joined Earth Day Oregon for this year's campaign.

"Oregon Earth Day came about more to celebrate the work that's being done specifically in our state that's helping to conserve our lands



Kleinhanzl

and care for a planet," said Sarah Kleinhanzl, communications and outreach coordinator for Wallowa Land Trust. "As Wallowa Land Trust, our mission is to conserve and promote healthy landscapes here in Wallowa County, and so those missions obviously interlock pretty well."

One of the ways Wallowa Land Trust is raising funds is through an in-person fundraising event on Friday, April 22.

"We haven't had any in-person fundraisers for a couple of years because of COVID-19, so we're really excited about it," Kleinhanzl said.

The fundraiser will include silent auctions for local art, live music, drinks, food and beer donated by Terminal Gravity Brewing. Kleinhanzl said it would be "a chance to reconnect with our community and raise the money for our conservation work."

"We're really grateful for the local support," she said. "The three partners that we partnered with have been really supportive throughout the years, and we're really glad that they joined us."

The land trust does not have

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