

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

July 19, 2022

TUESDAY EDITION

lagrandeobserver.com | \$1.50

## Car chase involved gunfire in Island City

Two arrested in connection to the chase; one suspect remains at large

The Observer

ISLAND CITY — Law enforcement arrested two people and one suspect remains at large after a car chase Sunday, July 17, out of Island City that involved gunfire.

Deputies from the Union County Sheriff's Office responded around 12:45 p.m. to Bullseye Muzzleloaders and More, 10201 W. First St., Island City, for a reported burglary, according to a press release. Law enforcement was called again to the same business shortly before 2:30 p.m. with reports describing three people wearing gloves and masks approaching the business, the release said.

While law enforcement was on its way to the scene, a Bullseye Muzzleloaders and More employee confronted the suspects. During the confrontation, shots were fired, the release said. The suspects fled in a vehicle, and sheriff's deputies immediately began a pursuit. During the course of the pursuit, occupants in the fleeing vehicle fired rounds at the pursuing law enforcement vehicles, disabling one.

An Oregon State Police trooper was set

See, *Chase*/Page A3

## Lee murder trial underway

Ronald Lee faces charges stemming from 2019 shooting of ex-wife, Loretta Williams

By ISABELLA CROWLEY

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The murder trial of Ronald Lee is underway in Union County Circuit Court, more than three years after his arrest for the slaying of his ex-wife, Loretta Williams.

Union County District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel opened her case against Lee the afternoon of Thursday, July 14. The state has charged him with one count of second-degree murder and one count of conspiracy to commit murder. The 74-year-old Lee has pleaded not guilty to both charges and remains in the Union County Jail.

See, *Trial*/Page A3



## FIRE SEASON Creeping higher

Vale District Bureau of Land Management/ Contributed Photo, File

The Willowcreek Fire burns in northern Malheur County on Wednesday, June 29, 2022.

Triple-digit heat dries out the region; agencies have yet to impose campfire, other restrictions

By JAYSON JACOBY • Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The wildfire season has been pretty tranquil in Northeastern Oregon, but Al Crouch and Nathan Goodrich are beginning to detect the potential for boisterous days to come.

They see it in the grass, nourished by plentiful spring rain but now curing into tinder beneath the July sun.

And in the heat that has finally arrived, pushing temperatures to triple digits at lower elevations, and humidity levels below 20%.

"It's definitely drying out," Goodrich, fire staff officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, said. "Things have changed quite a bit in the last two weeks."

Crouch, the fire mitigation specialist for the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District, concurred with his fellow federal fire manager.

"The drying is happening fast," Crouch said.

That's especially so in Baker County and points south, he said.

The lush crop of grass, including invasive cheatgrass, that grew this spring has already dried in much of Malheur County, and the trend is moving north, Crouch said.

Conditions are still comparatively damp, and the fire danger somewhat lower, to the north, he said.

After the soggy spring, the Baker City Airport has been relatively parched, measuring just 0.05 of an inch of rain since June 6. Thunderstorms that doused other parts of the region mostly missed Baker City.

Meacham, by contrast, has had 3.12 inches of rain during that span, most of it coming from a couple of June cloudbursts.

The Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton has recorded 1.33 inches since June 6.

The Willowcreek Fire, which

started on private property north of Vale on June 28, rapidly spread to about 40,000 acres, propelled by gusty winds on a day when temperatures reached 100 degrees in north Malheur County.

That fire shows the potential for fast-moving fires given a combustible combination of weather conditions, Crouch said.

Yet that blaze, which is still under investigation, is also a conspicuous anomaly.

The Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center at the Union County Airport, which oversees much of Northeastern Oregon — although not Malheur County — has recorded just 17 fires this year, which burned a scant 2.7 acres.

See, *Fire*/Page A3

## Vintage truck turns heads at car show

1926 Mack Model AB was once used by La Grande's public works department

By DICK MASON

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Kenrik Neustel, a photographer for the annual car show at La Grande's Crazy Days celebration, encountered a problem over the weekend that no cutting-edge digital camera equipment could address.

Neustel found that one of the oldest vehicles at the

show, a 1926 Mack Model AB truck, was among the most challenging to shoot pictures of due to its popularity.

"It was hard to take photographs of it because so many people were crowding around it," Neustel said on Saturday, July 16, after getting high-quality photos of the 1926 truck.

The truck, used by the La Grande Public Works

Department to haul dirt, rocks and water in the 1920s, stopped foot traffic on Adams Avenue during the car show.

"It is like a piece of time," said Todd Carter, who judged the 1926 Mack Model AB truck for the car show.

Its features — which include a hand-crank starter, a 28.9-horsepower engine, a four-speed transmission, a steel open-air cab, hard rubber tires and a solid metal frame — look



Dick Mason/ The Observer  
Ray Clements, of the La Grande Public Works Department, on Tuesday, July 12, 2022, checks on the department's vintage Mack truck.

See, *Truck*/Page A3



### INDEX

Classified.....B2	Home.....B1	Obituaries.....A5
Comics.....B5	Horoscope.....B3	Opinion.....A4
Crossword.....B2	Local.....A2	Region.....A6
Dear Abby.....B6	Lottery.....A2	Sudoku.....B5

### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	<b>Tonight</b> 60 LOW Clear		<b>Wednesday</b> 97/60 Very warm
--	-----------------------------------	--	--

### CONTACT US

541-963-3161	Email story ideas to <a href="mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com">news@lagrandeobserver.com</a> . More contact info on Page A4.
Issue 86	
2 sections, 12 pages La Grande, Oregon	