

First herbicide barrel removed from Wallowa Lake

Barrels were first found nearly 10 months ago by recreational divers

By ERIN ROSS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

JOSEPH — The Environmental Protection Agency has begun removing potentially contaminated barrels from Wallowa Lake. Despite initial fears, the barrels seem to have been full of lake water, though the EPA is waiting for test results to confirm that the water and barrels are indeed clean.

The barrels were first found nearly 10 months ago by recreational divers, who were alarmed to see one labeled with “2,4-D or 2,4,5-T.” 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T are agricultural



EOMG photo by Ellen Morris Bishop

An “intact” barrel removed from Wallowa Lake by the EPA-contracted dive team, Global Diving and Salvage hangs above the over-sized containment barrel that encased it before divers removed it from the lake.

herbicides that, when combined in military strengths, can form Agent Orange. Agent Orange was an herbicide and defoliant that the U.S. military sprayed during the

Vietnam War, with devastating public health and environmental consequences.

Initially, divers reported over a dozen large, intact barrels beneath the surface, and

several others that were rusted away. Wallowa Lake is normally the source of drinking water for the nearby community of Joseph. On Thursday, officials started drawing water from a well instead, and will continue to do so for the duration of the cleanup. The lake is also used by recreational boaters and swimmers.

“We have now, after several days of investigation, determined that it was only one drum with that herbicide label, and that drum was filled with lake water,” EPA spokesperson Bill Dunbar said Monday.

It’s not uncommon to find barrels like these in lakes, says Dunbar said. Empty barrels are frequently used as floats for docks, while others are filled with sand or water and used as weights for anchors, and these barrels were found

near a marina. Still, that doesn’t mean that a barrel full of herbicide couldn’t have found its way to the bottom of the lake.

The EPA arrived at Wallowa Lake late last week with an ROV — an unmanned submersible vehicle — which they used to scout the area. According to Dunbar, they found 69 barrels, and suspect there could be several more. “From what I understand, there could be hundreds in the lake from many decades of use.”

So far only one barrel has been found to have a label. It said “2,4-D or 2,4,5-T,” not “2,4-D and 2,4,5-T.” Dunbar said that makes it unlikely that it contained both chemicals mixed together as Agent Orange. The Vietnam War defoliant got its name from the orange identification stripes painted on the 55-gallon

drums that it used to come in.

Those stripes were absent from the barrel. Although the barrel most likely never contained both herbicides, 2,4,5-T can be toxic, and has been banned for use in the U.S. since 1985. 2,4-D is still commonly used as an herbicide.

Divers later recovered the barrel and found it had several holes in it and was full of lake water. It’s unclear if it was sunk empty, or if the contents escaped in the decades since it was sunk.

Another barrel labeled “diesel” was also removed. The EPA plans to continue to check the barrels, and remove those with labels indicating they could have toxic contaminants. The water near the barrels has also been tested, as have sediments at the bottom of the lake. No test results have been released.

LOCAL BRIEFING

UFO group presents in Pasco

PASCO — The eastern Washington chapter of the Mutual UFO Network invites the public to attend a presentation Saturday in the Tri-Cities.

Daniel Nims is the chief investigator for Washington MUFON and will discuss intriguing sightings in eastern Washington.

Nims grew up in Eastern Oregon and earned a bachelor’s degree in engineering science at the U.S. Air Force Academy, according to the meeting announcement. He was a combat fighter pilot and flew the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II in southeast Asia and later with the Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England. He also was a test pilot for the A-10 Thunderbolt II and the F-16 Fighting Falcon, two of the nation’s most successful military aircraft.

The presentation, “UFOs in Eastern Washington?” is Saturday, 6-8 p.m., at the Sleep Inn, 9930 Bedford St., Pasco, Washington.

Pendleton DMV changes hours starting July 1

PENDLETON — The Pendleton office of the Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division announced it will change the hours of operations July 1.

The DMV office at 1732 S.W. Court Ave. has been operating 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday. But come July 1, the office will operate 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The Pendleton office is one of three DMV offices that serve Umatilla County and the only one in Oregon that opened at 8:30 in the morning. The change makes the local office consistent with other offices across Oregon, according to the announcement, and allows for more efficient staffing schedules.

The driver division also suggested visitors first check OregonDMV.com to make

sure they have everything they need. Rather than coming to an office, you can renew vehicle registrations, change your address, report the sale of a vehicle and more online at www.oregondmv.com.

Hansell wildfire legislation passes the Legislature

SALEM — Legislation introduced by Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, unanimously passed the Legislature and was signed into law by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Monday.

Senate Bill 290 makes farmers, ranchers and volunteers immune from civil liabilities resulting from wildfire fighting efforts. The legislation was inspired by the Substation Fire, which burned 80,000 acres of land in Sherman and Wasco counties last July.

“This is a good Samaritan bill for farmers and ranchers to plow fire lines, and it protects these farmers and ranchers from liability,” Hansell said. “I am proud to have witnessed the ceremonial signing along with the farmers and ranchers that it will help.”

Oregon’s fed lawmakers seek disaster aid for six counties

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and U.S. Reps. Peter DeFazio and Greg Walden sought federal disaster assistance for spring storms that hit Curry, Douglas, Grant, Linn, Umatilla and Wheeler counties during a two-week stretch in April.

The bipartisan letter from the Oregon lawmakers — Wyden, Merkley and DeFazio are Democrats, Walden is Republican — comes in support of Gov. Kate Brown’s request for a presidential major disaster declaration for those counties’ losses from heavy rain, snowmelt, flooding, landslides and mudslides between April 6 and 21.



Staff photo by Jessica Pollard

Traffic was redirected around a rear-end crash involving two vehicles on Highway 395 outside of Hermiston on Tuesday.

Crash on Highway 395 leaves one seriously injured

By JESSICA POLLARD
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A two-car collision on Highway 395 outside Hermiston city limits on Tuesday sent one person to a regional hospital with serious injuries.

The incident occurred around noon when a 1996 blue Chevy pickup driven

by Albert Russel rear-ended a 1989 Ford pickup containing Zane Riddle and Robert Riddle, according to Oregon State Police Trooper Sean Carothers.

Carothers said the Riddles were stopped in the left lane, waiting to make a left-hand turn when they were hit from behind by Russell’s vehicle.

Russell was transported

to Kadlec Regional Medical Center via Life Flight with serious injuries, Carothers said. The Riddles were transported by ambulance to Good Shepherd Health Care System, according to Umatilla Fire District 1.

Highway 395 was blocked in both directions for over an hour. Those heading north were redirected down Bensch Road.

Umatilla Landing Days

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The Rustic Truck Bar & Grill

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