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VA plan calls for big changes

Recommendations call for reduction of services to Walla Walla VA center

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH** and **JOHN TILLMAN**
EO Media Group

WASHINGTON — Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden this week said he plans to personally contact the Department of Veterans Affairs regarding recommendations to reduce services at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla.

The VA in mid-March released a report from the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission to modernize and realign the VA health care system. According to the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, the report is in response to the 2018's MISSION Act, also known as the Veteran Community Care Act.

After site visits, listening sessions and data gathering around the country, the AIR Commission listed among its recommendations that the Walla Walla VA reduce services to primary care and mental health, which could result in the facility being reclassified as a community-based outpatient clinic, known better as a CBOC, rather than a full medical center, according to the Walla Walla UB.

At a virtual town hall for Union County residents on Wednesday, April 20, Wyden addressed several concerns related to veteran health care in Eastern Oregon. Key points included slow hiring processes, travel pay, difficulties at call centers across VA clinics and attaining health care services outside of the VA.

Wyden noted he has been hearing often from veterans on similar issues and said he will be reaching out to the VA himself for an explanation and how to address the four major concerns brought up at the meeting and potential changes to the Walla Walla medical center.

"Vets have earned the benefits because of their extraordinary service," Wyden said. "The vets committed their lives to our country and now I'm going to make sure we make our commitment to them really clear."

A market analysis showed veteran enrollment in VISN 20, the service region centered by the Walla Walla VA, is predicted to increase

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Going HOG WILD

Hog Wild Days returns in Island City after COVID-induced absence



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File
The Hog Wild Days piggy train visits the Union County Fair on Friday, Aug. 6, 2021.

By **DICK MASON** • The Observer

ISLAND CITY — A cherished tradition is set to return in Island City.

Island City's annual Hog Wild Days celebration is coming back after being shut down in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has subsided dramatically in Northeastern Oregon.

This year's Hog Wild Days celebration will run from Friday, June 3, to Sunday, June 5.

"We are bringing it back to life this year," said John Tolan, a member of the Island City Lions Club, which will again be putting on Hog Wild Days.

Dale De Long, who served as mayor of Island City for 24 years through 2016, was delighted to hear the news.

"It means a lot. It is a tradition," De Long said. "When something that has been successful returns, it has a big impact. It is a big positive."

This year's event will start around 6 p.m. June 3 with a barbecue at Island City's Fred Beeman Park, on McAlister Road adjacent to Island City Elementary School. In the past the barbecue was conducted in the school's gym but the gym will not be available this year, Tolan said.



The Observer, File

Ty Vanlith of Island City gets into character as he prepares to ride with the big boys in the 2005 Hog Wild Days parade in Island City. Bikers were collecting stuffed animals to donate to children's hospitals, fire and police departments and other organizations to pass on to kids who could use a furry friend in trying times.

Activities on June 4 will kick off with a breakfast at the La Grande Rural Fire Department's hall from 6-11 a.m. The La Grande Rural Fire Department traditionally serves a community breakfast on the Saturday morning of Hog Wild Days. The event is a fundraiser for the La Grande Rural Fire Department. Money raised at the breakfast is used for community projects such

as the department's Shop With a Firefighter program for children and Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets for families.

Activities will continue Saturday morning with the annual Hog Wild Days Parade at 11 a.m. Tolan said the parade will again be an excellent opportunity for new businesses

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Oregon wolf population growth slows, mortalities rise

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon's wolf population increased by just two individuals in 2021, according to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, while the number of wolf deaths was the highest yet in a single year.

ODFW released its annual wolf report on Tuesday, April 19, documenting 175 wolves compared to 173 in 2020. The count is a minimum estimate based on verified evidence, such as wolf sightings, tracks and remote camera photographs.

A total of 26 wolves died in 2021, including 21 killed by humans. Of those, four were hit by vehicles, eight were illegally poisoned, one was legally shot by a rancher on private property and another eight were killed by ODFW after habitually preying on livestock.

Roblyn Brown, ODFW wolf program coordinator, said last year's rise in mortalities "certainly played a role" in the latest population survey remaining mostly flat.

"Despite this, we are confident in the continued health of the

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Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife released its annual wolf report on Tuesday, April 19, 2022, documenting 175 wolves compared to 173 in 2020. The count is a minimum estimate based on verified evidence, such as wolf sightings, tracks and remote camera photographs.



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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 33 LOW Mainly clear		Sunday 65/39 Milder
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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page A4.