

Oregon's 'extreme drought' triples in size

Severe drought spreads in Washington

By DON JENKINS
EO Media Group

Drought intensified in Oregon and Washington over the previous week, the U.S. Drought Monitor reported this week.

The percentage of Oregon gripped in "extreme drought" more than tripled to nearly 22 percent. In Washington, the percentage of the state in "severe drought" nearly tripled to 17 percent from 6.

A drier than normal winter and a warm and dry summer have caused problems in much of the West, according to a statement from the Drought Monitor.

"This was most notable in Oregon, where the combination of a poor winter snowpack and a hot and dry summer have produced widespread poor pasture and range conditions and very low stream flows and livestock ponds, and required water hauling, supplemental hay and delayed forest harvesting, along with reduced livestock herds," according to the statement.

The Drought Monitor is a partnership between the USDA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The four categories of drought in order of severity are moderate, severe, extreme and exceptional.

Oregon and Washington have both had dry and



Don Jenkins/EO Media Group

Cattle graze this summer in a pasture in southwest Washington. August through June has been warm and dry in Washington and Oregon, leading to widespread drought conditions in both states.

warm summers. Drought conditions are more widespread and severe in Oregon because Washington had a wetter winter, according to the Drought Monitor.

The portion of Oregon in some stage of drought remained steady at 93 percent, but more areas on both sides of the state went from severe to extreme drought.

Ranchers in southwestern Oregon reported there was not enough water in creeks to run irrigation pumps and that livestock was moved off pastures because of low springs and ponds, the USDA reported in a weekly crop report.

Milder temperatures eased some of the drought stress. The cooler but still dry weather benefited rip-

ening wine grapes and tree fruit, according to USDA.

More than half of Washington fell into some stage of drought for the first time this year. The percentage of the state in drought increased to 54 percent from 46 percent. All of Western Washington is in drought. Drought is most severe in the South Puget Sound area and southwest Washington. The entire state is at least "abnormally dry."

"Those who have irrigation have been running day and night. Those without have stressed crops with reduced yield," according to USDA's crop report for Washington.

Drought conditions are less severe in Idaho and California and were lit-

tle changed from the week before.

Some 30 percent of Idaho is some stage of drought, mostly modest drought. Some 48 percent of California is in drought, again mostly moderate drought.

NOAA reported Thursday that this year's meteorological summer, June through August, in the U.S. was the fourth hottest on record, tying 1934. Records date back 124 years. The summer was the 20th wettest. The Great Plains and East Coast had above-average rainfall, according to NOAA.

Oregon had its ninth warmest and 24th driest meteorological summer, while Washington had its 13th warmest and 11th driest.

HERMISTON

City council to discuss water rates Monday

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council will discuss water rates, airport management and new projects for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center on Monday.

The meeting at city hall, 180 N.E. Second St., will begin with a work session at 6 p.m. to discuss water and sewer rates.

The city's public infrastructure committee has been working on a long-term capital improvement plan for the city and will provide the council with recommendations for the water and sewer portions of the plan and how the recommended

projects might be funded.

During its regular 7 p.m. meeting the council will hold a public hearing about the bid process for planned improvements to EOTEC. When the city and Umatilla County agreed earlier this year that the city should take full control of the formerly joint project, the city agreed to pay half of the cost of adding office and storage space for the Umatilla County Fair staff, up to \$250,000. The city also plans to improve the RV park located in the northwest corner of EOTEC.

According to a memo in the agenda packet from city manager Byron Smith, the city would like to use a bid-design-build format that

brings in a contractor before the project is designed.

"This process allows the contractor and the designer of the project to work together from the beginning of the project and provides for savings on the construction side because the contractor is able to comment on the construct-ability of the design from its earliest stages," he wrote.

The city will take public comment and vote on a resolution that would allow the city to use this alternative method of procurement.

On Monday the council will also consider an agree-

ment with Gorge Aviation Services to take over management of the Hermiston Municipal Airport. According to assistant city manager Mark Morgan, Hermiston Aviation Services has provided "excellent" services for the city and has been working with the city to find a successor. After putting out a request for proposals, the airport committee voted unanimously to select Gorge Aviation Services, which previously provided airport management services for the airport across from The Dalles in Dallesport, Washington.

Hit-and-run driver racks up damage in Lexington

LEXINGTON — The Morrow County Sheriff's Office reported one man was behind multiple hit-and-run crashes early Friday in Lexington.

The residents of 66790 Marquardt Road, Lexington, called 911 at 2:31 a.m. and reported a vehicle crashed into their house. Dispatchers sent fire and ambulance from Heppner along with the Morrow County Sheriff's Office to the scene. The ambulance took the driver, Jesus Garcia, 23, of Echo, to Pioneer Memorial Hospital, Heppner.

The sheriff's dispatch at 6:37 a.m. received a call from the Morrow County Grain Growers in Lexington, which reported that someone drove through the gates, hit a parked car and left behind the license plate from the vehicle they were driving. The sheriff's office reported that plate was from the vehicle Garcia crashed.

Less than 20 minutes later, a caller reported a vehicle drove through the residence at 350 W. Clay St. in Lexington just prior to 2:30 a.m. and left toward Hermiston.

The sheriff's office reported Garcia was the suspect in each crash and the investigation is continuing.

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Urban renewal will get own line on Pendleton and Hermiston property tax statement

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

When Pendleton and Hermiston residents see a new line on their November property tax statements, the Umatilla County Assessment and Taxation Department doesn't want them to fret.

Due to a calculation error discovered by a recent audit, the urban renewal districts in Pendleton and Hermiston have never been their own line item on a tax statement.

Now it will, and Paul Chalmers, the Umatilla County director of assessment and taxation, said it shouldn't cause anyone's tax bills to go up.

"It's not going to cost anyone anything more," he said. "That's the beauty in all of this."

Instead of creating a new tax, the new taxing system will take small amounts from each taxing district that overlaps with the urban renewal districts — entities such as Umatilla County, the InterMountain Education Service District, and Blue Mountain Community College — and reallocate them to the urban renewal district line.

While the other taxing districts will be forgoing some revenue, Chalmers said it shouldn't be significant and the amount of money going to each urban renewal district should be the same.

"What's going to the urban renewal district is not compromised by this development," he said.

Pendleton and Hermiston are the only cities that have urban renewal districts, which encompass each city's downtown core. Under an urban renewal

district, the property tax base is "frozen" for the duration of the district. Whatever money is made on top of the frozen level goes directly to the urban renewal district instead of the usual lineup of taxing districts that claim that money.

The urban renewal district uses that revenue to fund programs and projects that are expected to spur economic development within the district like façade upgrades and small business loans. Other projects include a Hermiston festival street on Northeast Second Street and a grant program to restore historical second story spaces in downtown Pendleton.

Pendleton's urban renewal district will expire in 2023 while Hermiston's will wind down in 2033.

While Chalmers is the tax assessor for the county, he also is on the other side of the coin as the chairman of the Pendleton Development Commission, the governing body comprised of Pendleton City Council members that oversees the city's urban renewal district.

Chalmers said he's already met with the commission's advisory committee to discuss the issue, but he has yet to inform every taxing district that will be affected by the change.

He said the assessment and taxation department will calculate the new urban renewal district figure Sept. 25, which will give the agency a better idea of how much each taxing district will lose.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.



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1:30* 4:10 6:50 9:30
THE MEG [PG13]
11:50* 2:20* 4:50 7:20 9:50
ALPHA [PG13]
12:00* 2:10* 4:30 6:40
MILE 22 [R]
7:10 9:40
MAMMA MIA! HERE WE GO AGAIN [PG-13]
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