

El Niño: Demise was unforeseen a month ago by NOAA

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the air,” NOAA climate scientist Michelle L’Heureux said.

Last month’s outlook, a 50-50 chance that El Niño would stick around, reflected uncertainty about the course of atmospheric conditions. In the past month, the conditions fell in line with a weakening El Niño, accord-

ing to NOAA.

“It was very difficult for us to predict what was going to happen,” L’Heureux said. “This situation now is not as opaque.”

In the mid-Pacific along the equator, the stretch that most influences seasonal forecasts, the sea-surface temperature cooled in June to 0.6 degrees Celsius above normal from 0.7 degrees

Celsius above normal. The threshold for an El Niño is 0.5 degrees Celsius above normal.

Subsurface temperatures were above average at the beginning of June and returned to near average by the end of the month.

As El Niño fades, the chances of an La Niña forming rise, though it’s still a long shot. NOAA estimated

the chance of a La Niña prevailing by December at 16%. Last month, the chance was only 6%.

La Niña, a cooling of the sea’s surface, generally means colder Northwest winters.

In the meantime, less precipitation continues to be seen in Washington. The U.S. Drought Monitor reported Thursday that 55% of the state is in severe or moderate

drought, nearly unchanged from the week before.

Assistant State Climatologist Karin Bumbaco said more of Central Washington is drying out, but still not in a drought.

Recent rain in Western Washington stopped conditions from worsening, but did not pull the region out of drought.

“If you look at the long-

term picture, the drought is not over,” she said.

Gov. Jay Inslee declared a drought emergency in about half the state in May. No area has been added to the declaration since then.

NOAA will release a new three-month outlook July 18. When neutral sea temperatures prevail, forecasters often base their predictions on recent climate trends.

School: Case faces motion to dismiss

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they are part of a parent support group but that getting that key socialization in is still difficult.

“A child with autism already feels isolated and different,” Schell said.

Schell and Disability Rights Oregon filed an Oregon Department of Education administrative complaint against the district in March, but it wasn’t very successful.

Schell said she knows of several other families in the Pendleton area with similar struggles.

“I have the utmost confidence in our staff and administrative team,” said Pendleton School District Superintendent Chris Fritsch. “I believe we’re following the state and federal laws.”

Julie Smith, Director of Special Programs at Pendleton School District, stated that PSD follows the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act and Oregon SB 263 regarding abbreviated school days.

SB 263, passed in 2017, limits school districts from imposing shortened school days on students who could manage full school days with the proper support.

Fritsch said the dis-

trict could not comment on the class action lawsuit, because it is pending litigation.

Across the state

The lawsuit, which Schell was not a part of, emphasizes that shortened school days are a problem in smaller school districts. In these areas, districts might be strapped to find people with the necessary behavioral expertise to support some children through full school days.

“It particularly impacts small and rural school districts, many of which are located in Northeastern Oregon,” said Joel Greenberg of DRO. “We’ve had complaints from that part of the state.”

But the class action lawsuit stretches beyond this corner of Oregon.

“The reason we’re filing a class action suit is because we believe there are at least hundreds of students across the state who are affected by shortened school days,” said Greenberg. “[But] the state doesn’t collect any data.”

Under SB 263, districts do record students with shortened school days, but don’t have to report the information to the state.

The lawsuit lists four boys as plaintiffs, by ini-

tials rather than full names, who attend or have attended public schools in Oregon and qualify for special education through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. They represent the much larger class, according to the complaint.

FACT Oregon, an organization that advocates for families who experience disability, also operates a help line for Oregon parents. The organization reported that they received 280 calls about shortened school days between September 2016 and December 2018.

In the motion to dismiss, the state, comprised of the ODE, ODE Director Colt Gill and Gov. Kate Brown — who also serves as the Superintendent for Public Instruction in Oregon — argues it is not their responsibility to prevent schools from violating the public statutes which prevent inappropriate use of shortened school days, and that the plaintiffs’ arguments are not supported by existing legal precedent.

The motion also argues that because the four plaintiffs are not currently receiving unlawful shortened school days, the complaint lacks standing.

At the time the case was filed, one child was

actively receiving shortened school days.

Another child, 7 years old, hadn’t experienced a full school day till this past school year. His mother frequently received calls from the school to pick him up early from his two-hour school day.

Currently, the ODE does have a complaint process where parents who feel their children are being placed in unlawful abbreviated school day programs can report, which, according to the motion to dismiss, has “achieved a resolution” for three of the plaintiffs and over 30 students in general.

Communications Director for General Attorney Ellen Rosenblum, Kristina Edmunson, said the Oregon Department of Justice typically does not comment on pending litigation. During the oral argument Wednesday, Judge Aiken recommended the state consider some sort of mediated settlement, to spare time and costs for litigation. “We were really pleased that the court was taking seriously the plight of the kids of Oregon who aren’t getting full school days,” Galanter said. “We’re certainly very optimistic.”

Hedman: Baker man thankful no one injured in car theft

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million bail at the Baker County Jail on a Walla Walla warrant charging him with the first-degree murder of Kyle Jordan Martz, 35, of Walla Walla.

The Walla Walla Police Department believes the meeting that led to Martz’s death was a random encounter between the two men who did not know each other.

Borders said his wife, Robbie, who turns 60 next week, had gone to Boise that day. There were no lights on in the house and no indication that anyone was home when Hedman arrived.

“I heard a voice — that’s what woke me up,” Borders said.

But no one was there.

Border’s living room chair sits just three steps above his “man cave,” which is separated from the front room by a sliding door. The sliding door is usually always open. But on Monday night, for some reason, it was closed, Borders said.

“I was grateful he didn’t come all the way in,” he said of the intruder.

It’s in retrospect that Borders wonders just who it was who woke him up.

“I feel that God was watching over me big time and watching over Robbie,” he said. “Maybe it was God waking me up and saying: ‘Bob, you’re in big trouble!’”

As he reported the crime, he watched Hedman drive away, and then stop on Old Trail Road just about 100 yards from Taggart Lane.

Hedman appeared to be moving things from the Toyota pickup he’d been driving to Borders’ Ford pickup.

According to an affidavit in support of a probable cause arrest document filed in Baker County Circuit Court, deputies Gabe Maldonado and Craig Rilee confronted Hedman, who refused to follow their commands to come over to talk to them.

The report says Hedman ignored their instructions at least four times and ultimately walked away from them.

He next went to the Toyota pickup, removed a suitcase and walked north down the eastbound freeway lane away from the officers, who were separated from him by a fence and high grass.

Rilee secured the pickup, and then drove to the opposite side of the freeway looking for Hedman. In the meantime, Maldonado traveled eastbound on the freeway looking for the suspect, the report stated.

Hedman then returned to the Toyota pickup while officers searched for him along West Airport Lane.

Meanwhile, Borders said Hedman returned to his Taggart Lane property where he earlier had seen Borders’ 2000 Jeep Wrangler.

During his first visit, Hedman had removed items from the Jeep, such as tools, a compound bow and arrows, and put them inside the pickup truck before driving off in it, Borders said.

This time, when Hedman returned to his property, Borders was not just awakening from an evening nap and defenseless. He said he was armed, the doors were locked, and all the lights in the house were on.

Borders was struck by

how “brazen” Hedman was to proceed just like before onto his property and take another vehicle.

“He knew what he had done, and he was in a flight mode and he was going to do anything he could to get away,” Borders said.

As Hedman drove away in the Jeep, he traveled west on Old Trail Road and headed toward Chandler Lane, Borders said.

The court documents stated that Rilee watched as Borders sped down Taggart Lane in the Jeep. He and Oregon State Police troopers Andrew McClay and Tim Schuette followed the vehicle.

Hedman drove onto the eastbound freeway lanes and Maldonado drove across the median to intercept him, the report stated.

Hedman refused to stop as Maldonado followed him with his patrol car emergency lights and siren activated.

Hedman eventually drove through a barbed wire fence in the barrow pit, damaging about 100 feet of fence, and returned to Old Trail Road.

Hedman then drove back to the freeway at the Chandler Lane crossing, about 5 miles north of Baker City, and was blocked by the OSP troopers’ patrol cars as he attempted to turn westbound onto the eastbound lanes of travel. Borders said his recently restored Jeep, valued at about \$10,000, was totaled in the crash. The police cars received minor damage.

Hedman was taken into custody without further incident. He also is being held at the jail on Baker County charges of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, two counts; second-degree criminal mischief, two counts; attempting to elude police, reckless driving and failure to perform the duties of a driver involved in an accident.

Borders said police did not provide him with any details about Hedman’s other charges during the investigation of his stolen vehicles. He and his wife learned that Hedman was a murder suspect the next morning after reading about the crime on the internet.

“It scared the living daylights out of us when we found out about it,” he said.

They realize many things could have gone terribly wrong that night.

His wife was on Cedar Street, just a few miles from home, when her husband called police. He alerted her of the trouble and she turned around and waited in her car in the Safeway parking lot until the incident was over, Borders said.

“I’m just so thankful she wasn’t 30 minutes earlier and was in the driveway when he was there,” he said.

And although his prized Jeep was totaled and his pickup truck, which has sentimental value to him, was damaged, Borders said he is glad Hedman ran out of gas near his home instead of a mile or two in either direction where the outcome might have been different.

“We’re just thankful the police officers responded as quickly as they did and that nobody got hurt — and that we got him off the street before he was able to kill somebody else,” Borders said.

Whisky Fest: Post Malone draws thousands

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“It’s way too hot out here,” Adams said, laughing.

The couple had planned the trip to Whisky Fest prior to knowing the lineup and hadn’t expected Post Malone to be the headliner.

“I was honestly hoping it was going to be more country music,” Adams said.

Either way, the couple was pleased to have the weekend to camp and relax away from their two kids.

Another group of campers is using Whisky Fest as a reunion of longtime friends. Monaca and Blake Markee live in Portland but grew up in Ontario along with Kara Caughlin, who now lives in Boise, Idaho. While Blake said he remembered traveling to Pendleton for high school sporting events, now the city is the midway meeting point for the trio.

As for their first impressions of the city, the torrid sun and 90-plus degree weather stole the show.

“It’s hot as hell,” Caughlin said, laughing.

The group came prepared, though. Blake Markee and Caughlin said they’ve been getting ready for the weekend for at least two months and it seemed to pay off. Their spot was filled with three separate tents connected by a covering and netting that offered as much relief from the sun as possible while the group lounged with drinks in hand.

Unlike Adams and Dersaw, the trio bought their festival tickets as soon as they found out Post Malone would be performing.

In addition to the organizers accommodating the campers, the Pendleton Police Department is assisting with safety and security for the weekend.

Pendleton Chief of Police Stuart Roberts said most criminal activity during the weekend is minor theft and vandalism. He added that the campsites are particularly vulnerable if left unattended during the kickoff party or concert.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Some Whisky Music Fest campers relax on Friday afternoon after setting up their tents.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Two motorcyclists work on setting up camp Friday afternoon in the Whisky Music Fest camping area nearest the Round-Up Arena.

tion of alcohol and aggressive behavior, according to Roberts. He added that most problems are minor in nature.

“We manage what we can manage,” he said.

Once the event ends is when the real challenge begins.

Headliner Post Malone’s set is slated to begin at 9:30 p.m., but afterward the crowd of 17,000-plus people will be looking to leave the Round-Up Grounds as quickly as possible. While Pendleton PD will be directing traffic around the stadium, delays should be expected.

“The city just doesn’t have the infrastructure to

support that much traffic all at once,” Roberts said.

Whisky Fest’s Facebook update from Tuesday urged people to carpool and “be mindful of the traffic situation.”

The organizers also wrote on Facebook that Whisky Fest has a “Safe Rides Home Program,” which will offer free transportation to and from the event. Nine shuttles courtesy of St. Anthony Hospital will be running from 2:30-7:30 p.m. and then from 10 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. for pickups and dropoffs between the stadium and hotels in the area. The hospital will also be covering all taxi expenses after the event.