



BULLDOGS DOMINATE SPORTS/1B



BEAVER BELIEVERS LIFESTYLES/1C



BLUE MOUNTAIN FOLK MUSIC/3C

EAST OREGONIAN

OCTOBER 21-22, 2017

142nd Year, No. 5

WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

CLEARING A PRESENT DANGER

Landowners remove brush, fallen trees to help prevent forest fires

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

The contrast is easy to see driving through Tom and Cindy Beechinor's forest property up Government Mountain Road in northern Umatilla County.

Fall colors decorated the soggy woods Wednesday, where the Beechinors showed their latest work to thin overly dense stands of trees. In one area, the forest floor is clean of clutter and open for larger trees to thrive. In other areas, the brush is almost too thick to walk and loaded with dead and down fuel.

"If we don't do something in here, Mother Nature will," Tom Beechinor said, warning against the threat of wildfires, disease and insect infestations.

This year marked another intense fire season across the West, including Oregon, where large blazes swept over an estimated

"We're praying to God we never end up with a fire up here. But you never know."

— **Dale Freeman**,
president of the
Langdon Lake Association

678,000 acres statewide. Some were sparked by lightning, such as the 191,121-acre Chetco Bar fire near Brookings, while others were carelessly ignited by humans, such as the 48,831-acre Eagle Creek fire in the Columbia River Gorge.

So-called "megafires" are burning bigger and hotter than before, according to researchers, due to changes in both the climate and landscape. Paul Hessburg, research landscape ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service, recently visited Pendleton to talk about the need for forest rehabilitation to boost fire resiliency, especially in the wild-



(TOP) A recently cleared area of Tom and Cindy Beechinor's forest property in the North Folk Walla Walla River watershed east of Milton-Freewater. (BOTTOM) Densely packed trees with ladder fuel growing all of the way to the forest floor in a wooded area nearby.

land-urban interface where development is adding a whole new set of challenges for firefighters.

Tom and Cindy Beechinor have heeded the call,

spearheading projects on the family's property where they run cattle and harvest some commercial logs for timber sales. By cutting smaller diameter

trees — known as pre-commercial thinning — Tom Beechinor said it helps to ensure the overall health of the forest.

"If the forest is too

crowded, you have all of these trees competing for a limited amount of moisture, and ultimately

See **FOREST/13A**

ECHO

City issues apology for councilor's anti-gay comments

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The city of Echo has issued an apology for statements made by city councilor Lou Nakapalau on Facebook calling a gay man an anti-gay slur and telling him that when he dies of AIDS he will spit on his grave.

"The Echo City Council would like to extend its sincerest apology to those who were offended by comments made by a council member in a Facebook dialog reported by the *East Oregonian*," the statement reads. "Comments of individual council members on their personal social media accounts do not have any endorsement or approval of the council as a whole nor do they represent city policy."

The statement goes on to say that the city does not endorse any statement that disparages someone because of their identity and has never taken an action or adopted a policy that was "in any sense prejudicial or biased toward a class or group of people."

City councilor Robert Harris proposed issuing the apology during Thursday's council meeting — the first since Nakapalau made the comments on Oct. 7.

"I think that's the absolute least we can do," Harris said.

His motion was met with several seconds of silence from the rest of the council, prompting an outcry from audience members as it looked like the motion might die from a lack of a second. Harris looked at councilor Jerry Gaunt, who told Harris he didn't have to second it, but councilor Janie Enright said she had seconded the motion while people were talking. The council, including Nakapalau, then voted unanimously to approve the motion.

Nakapalau did not offer any comment during the council meeting and has not returned requests for

See **APOLOGY/11A**

PENDLETON

Drone range expands horizons with mission control

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range Mission Control and Innovation Center was a literal toy factory on Friday.

Range employees will contend that the drones they test on a regular basis are tools and not toys, but there's no practical application for the dozens of small, gray robots the city was mass producing for a group of high school students coming in later that afternoon. Using 3-D printers, the range manufactured the robot toys, complete with cowboy hats, the range's initials and an imprint on the left foot with the phrase "Maker Buck" and the range's bucking Pegasus logo.

Beyond making promotional material, the mission control and innovation center



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is the latest addition to the test range, another feature range officials believe will continue to add to Pendleton's competitive edge among drone manufacturers.

Steve Chrisman, Pendleton's airport manager and economic development director, said the center could eventually help unmanned flights surpass manned flights in terms of operations.

The command center

Located at the corner of Northwest 56th Street and Airport Road, the former

See **RANGE/11A**



Range Manager Darryl Abing explains the capabilities of the mission control room at the Pendleton UAS Range Mission Control and Innovation Center in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



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