

Weather service issues flood watch for region

Between 1 to 3 inches of rain expected in the next 48 hours

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A flood watch released Thursday morning by the National Weather Service is in effect for northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington until Saturday morning. According to the flood watch, a slow moving weather system will produce excessive rainfall throughout the Blue Mountains and foothills, the Grande Ronde Valley and Wallowa County. Areas could see as much as 1 to 3 inches with the majority of rainfall expected in the Blue and Wallowa mountains, lead-



Raindrops make ripples in a puddle during a heavy downpour on Thursday in Pendleton. The National Weather Service has issued a flood watch through Friday evening for rivers and streams in the Blue Mountains.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

ing to rising water levels in streams and rivers coming out of the mountains. “A flood watch means conditions are forecast to occur or continue and to

add to already high running rivers and streams, causing a possibility of flooding,” Ann Adams, assistant forecaster at the National Weather Service in Pendleton, said. Adams said the watch covers a large region and the Weather Service is also monitoring gauges along some of the main rivers as the storms roll into the area. To help deliver current weather status, she said forecasters are updating the weather service’s Facebook page, Facebook.com/nwspendleton, Twitter account, @nwspendleton and the website, www.weather.gov/pdt. “Flood watches are more generalized,” Adams said. “In the Blue Mountains, foothills, Wallowa County or Grande Ronde Valley — any rivers or streams in that type area could possi-

bly flood with the additional rainfall.” Watches and warnings are posted in both a text version as well as colored graphs on the Service’s Pendleton website, Adams said. “If we have any weather graphics, what we call ‘weather stories’, they will be at the top of the page along with a map of our area of responsibility — Central and Northeastern Oregon and central and southeastern Washington,” she said. “The shaded green areas shows where it’s covering and it’s a good way to just get first impressions.” As forecasters keep an eye on critical flooding areas, Adams said more detailed information will be released in the case of an actual flood warning — a higher threat, meaning flooding is imminent.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Heppner teens to protest climate change

Teenagers from Morrow County are planning a “climate strike” in Heppner to raise awareness about climate change. The event, titled “Fight for our Future,” will take place at Heppner City Park on Main Street on Friday, May 24 at noon. Community members of all ages are welcome to participate, and are encouraged to bring signs “with messages pertaining to the global climate crisis.” According to a news release about the event, the goal is to educate the public about the effect climate change has on individuals’ daily lives and the broader environment. Educational materials will be provided, and organizers will be wearing T-shirts with the “Fight for our Future” slogan. Hunter Houck, 13, said he and his friends came up with the idea on Earth Day and applied for a park use permit from the city of Heppner. They put together a website and blog at bit.ly/heppnerclimate to start raising awareness and created an Instagram account at @heppnerclimatestrike.

Initial filings reveal stabilization as rate review season begins

SALEM — Oregon consumers can get a first look at requested rates for 2020 individual and small group health insurance plans. In the individual market, seven companies submitted rate change requests ranging from an average 3.2% decrease to an average 13.5% increase, for an average of 3.3%. In the small group market, nine companies submitted rate change requests ranging from an average 0.3% decrease to an average 13.1% increase, for an average of 8.7%. “It’s early in the process, but we are encouraged to see carriers providing more options to Oregonians by expanding into both rural and coastal communities, and the market stabilizing in spite of uncertainty at the federal level,” said Insurance Commissioner Andrew Stolfi. “Now it is time to start our open and thorough review process that allows Oregonians to provide input on the filings that affect them.”

Health insurance companies submitted rate requests to the Department of Consumer and Business Services, Division of Financial Regulation on May 13. Over the next two months, the division will analyze the requested rates to ensure they adequately cover Oregonians’ health care costs. The division must review and approve rates before they are charged to policyholders. Later this month, Oregonians will be able to compare their health plans and submit comments at oregonhealthrates.org. Public hearing dates will also be posted to the site.

Low returns put a damper on Chinook season

The Snake, Wallowa and Imnaha rivers will remain closed to spring Chinook fishing during 2019 due to low returns. Lookingglass Creek also remains closed for now, but will be reevaluated later in the season. According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2019 forecasts are just half of the 10-year average. Just 99,330 fish are expected to pass the Bonneville Dam this year compared to an average of 198,200. “While ODFW makes every effort to offer opportunities to fish for these prized salmon, protecting wild stocks and meeting hatchery broodstock needs are a priority,” a news release stated. Updates and closures can be found at myodfw.com/recreation-report/fishing-report/columbia-zone.

Search and rescue finds new evidence in death investigation

East Oregonian

Umatilla County Sheriff’s Search and Rescue unit provided new assistance on Saturday in an ongoing investigation into human remains found earlier this year inside the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. On April 22, a private property owner located a body on their land, which the SAR unit helped recover. At the time, the sheriff’s office reported

the body lacked identification and they were unable to determine the gender, race or age. CTUIR communications director Chuck Sams said Thursday there were no new updates on identifying the remains. According to a news release from the sheriff’s office, tribal police asked for assistance in locating more evidence for the case. On Saturday, search and rescue teams located a bone believed to be connected to the case, which remains under investigation.

A lot of barking



Danny Minkler, center, and Tyler Brainerd, right, shovel bark mulch from the back of a trailer into a wheelbarrow on Thursday in downtown Hermiston. The pair work for the Simmons Insurance Group in Hermiston and were taking part in the company’s fifth annual community service day. Volunteers worked on replacing the bark mulch in downtown flowerbeds owned by the city.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Preservation agreement moves depot closer to transfer

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

A memorandum of agreement between the Columbia Development Authority and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation puts the former Umatilla Chemical Depot one step closer to local control. The agreement lays out plans to preserve areas of cultural, historical and religious significance within the former depot. After months of negotiations it was approved by the CDA board in April and approved by the CTUIR board this week. Chuck Sams, communications director for the CTUIR, said the board of directors was pleased to move forward with the memorandum and was looking forward to working with the CDA to preserve those significant areas. The agreement lays out agreements for the CTUIR to manage the wildlife habitat portion of the prop-

erty, including access to needed water rights and roads. It states that the CTUIR and CDA will work together to preserve a site of religious importance to the tribes and preserve historically significant areas such as sections of the Oregon Trail. Greg Smith, executive director of the CDA, said having the local partners come to an agreement is a “major step” in wrapping up transfer of the land. The final barrier is getting the State Historical Preservation Office to approve the terms of the agreement, after which attorneys will draw up the final transfer papers. “After the SHPO issue there’s nothing left for (the CDA) to complete,” he said. Smith said both sides’ attorneys have been involved in the process and there hasn’t been an indication that SHPO or the attorneys will hold things up. Smith, who serves as CDA director as part of his

private economic development business but is also a state legislator, said he plans to have the Army work with SHPO to avoid any conflicts of interest. The Army finished incinerating the depot’s chemical weapons and closed the depot in 2012, with plans to transfer the depot to local control by 2015. Negotiations about issues such as water rights, along with the Army’s slow-moving bureaucracy, have delayed the transfer ever since. A 7,500-acre portion of the former depot has already been turned over to the Oregon Military Department for use as a National Guard training facility. Once the transfer papers are signed, the rest will be split between a 5,700-acre wildlife refuge managed by the CTUIR and nearly 4,000 acres of

industrial, commercial and agricultural land managed by the CDA.

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