

Drought declared in three more counties

Union, Hood River, Curry counties added to list

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

The number of Oregon counties suffering from drought continues to grow. Gov. Kate Brown declared drought emergencies Tuesday in Union, Hood River and Curry counties, bringing the total number to 23 — more than double the drought declarations last year. Other counties in a declared drought include: Baker, Coos, Crook, Deschutes, Douglas, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Jackson, Jefferson, Josephine, Klamath, Lake, Lane, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Wasco and Wheeler. “The extreme drought conditions we are experiencing reflect a new reality in Oregon,” Brown said. “In an already difficult fire season, steps such as these are key to taking a proactive approach to the continuing challenges of climate change.” Snowpack was historically low throughout Oregon for the 2015 water year, leading to significant water shortages into summer. Farms and fish

depend on gradual snowmelt to replenish and recharge streams, something that simply wasn’t available in most basins given the conditions. An official drought declaration gives water managers some additional tools at their disposal, such as expediting emergency water use permits or temporary transfers of water rights. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has also made \$2.5 million available to farmers, ranchers and foresters in drought counties to improve their conservation practices. Funding is provided by the Natural Resource Conservation Service through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Producers can learn more by contacting their local USDA Service Center. The U.S. Drought Monitor shows all of northeast Oregon in severe to extreme drought. In Umatilla County, McKay Reservoir is just 45 percent full and 20 percent full at Cold Springs Reservoir. As part of an effort to raise drought awareness, Gov. Brown has created a website for more information, at www.drought.oregon.gov. State agencies are also using the hashtag #ORDrought to keep Oregonians informed on social media.

County lifts Helix boil water notice

HELIX — The Umatilla County Public Health Department has lifted a notice advising residents of Helix to boil their water before using it. The Oregon Health Authority drinking water services reported five sample of water were collected in the area’s water distribution system on Monday, none of which

contained *E. coli* bacteria, according to a news release from the public health department. A boil water notice was put into effect earlier in the month after samples of the small town’s water supply tested positive for *E. coli*. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov or ucohealth.net.

BRIEFLY



Staff photo by Tammy Malgesini

Josh Rist leads the Hermiston Community Choir at a recent rehearsal. The group will perform a free concert Thursday at 7 p.m. in the Hermiston High School auditorium.

Community choir tunes up

HERMISTON — With twice-weekly rehearsals under their belt since late June, the Hermiston Community Choir will crescendo with a free community performance. Director Josh Rist, who also teaches choir at Hermiston High School, is excited by the community’s response. In just its second year, the choir has nearly doubled in size. Open to teens and adults, there are about 60 voices in this year’s group.

The free performance is Thursday at 7 p.m. in the auditorium at Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St. “We’re doing a real diversity of genres and styles,” Rist said. “Gospel, spiritual, Shaker tunes and popular songs, including ‘Lean on Me.’” Rist said the performance is somewhat dark and serious in the beginning and then moves into the encouragement and supportive stage. The community choir is coordinated by Hermiston Parks & Recreation. For more information, call 541-667-5018.

Caledonian Games book hits stores

“Br-r-r-ring On the Games!, An Athena Caledonian Games Album Since 1899” is now available in local stores. The book, which features historical articles and photos

of the Athena Caledonian Games, was released in July thanks to grants from the Umatilla County Cultural Coalition, the Blue Mountain Community Foundation, the Homer and Persephone Watts Foundation and Ken and Dorothy Bjorklund. The 196-page book, which costs \$40, is available at Athena City Hall and at Armchair Books and Heritage Station Museum in Pendleton. For more information, contact Sue Friese at 541-566-3880.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Wheat field fire near Milton-Freewater

Two pumers patrol for hot spots after a fire raced through wheat fields south of Milton-Freewater on Tuesday afternoon. The Oregon Department of Transportation closed Highway 11 for a short time while firefighters controlled the blaze.

IRRIGON

Festival offers watermelons, family fun

By **TAMMY MALGESINI**
East Oregonian

Watermelons — lots of them — are the centerpiece of the Irrigon Watermelon Festival. In addition to eating the sweet melons, they are featured in several contests. From the Mayors Watermelon Seed Spitting Contest to kid’s seed spitting and watermelon bowling, melons are a focal point of the 32nd annual festival. Renee and Raymond Couchman, who have acted as the liaison with Jack Bellinger for many years, are grateful to Bellinger Farms for its continued support of the festival. Renee Couchman said the donated melons save the festival at least \$1,000 each year.

The festivities kick off Saturday with a breakfast from 6:30-9:30 a.m. at Irrigon Marina Park. The parade, which runs along Main Street, starts at 10 a.m. and leads back to the marina park for the rest of the day’s activities. The Couchmans stepped up their involvement with the festival as sort of changing of the guard. Some volunteers, Renee Couchman said, have either moved away or pared back their participation. Another part of the festival Couchman is excited about is the all-day raffle. Tickets are \$1 each or six for \$5. Drawings will be held throughout the day and evening. People don’t have to be present to win. And there are some amazing prizes, Couchman said. From a flat screen TV and luggage to a lawn mower and a gazebo, people



Staff photo by Tammy Malgesini

Tony Sexton and Clara Funk enjoy watermelon during the 2013 Irrigon Watermelon Festival at Irrigon Marina Park.

have an opportunity to take home some awesome items. Also, there are gift baskets, rodeo and fair tickets and a Wildhorse Resort & Casino package. Also, for a chance at cashing in on \$100, be sure to purchase a button. Nearly two dozen arts, crafts and commercial vendors will be scattered throughout the park — offering everything from homemade items to art and jewelry to information about water safety. Angie Schneider, vendor coordinator, said there’s room for more people to rent space to sell their wares. The cost is \$20 for arts/craft vendors and \$50 for commercial items. The set-up time begins at

7 a.m. and vendors need to be ready to sell items from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call Schneider at 541-314-0166. Stage entertainment features regional talents, including Three River Saxtette, Roundup City Cloggers, Vaughn Jensen, The Trio, Rock Blythe, The Sahara Dancers and Frazer Wambeke Trio. “We try to get some new people and some favorites,” Couchman said. “It’s nice to rotate them every few years.” The festival also includes

boat rides with the Morrow County Sheriff’s Office, water slides and a car show. A softball tournament runs through the weekend at the adjacent fields. The festival crescendos with an evening street dance at 9 p.m. For more information, contact Couchman at 541-922-1560 or City Manager Aaron Palmquist at manager@ci.irrigon.or.us.
Contact Community Editor Tammy Malgesini at tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4539

SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.



First Foods Festival and Race

– Formerly known as Salmon Walk

Saturday, August 1, 2015 • July Grounds
(73310 July Grounds Lane, Pendleton, OR 97801)

Race Events & Times

(Jackets and medals for 1st – 3rd place for hike, 10 K & 5 K race events)

7:10 am	Kanine Ridge Hike Departs July Grounds
9:00 am	10 K Spawn Run
9:30 am	5 K Smolt Run
10:30 am	Family Fun Walk & Cycle (noncompetitive)
1st Annual Chumash Lacrosse Tournament	
Team Categories Grades	
1st - 3rd, 4th - 6th, 7th - 8th, 9th - 12th & Adult (Medals for Winning Team in Each Category)	
8:00 am - 10:15 am	Chumach Tournament Begins
10:15 am - 12:00 pm	Break for Family Fun Walk/ Race
12:00 pm - 2:30 pm	Chumash Tournament Continues

1-888-809-8027 ext. 7219 or firstfoodsfestival@ctuir.org

Event Agenda

6:45 am	Race Registration Opens
7:10 am	Hikers Depart for Kanine Ridge Hike
8:00 am	LaCrosse Tournament Begins (Game Times 8 - 10 am & 12:00 - 2:30 pm)
8:15 - 9:40 am	Yoga Stretch & Breath
9:00 am	10 K Spawn Run
9:30 am	5 K Smolt Run
10:00 am	First Foods Info Booths Open
10:30 am	Family Fun Walk & Cycle (Noncompetitive)
11:30 am	BBQ Fundraiser Lunch
12:00 pm	Awards Ceremonies for Race Events
1:00 pm	First Foods Contest
2:30 pm	Festival and LaCrosse Tournament Ends

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