

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

August 16, 2022

TUESDAY EDITION

lagrandeobserver.com | \$1.50

## Hail damages Union County crops

Some farmers lost up to 70% of their crops

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Farmers in Union County are describing the hailstorm that hit Union County late last week as among the worst they have seen.

“It was pretty significant, pretty severe,” said Matt Insko, a farmer in the Imbler area.

Insko said he and many farmers were just getting ready to start harvesting their wheat when the hailstorm hit at about 4 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 11.

“It would have been nice if it

had been a couple of weeks later. It did a lot more damage because of when it hit,” he said.

Insko lost about 30% of his 450-acre wheat crop. Fortunately, he had purchased hail insurance for his crop.

“That will definitely take some of the sting away,” he said.

Insko has been farming in the Grande Ronde Valley for 23 years and said he has seen few storms drop so much hail over such a wide area so quickly. This made driving during the hail storm difficult.

“My windshield wipers could not move fast enough,” Insko said.

The hail hit during a thunderstorm that started south of La Grande and moved northeast

through the Wallowa area. Insko said he always fears thunderstorms because of the hail they can bring. He said thunderstorms are more likely when there are temperatures in the 90s, as was the case last week.

Seth Hassinger, a farmer in the Cove area, said that the hailstorm missed his family’s farm. He knows firsthand, though, just how devastating hailstorms can be to crops. Hassinger said that even small hail stones can have a big impact. He recalled how once a hailstorm filled with small stones destroyed much of the peppermint crop on his family’s farm.

“It shredded the leaves off,” he said.

Brett Rudd, also a Grande

Ronde Valley farmer, said the storm destroyed as much as 35% percent of his 500-acre canola crop.

The storm also ruined up to 10% of his 150-acre wheat crop. “The hail knocked the seeds out of their heads,” he said.

Rudd, like Insko, describes the hailstorm as one of the worst he’s seen.

“It was definitely a memorably bad storm. It was so widespread,” said Rudd, who is 45 and has lived in Union County all of his life.

Curt Ricker, who farms in the Island City area, also sustained heavy losses.

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Dick Mason/The Observer  
**Curt Ricker, an Island City farmer, checks a portion of his spring wheat crop for seeds on Monday, Aug. 15, 2022, after it was hit by a hailstorm on Thursday, Aug. 11.**



## Racing for a cause

Elkhorn Relay rounds out seven years of racing, charity and community

Gail Kimberling keeps track of her granddaughter’s time as she rounds out the first leg of the Elkhorn Relay on the morning of Aug. 13, 2022.

Photos by Shannon Golden/The Observer

By **SHANNON GOLDEN**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — While a nearly full moon hung over La Grande, racers were taking their marks among the pines at Hilgard State Park. It wasn’t quite 5 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 13, but the Elkhorn Relay — an 82-mile race put on by La Grande’s Doomsday Racing — was about to begin.

The yearly relay is a summer staple for runners in the Union County area.

While stunning views of

the Elkhorn Mountains and the Grande Ronde River may be part of the draw, the race’s charitable zeal gives many added motivation to participate.

Doomsday Racing, a La Grande nonprofit, started the local relay in 2015, intending to raise funds for nonprofits helping people around the world.

According to Summer Steele, one of Doomsday Racing’s six founding board members, the relay has raised approximately \$10,000 for charity since its inception.

The idea for the Elkhorn



Gail Kimberling smiles with her granddaughter Kasey in the early morning of Aug. 13, 2022, after Kasey completed the first leg of the Elkhorn Relay.

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## OTEC submits fire plans to state

This is the first year electric utilities have had to submit plans for fire prevention tactics

By **JAYSON JACOBY**  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Electric utilities have plenty of incentive to prevent their lines from sparking wildfires.

Such blazes can destroy homes as well as power lines themselves, resulting in long outages that can affect hundreds or thousands of customers.

Last year, the three investor-owned utilities that operate in Oregon — PacifiCorp, Portland General Electric and Idaho Power Company — were required for the first time to submit to the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) a plan listing their fire prevention strategies.

This year other electric providers, including cooperatives such as Oregon Trail Electric (OTEC), also had to submit their wildfire mitigation plans to the state agency.

The mandate is part of Senate Bill 762, which the Oregon Legislature passed, and Gov. Kate Brown signed into law, in 2021.

The legislation deals with multiple issues related to wildfire risk and prevention in the state. OTEC, which is based in Baker City and has about 31,000 customers in Baker, Union, Grant and Harney counties, submitted its 17-page plan earlier this summer.

Eric Wirfs, director of operations for OTEC, said that for the cooperative the new requirement was largely an exercise in compiling existing policies into a single document.

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## Passenger train advocacy group rolls into La Grande

All Aboard Northwest advocating for expanding passenger rail service to communities in Pacific Northwest

By **ISABELLA CROWLEY**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — All Aboard Northwest rolled into La Grande on Saturday, Aug. 13, to host a Train Trek meeting at Cook Memorial Library.

The stop in La Grande is part of a larger series of talks happening across

Oregon, Idaho and Utah to gather support for the return of passenger trains to the Pacific Northwest.

“We look at trains as part of a world class transportation network, that is a seamless way to get people from here to there,” said Charles Hamilton, vice president and treasurer of AANW.

### Importance of passenger trains

Around 30% of Americans do not drive and that number is growing, according to AANW. Many people cannot drive due to age — too young or too old — or disability.

Owning a car is expensive — initial purchase, yearly maintenance, insurance, price of gas — so socioeconomic status can be a factor.

Many people live in places where seasonal weather, such as snow or ice,

impact their ability to drive. There also are people who choose not to drive due to the environmental impact.

“We’ll always need cars in rural areas and elsewhere, but we really need to ensure that communities of all sizes can participate in mobility that works for everyone,” AANW President Daniel Bilka said.

In November 2021, the U.S. House passed a \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill, which allocated \$66 billion in funding for Amtrak’s repair backlog.

This would allow for improvements to existing passenger rail networks and potentially kick-start new projects that would allow passenger rail service across the nation.

Meeting attendees pointed out areas where they believed a passenger rail could have a positive impact for Northeastern Oregon — winter weather, medical access and college attendance.

“If you want to go to

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

	<b>Tonight</b>		<b>Wednesday</b>
	54 LOW	<b>HOT</b>	100/57
	Clear		Very hot

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Issue 98  
2 sections, 14 pages  
La Grande, Oregon

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