



**ALL-EO
PLAYER OF
THE YEAR**
SPORTS/1B

Buti
yoga
bliss



LIFESTYLES 1C

REGION:
Crews extinguish fire
on Hermiston Butte **3A**

NATION:
U.S. report finds Iran
threat remains **12A**

EAST OREGONIAN

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ALL FIRED UP

Class of firefighters train
for what may be a difficult
season in a dry, hot West



A fire school participant holds a wildland firefighting tool called a pulaski, which combines an axe and an adze. About 100 firefighters from various agencies spent four days in a classroom learning about fire behavior, weather, suppression, tools and other topics before going into the woods Friday to practice techniques.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

A cloud of white smoke rose from the woods Friday morning in the Blue Mountains between Pendleton and La Grande. In response, seasonal firefighters quickly moved to a nearby hillside along Summit Road.

Marching single file, the hand crews paused to assess the flames smoldering in mostly downed branches and tree stumps. After checking for snags and hazards, they worked together to dig a fire line and stop the tiny blaze in its tracks.

The incident was only a simulation, but for about 80 young firefighters it was a chance to test themselves in preparation for what forecasters say will be another long, hot wildfire season across the Northwest.

Friday's training on live fire — done within a prescribed burn area of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest — marked the end of a week-long fire school led by the U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Forestry and Bureau of Indian Affairs. The course combined classroom learning with hands-on practice in forest near Mount Emily.

Come July, the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise predicts an above-average potential for large wildfires throughout Oregon and Washington. Those conditions are expected to linger through September.



Fire school participants walk single file Friday to a practice fire near Mt. Emily Road on the Umatilla National Forest.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

If the 2015 season is anything like last year, Northwest firefighters could be in for a wild ride. Fire burned an estimated 1.3 million acres in Oregon and Washington in 2014, including the 256,108-acre Carlton Complex that was the largest blaze in Washington state history.

Andrew Livingston, 23, of Baker City, remembers spending 10 days on the Carlton, an experience he described as "controlled chaos."

"It's a really fast-paced environment when it's happening like that," Livingston said. "You really need to have faith in your leaders."

Now in his sixth season as a seasonal firefighter, Livingston returned to fire school to learn how to become one of those crew leaders. He plans to become certified as a Type 5 incident commander before the end of the

See **FIRE/14A**

"The most important thing about firefighting is paying attention so you can come home at night."

— **Andrew Livingston**, training to be incident commander

Umatilla County folds human services, overhauls addiction treatment program

Fourth department closed by commissioners

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County's troubled human services department is no more.

The board of county commissioners dissolved the department Wednesday in the face of a possible criminal investigation of its former director and two alcohol and drug counselors.

Commissioner George Murdock said addiction treatment and other services the department provided will continue under the purview of

the Community Justice Department.

"It might not be under community justice forever, but it will not be a separate department again," Murdock said.

Murdock and fellow commissioners Bill Elfering and Larry Givens have spent the past couple years winnowing the number of departments in county government from 12 to eight and eliminating or combining department heads. This revamp might be the biggest move yet and results in cutting two manager positions.

In April, the county suspended

then-human services director Carolyn Mason and husband-and-wife counselors Laura Aviles-Valdez and Juan Valdez while Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc. investigated the department. The county fired the trio June 4, and GOBHI turned over its findings to the Oregon Department of Justice for a possible criminal investigation.

Murdock said the vacancies presented the county with an opportunity to restructure how it would provide addiction services. Murdock, outgoing community justice director Mark Royal,

See **SERVICES/14A**

War on wage hike

Chamber of Commerce opposes
increase to state minimum wage

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

In between the usual announcements of ribbon cuttings and professional luncheons, the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce recently sent out an email urging its members to contact state legislators.

The June 16 letter detailed the renewed push of House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, to pass House Bill 2012, which initiates a minimum wage increase from \$9.25 per hour to \$11 next year, \$12 in 2017 and \$13 in 2018.

The letter encourages members to contact Kotek, state Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, and state Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, and voice their opposition to the bill.

"We are closely watching this issue and Oregon State Chamber of Commerce is working to ensure the bill does not get traction this session," the letter states.

Pendleton chamber Executive Director Gail Nelson said the intent of the letter was to keep members abreast of activity that might affect them.

"Small businesses just don't have the ability to absorb those costs," she said.

Whether a minimum wage increase would be a boon or bane to the economy has long been a source of contention among economists. But the state chamber, which is funded by and promotes businesses, cites a study that predicts a loss of 52,000 jobs across the state if the minimum wage is raised to \$12 per hour.

For her part, Kotek has said the boost

See **WAGE/14A**

Heat wave cuts deep into wheat

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
EO Media Group

Wheat yields are projected to take such a hit this summer that some Eastern Oregon growers may not even harvest their crop, a senior grain merchandiser said.

Sparse rainfall and diminished snowpack has impacted producers all across the West, but an unseasonable heat wave in late May and early June hit developing wheat plants at exactly the wrong time, said Dan Steiner of Pendleton Grain Growers.

Dryland wheat growers, who farm without irrigation, were hit especially hard as the National Weather Service recorded temperatures of 90, 96 and 102 degrees in the Pendleton area from May 29 to June 10.

"Production will be down significantly," Steiner said. He estimated a 20 percent yield drop overall from the statewide average of about 60 bushels an acre.

"Some of the dryland areas are going to have zero," he said. "Some (fields) will be abandoned."

Steiner said the heat wave came as wheat plants were in the stage of filling out their grain kernels. Evaporation stole what little water was left for plant development, he said.

"It came at a very, very bad time," he said. "A lot of moisture that could have gone to the kernel was simply lost."

If temperatures had been in the 70s

See **WHEAT/14A**

