

Invasive species fight takes to the air in Eastern Oregon

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

A cold wind gusts, and Jeffrey Pettingill’s grin turns into a grimace.

Here he is, surrounded by the enemy on a ridge in the sprawling rangelands about 17 miles east of Baker City, and his best weapon has been rendered useless by a persistent autumn wind.

The Bell Jet Ranger 206 helicopter sits just a few feet away.

The blue-and-silver chopper is loaded with ammunition.

The sun shines brightly late on Thursday morning, and the visibility from this ridge, about 2 miles south of Love Reservoir, could be measured in tens of miles.

But pilot Joshua Charvet can only join Pettingill in milling around, their boots puffing dust in this year of drought.

Their adversaries are a pair of invasive grass species — cheatgrass and medusahead.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

This pod attached to a Bell Jet Ranger 206 helicopter holds 400 pounds of granular herbicide. There’s an identical pod on the other side of the aircraft.

Pettingill, the weed control supervisor for Baker County, secured \$20,000 from the Lottery-funded Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to hire Charvet’s employer, Wilbur-Ellis Inc., to spread by helicopter about 19,500 pounds of a granular herbicide on 1,500 acres of private land distributed among four property owners.

Although Charvet’s target is that duo of annual grasses — weeds, in Pettingill’s view — the overall goal is broader. The ultimate beneficiaries, he said, are sage grouse.

This is sage grouse habitat, and Pettingill said the grasses can outcompete not only the sagebrush that lent the bird its name, but also native grasses and other plants that the

grouse depend on for food. Adult sage grouse rely solely on sagebrush for food during the winter, he said.

During the spring, sage grouse chicks not only eat native grasses and forbs (wildflowers), but those plants are habitat for insects that are a vital source of protein for growing chicks, Pettingill said.

Sage grouse populations have declined over the past couple of decades in Baker County and in some other parts of its range in several western states. Environmental groups have petitioned the federal government to list the chicken-size bird as threatened or endangered, but so far the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has declined to do so.

Both cheatgrass, which is also known as downy brome, and medusahead can greatly reduce the value of rangeland both for cattle grazing and as habitat for sage grouse and other wildlife. Neither is very palatable for cattle.

Sentence: ‘He picks on women and children’

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“There’s really no amount of time or money or anything else that can ever give back the innocence of a child’s life or a victim of sexual abuse,” Brown said. “And it’s frustrating that the best we can do is just put somebody in prison, but at least he won’t be hurting anybody for the better part of the next 20 years.

“He’s a total bully, and he picks on women and children. That’s his track record.”

Prosecutors and law enforcement have described the death of Wing and the abuse of her brothers as one of the worst child abuse

cases in the county’s history.

Prosecutors alleged the children were tortured, sexually abused, burned, bitten and caged in the Seaside apartment their mother, Dorothy Wing, shared with Roden.

Dorothy Wing pleaded guilty to manslaughter and criminal mistreatment and was sentenced to 15 years in prison, a reduced sentence agreed upon in return for her testimony against Roden.

During Roden’s sentencing on Friday, the family of the children struggled to come to terms with a new sentence they view as unjust.

Melissa Smith, the children’s aunt and adoptive

parent of the two boys, said her family is offended by how the matters have been handled.

“It sends a message to the community in which this child died that her life does not matter,” Smith said. “The effects of this crime, and his actions on every member of my family is a life sentence of dealing with profound trauma and grief and loss.

“When I think of everything my nieces and nephews have gone through, I become sick to my stomach that someone could hurt children in this way or that a mother could look the other way shocks me to my core. No one will ever know the

extent of their torture, sexual abuse, mental and emotional abuse that they suffered at this man’s hand. Man is too kind of a word, he is a monster.

“I’m still learning new things that were done to my boys and their sister every day and it takes a part of my heart. There’s a raw and empty space in all of this now that will never be healed because of this horrible man.”

Judge Henry Kantor, who presided over the sentencing, said the new sentence may not satisfy anyone, “but it is what the community can produce in light of all of the circumstances.”

Director: No money to help new families

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“I think that there’s a very serious approach that the board is taking toward getting NOHA back into HUD’s good graces,” Evans said. “And that goes out to our community partners and the funders and the development partners and everybody else.

“I think that there’s sort of a renewed commitment to just sort of doing the right thing and creating an environment and an organization that’s supportive of the families that we serve, all of our stakeholders — whether it’s landlords, participants, applicants to our programs, the communities more broadly — that the organization is committed to being the best housing authority and affordable housing provider that it can possibly be in serving this sort of coastal region.”

The housing authority is evaluated each fiscal year.

The goal is to get on a path to being rated a standard or high performer by June 2022.

In the meantime, the housing authority is also addressing a financial shortfall.

The voucher program assists over 1,000 people, but there is no money to help new families.

Evans said the housing authority was advised by HUD to stop issuing new vouchers until funding stabilizes.

The housing authority is trying to secure sufficient funding to support those already on the program before reassessing the situation.

Susan Williams, the housing authority’s finance director, told the board Thursday that part of the reason the agency is experiencing a shortfall is because of improper reporting to the Voucher Management System, the system HUD uses

to determine how much money the housing authority will receive each year to pay those in the program.

Williams said the inaccurate information reported to HUD may have resulted in the housing authority being underfunded for months or even years.

Evans said the largest contributor to the shortfall was the number of families that have lost wages as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The housing authority is applying for additional funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act to help get through shortfall.

The housing authority cannot give out project-based vouchers until it has an approved five-year plan.

Project-based vouchers, which encourage property owners to construct, rehabilitate or make available existing housing units, has also

created challenges for several affordable housing projects.

Evans told the board that the housing authority had pledged a certain number of project-based vouchers to several development properties, including Trillium House at Chelsea Gardens, an affordable housing project planned for Warrenton.

He said HUD approved the housing authority’s application that was submitted to have those units, which has created a significant challenge.

Evans said the project in Warrenton is far enough out into the future that the issues can be resolved with limited or minimal disruptions to the timeline.

“We want the public to know that we’re here and that we’re 100% committed to doing what’s right for the community and for the families and the people that we serve,” Evans said.

Water: ‘The city of Astoria has no system development charges’

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“All the water for the whole neighborhood goes through that pipeline,” he said.

Melanie Olson, a regional development officer with Business Oregon, said the money was repurposed from leftover lottery funds earmarked for a dike and levee improvement project that hasn’t begun.

“We wanted to get the money out the door to a project that was going to improve economic development,” Olson said. “So this one fit the bill, and it was a good use of the funding.”

An agreement with the city allowed Bowline Hotel to finish decking, roofing and framing the building while figuring out how to get adequate water service. The City Council on Monday approved an amendment that will allow the Bowline to add doors, windows and siding to button the building up for the

rainy winter season.

Like Buoy Beer, Bowline will also design an improved water system to meet fire suppression and other standards, while likely benefitting surrounding properties. The city will develop a financing plan to reimburse Bowline for improvements that benefit other nearby properties.

Estes described such plans as being in lieu of system development charges — fees charged to property owners to help pay for growth.

“I can tell you that if we had system development charges, that the city would most likely be looking to do a public-private partnership to be able to assist in some of these things,” Estes said.

“However, as we all know, the city of Astoria has no system development charges. We’re probably the largest city in the state of Oregon who doesn’t have them.”

Virus: Pool to remain closed until Nov. 18

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Skyler Archibald, the recreation district’s executive director, said the staff member who tested positive was recovering at home. “They are in contact with their medical provider and the health department,” he said.

Melissa Ousley, the marketing and special events manager for the recreation district, said the district is working with the county Public Health Department on contact tracing.

“At this time, we do not believe there has been exposure to the public,” she said in a statement.

Staff that had close, personal contact with the positive case are being asked to self-isolate for 14 days from their last contact. “It’s a tricky situation and kind of difficult, but we didn’t feel we could staff the pool or put our users and patrons at risk,” Archibald said.

The pool will remain closed until Nov. 18 as a precaution.

The county on Friday reported six new virus cases.

The cases include a man in his 30s and a man in his 40s living in the northern part of the county. The others live in the southern part of the county and include two women in their 20s, a man in his 20s and a woman in her 60s.

On Thursday, the county reported seven new cases.

The new cases included a woman in her 70s, a woman in her 20s and a man in his 30s living in the northern part of the county.

The other cases include two men in their 20s, a woman in her 20s and a man in his 30s who live in the southern part of the county.

On Wednesday, Michael McNickle, the county’s public health director, said during a county Board of Commissioners work session that a man in his 60s was taken to a hospital outside of the county and is on

a ventilator. The man lives in the northern part of the county and was reported as one of three new cases on Tuesday.

The county reported 14 new cases on Monday.

Since March, the county has recorded 284 virus cases. According to the county, 243 have recovered, one was hospitalized and the others were convalescing at home.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 48,608 cases and 716 deaths statewide as of Friday morning.

The health authority tracked 7,489 test results in Clatsop County, including 278 of the positive cases.

At a news conference on Friday, Brown said it was alarming that the spread of the virus in Oregon was not linked to specific outbreaks, but rather community spread.

Oregon announced a record-high 805 new cases on Thursday.

“The virus can very quickly snowball out of control,” the governor said. “We’re seeing that in real time, and certainly lives are at stake.”

The two-week pause on social activities applies to Multnomah County, which includes Portland and is the state’s largest by population, along with Jackson, Malheur, Marion and Umatilla counties, where virus cases are high. Five other counties — Baker, Clackamas, Linn, Union and Washington — could be added next week, depending on case counts.

The new restrictions begin Wednesday, the Associated Press reported, and include halting visitations to long-term care facilities, reducing the capacity of indoor dining at restaurants to 50 people, encouraging all businesses to mandate work from home and urging Oregonians not to gather with people who do not live in their household, but if they do to limit it to six people.

Lower Columbia teams sweep La Salle

The Astorian

The Lower Columbia Baseball Club’s fall 16-and-under team picked up two easy wins last weekend in a doubleheader against La Salle at La Salle High School in Milwaukie.

Sponsored by Hilander Dental of Longview, Washington, the Lower Columbians swept the twinbill 21-1 and 16-0.

In just nine-and-a-half innings of play, Hilander scored 37 runs, pounded out 22 hits, drew 18 walks and took advantage of nine La Salle errors. Lower Columbia pitchers allowed just two hits total.

In the opener, Hilander led 11-1 after three innings, then scored 10 runs in the top of the fourth.



Riley Kuhl

Justin Morris

Naselle’s Kolten Lindstrom did not have a hit, but drew three walks, drove in two runs and scored twice.

Seaside’s Lawson Talamantez also did not have a hit, but drew a walk, was hit by a pitch and scored two runs.

Pitchers Brodie Fitzpatrick (Kelso) and Nolan Williams (Castle Rock) gave up just one hit, with seven strikeouts.

Astoria’s Gunnar Olson combined with Lindstrom and Talamantez for four

hits, five RBIs and five runs scored.

While Olson had a double, Lindstrom (2-for-2, two runs scored, four RBIs) led the offensive attack with a triple and a home run.

On the mound, Olson, Williams and Lindstrom combined on another one-hitter, with 12 strikeouts.

Lower Columbia improved to 12-3 on the season.

Hilander 18U team sweeps

In addition to the sweep doubleheader sweep for the 16U team, Lower Columbia’s Competitive Athletics 18-and-under team also posted two wins over the La Salle 18Us, 8-7 and 8-6, last weekend at La Salle.

In Game 1, Seaside’s

Riley Kuhl set the pace for Lower Columbia, going 2-for-4 from his leadoff spot.

Seaside teammate Justin Morris pitched two innings, allowing four hits and four walks with three strikeouts.

Lower Columbia trailed 7-0 after four innings, before scoring four runs in the fifth, one in the sixth and three in the seventh to rally for the win.

In the nightcap, Kuhl and Morris combined to drive in five runs, while Lower Columbia led 8-1 after five innings before giving up five runs in the sixth.

Five Lower Columbia pitchers allowed just three hits with Naselle’s Kolten Lindstrom picking up the save.

The Lower Columbia 18U team is 9-5-1 this fall.

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