

West Nile virus on the rise in Morrow County

Fifteen mosquito pools test positive for disease

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

West Nile virus is on the rise in Morrow County, with more than twice the number of mosquito samples testing positive for the disease compared to this time last year.

Greg Barron, manager of the North Morrow Vector Control District, said five more samples of mosquitoes have tested positive for West Nile, taken from two collection sites in rural Irrigon and Boardman. That brings the total number of positive tests countywide to 15, compared to seven a year ago. "It kind of comes with the territory this time of year," Barron

said. "We just have to reduce that (mosquito) population."

On Thursday, the district sent another 235 mosquito pools to the Oregon State University Veterinary Diagnostic Lab in Corvallis for further testing. One pool consists of about 10-15 mosquitoes, Barron said.

Crews spray for adult mosquitoes on the ground at least two or three times a week, usually from 9 p.m. to midnight when the insects are most active. The district also did an aerial application of larvicide Thursday to try and keep the numbers in check.

Unfortunately, with the return of triple-digit temperatures next week, Barron said he does not see much relief in sight.

"I hate to see that, because I know we're going to be in for it," he said.

The good news, Barron said, is that while the number of positive tests is higher this year, they are coming from just a few collection sites, meaning the district knows where to focus its resources.

"We've got it pigeonholed pretty good," he said.

Irrigon has been especially hard-hit by mosquitoes, Barron said, since it is sandwiched between irrigated farms on one end and the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife's Irrigon Wildlife Area on the other.

West Nile is carried by mosquitoes that feed on infected birds, and transmitted to humans via mosquito bites. About one in five people infected with the virus will actually show symptoms, which can range

from mild — fever, headaches and nausea lasting a couple of days — to a more severe condition known as encephalitis, which causes inflammation of the brain.

Those at highest risk include people over the age of 50, with immunodeficiencies, diabetes or high blood pressure. Oregon health officials recommend the following tips to avoid mosquito bites:

- Drain standing sources of water where mosquitoes can breed, such as watering troughs, bird baths and ornamental ponds.
- Use insect repellents when engaged in outdoor activities, especially at dawn or dusk when mosquitoes are active.
- Wear long-sleeve shirts and long pants in mosquito-infested areas.
- Make sure screen

doors and windows are in good repair and fit tightly. Barron said mosquito suppression efforts appear to be working, but crews need to keep up the pressure to avoid the situation getting out of hand.

"Don't ever give them a break. That's the big thing," he said. "We just want to stay on top of it."

According to the Oregon Health Authority, there have been 45 positive tests for West Nile in mosquitoes statewide, including 15 in Morrow County, 21 in Malheur County, six in Baker County and three in Umatilla County. Malheur County has also had three horses and two humans contract the virus.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Find this observation balloon, collect \$1,000

By **EMILY OLSON**
East Oregonian

You've seen rewards for missing dogs or cats or the bad guys in western flicks, but now you add a new one to the list. A team of researchers is offering \$1,000 for the safe return of their missing eclipse observation equipment.

The rogue rig is composed of a 360-degree livestream video camera, a defunct GPS unit, a yellow and purple parachute, a John Glenn action figure, a lumpy meteorite and a high altitude balloon, which may or may not have popped. Holding all that together is — or was — a system of strings.

"The equipment is only worth \$500 to \$1,000," said David Roman, who helped launch the rig. "But we pumped \$13,000 into it between our time and testing."

Plus, it carried a hefty dose of sentimental value.

The team was trying to raise awareness for the LGF Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to building a natural history museum in Arizona. They hoped to use the meteorite and footage in an exhibit, inspiring kids to develop a pioneering spirit towards science.

The rig launched near Vale, Ore., at 9:10 a.m. on Monday. Researchers intended to send it as high as 100,000 feet to record the eclipse, trigger a cutaway and use the GPS tracking system to retrieve it upon landing.

But as the balloon floated close to 20,000 feet, the GPS tracking and livestream connection were suddenly lost.

"We have no idea what could have

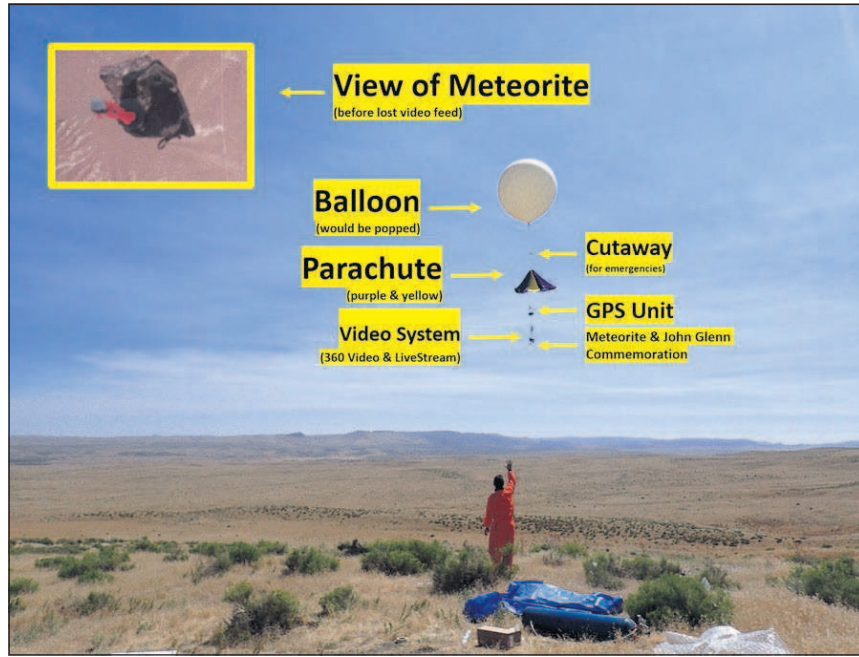


Photo courtesy of David Roman
The missing eclipse observation equipment, worth a \$1,000 reward, could be floating near Boise or beyond.

caused it," Roman said. He speculates it could have been a strike from a bird flying abnormally high or an unforeseen puncture to the balloon.

Unable to trigger the cutaway, the researchers could do nothing from the ground but hope for the best.

In the days since, they've received several reports of sightings, but it's tricky to determine whether it is indeed their rig and not the 50 or so that were launched in the area by NASA's teams. Two seemingly credible tips suggest

it might be floating near the foothills north of Boise, but Roman says the equipment could float to Sun Valley or Eastern Oregon or beyond.

While the team is offering a \$1,000 reward, they hope whoever finds it might donate that money back to the LGF Foundation, helping to educate the general public on paleontology and geology.

Those with any information can contact David Roman at 480-789-9829 or david@spiritvsn.com.

Defendant seeks to keep police interview from jury

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County prosecutor Jaelyn Jenkins wants a jury to know what Kenneth Eugene Christopher said to police about having sex with an underage girl. Christopher, 48, and his lawyer want the court to suppress that conversation.

Christopher's attorney, Jody S. Vaughan of Pendleton, filed a motion on Aug. 9 in Umatilla County Circuit Court asking for a hearing to determine if a jury should hear statements her client made during police questioning two years ago. She argued he was injured at the time, and as a result of the injury was not able to waive his right to keep silent.

"Furthermore," Vaughan asserted, "he has no independent recollection of the statements he made to law enforcement."

Jenkins filed a response with the court on Aug. 23 that stated Lt. Ben Peech of the Converse County Sheriff's Office, Wyoming, received a report on Aug. 12, 2015, of possible sex abuse. During the ensuing investigation, two girls told police Christopher sexually assaulted them. The crimes began in 2009 in Milton-Freewater and ended five years later in Wyoming. Christopher threatened the teens and

their pets if they talked, according to Jenkins, and he threatened their financial security.

Peech asked one victim on Aug. 13, 2015, to "place pretext calls and text messages" to help find Christopher. Sheriff's deputies arrested him, and Peech questioned him and recorded the interview. Police also advised Christopher of his rights to remain silent and ask for a lawyer, Jenkins claimed, and he indicated he understood those rights.

During the interview, according to Jenkins, "the defendant admitted to having sex with [one victim], admitted that it started when she was 14, but argued that she was at fault for instigating the sexual contact between the two."

Jenkins stated this is the interview Christopher seeks to suppress.

While Christopher "had some minor cuts and abrasions from when he was arrested," Jenkins argued "he was not injured to the point that his statements were involuntary." He was "an active participant" throughout the questioning, she stated, and never once indicated he suffered from any injury.

Therefore, she argued, the court should allow the statements at trial.

Circuit Judge Jon Lieuallen will hear arguments on the matter during a two-hour hearing Tuesday in Pendleton. Christopher faces 30 counts in all,

including four of first-degree rape, five of first-degree sexual abuse and four of first-degree sodomy. He remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, in lieu of \$1 million bail. The court set his five-day trial to begin Sept. 18.

In other court action, Milton-Freewater drive-by shooting suspect Clemente Garcia-Cerda, 21, of Walla Walla, had a pretrial conference Wednesday. Lieuallen is presiding over that case and set a trial readiness hearing for Nov. 7. Garcia-Cerda faces attempted murder, weapons charges and multiple counts of recklessly endangering another person stemming from a May 10 shooting.

The co-defendant in the case, Francisco Javier Palacios-Garcia, 24, of Milton-Freewater, took a deal in July and pleaded guilty to two counts each of unlawful use of a weapon and recklessly endangering another person. He is serving a five-year sentence in Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton.

And Angela Marie Fix, 40, of Pilot Rock, had a pretrial conference Thursday in Pendleton. She faces first-degree arson and second-degree manslaughter charges in the July 16 death of Larry Castro of Pilot Rock. Fix remains in the county jail on a \$500,000 bond. Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer set a trial readiness hearing in the case for Aug. 31.

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Stanfield School Board considers spreading bond payments over two years

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

The Stanfield School Board will meet next week to discuss spreading out missed payments for its elementary school bond over the next two years, instead of levying the entire amount this fall.

The district mailed out a flyer last week notifying residents that due to a miscalculation by the district, they had been under-charging residents for the last several years on bond payments and would be increasing residents' property taxes for the next fiscal year to make up the deficit.

After a meeting with

county assessor Paul Chalmers, district officials and board members said they would most likely be spreading the payments out over two years, instead of lumping it into one fiscal year.

Stanfield School Board Chair Scott Morris said the board was hoping to hold a special school board meeting next week, in which they could approve a resolution to spread out the payments.

Morris said the deficit was first brought up to the board at a school board meeting during budget season, in spring of last year.

Stanfield School District Business Manager Kris James

clarified that she and Liscom never placed full blame on the previous business manager for the error.

"There were previous administrators," she said. "We can't really put our finger on where it originated. We're just picking up the pieces."

The bond to build a new elementary school in Stanfield was passed in 1999. It was advertised as a \$5.4 million bond at a cost to taxpayers of \$2.97 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

It passed with 375 votes in favor to 223 opposed, from a pool of about 1,100 registered voters. The bond is set to expire in 2019.

PENDLETON Roy Raley well to remain down until after Round-Up

East Oregonian

One of Pendleton's main drinking water production wells will remain offline through Round-Up.

According to a Thursday email from Public Works Director Bob Patterson, the replacement pump equipment for the well at Roy Raley Park won't be on-site until Sept. 18.

The wells at Roy Raley at Stillman parks, which collectively produce 4.6 million gallons of water per day, went out of service in early August.

While the Stillman well went back into service Aug. 12, repairs at Roy Raley have taken longer as pump equipment was stuck in the well hole for more than a week.

Although the well will be ready for pump installation by Round-Up week, Patterson said that with all the activity surrounding the event at Roy Raley Park, the city decided to wait until after the rodeo ends.

In an interview Thursday, Patterson said City Manager Robb Corbett has approved \$95,700 to repair the

well, although that cost doesn't cover the additional contractor the city hired to help remove the lodged pump.

Although water use will ramp up for Round-Up week, Patterson doesn't expect there to be a water supply issue if the city's current cool weather holds.

If there is a heat spike, Patterson said the city will curtail water use in Pendleton parks and ask large-scale customers like Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Blue Mountain Community College and the Pendleton School District to reduce their use.

With a "pinch point" in the 700-foot well hole currently preventing the pump from lowering to the 440-foot mark to efficiently pump water, the city's replacement pump will be different than its predecessor.

To be more flexible around the well hole's outcroppings, the city will replace the 14-inch diameter pump with a 12-inch pump and the 10-inch diameter column pipe with an 8-inch one.

Rivoli picks up \$15,000 Wildhorse grant

East Oregonian

The Rivoli Restoration Coalition is \$15,000 closer to meetings its goal of restoring the Rivoli Theater in Pendleton and turning it into a performing arts center.

The coalition announced that it received a \$15,000 grant from the Wildhorse Foundation for the first phase of construction, which encompasses skilled demolition, excavation and basic structural work.

The coalition has now raised 54 percent of the campaign goal of \$559,114 for the first phase of the project. The EO Media Group, the parent company of the *East Oregonian*, is one of the donors.

Andrew Picken, the president of the coalition, said the coalition and the Pendleton Downtown Association co-applied for the grant.

He added that this was the second successful collaboration between the two nonprofits after the downtown association helped the coalition obtain a \$100,000 Oregon Parks and Recreation Department grant earlier this year.

The coalition has already hired Kirby Nagelhout Construction to handle the first phase of the project and Picken expects construction to start in early September.

Route work pays for my children's activities.



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