

# Ventenata, a noxious weed, spreads across the West

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

JOHN DAY — Looking out at an expansive meadow in Oregon's Blue Mountains, local cattleman Loren Stout sees not an idyllic landscape but an "environmental disaster."

The problem is as subtle as it is pervasive: The wispy yellow grass drying in the sun isn't forage that's readily consumed by livestock and wildlife.

It's ventenata, an invasive species that originated on the other side of the globe but now crowds out native plant life on large swaths of government-owned land in the Blue Mountains.

The weed contains enough silica — a compound traditionally used for glass production — that it's largely considered inedible for herbivores.

"There is nothing utilizing this stuff," said Stout. "It just looks lush in spring, but they won't touch it."

Aside from its lack of forage value, experts are finding that ventenata has another pernicious trait. Specifically, the invasive grass seems to benefit from the same wildfires that it helps fuel.

That dynamic has

become especially apparent after fires ignited by lightning strikes in 2014 and 2015 that devastated tens of thousands of acres surrounding John Day.

"The invasion rate was reaching a level that it seemed to be affecting fire spread," said Becky Kerns, a research ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service. "It doesn't need fire to trigger an invasion, but fire may exacerbate and increase the population."

Kerns is taking part in an interagency research project that's studying ventenata's influence on novel fire behavior, as well as mapping the extent of the weed's spread and examining the role of climate change in that invasion.

The study began in 2016 in response to reports that ventenata was creating fuel connectivity across open scrubland, allowing flames to traverse sparsely vegetated areas that normally serve as fire breaks.

It's expected that research papers from the study will first be published in 2020 though the overall project may last another year.

Ventenata appears to recolonize burned acres more quickly than native species, such as sagebrush, which provide important



Capital Press Photo/Mateusz Perkowski

**Cattleman Loren Stout examines ventenata, an invasive weed, growing in Oregon's Blue Mountains near John Day. The species appears to benefit from wildfire, helping it spread.**

wildlife habitat, said Claire Tortorelli, an Oregon State University graduate student participating in the study.

"We're not really seeing the recovery of those shrubs or woody perennials," Tortorelli said.

Preliminary study results indicate perennial grasses are holding their own better than annual forage types,

which haven't been returning as readily after fires, she said.

Even though perennial grasses may have survived a fire, ventenata may impede their reseeding of the ground, she said.

"The concern is you'll lose that perennial component in the long term," said Kerns. "Invasive grasses tend to be pretty aggressive."

An advantage the weed holds over many other plant species is its adaptability to land that normally has only scattered vegetation, said Tortorelli.

Ventenata is more abundant than these native plants and thus it contributes to the overall intensity of fires, she said.

"They're not these super-productive ecosystems," Tortorelli said. "When ventenata has invaded, there's just so much more ventenata than anything else in that system."

The invasive species is considered an "ecological driver" that's capable of altering "ecosystems at landscape levels," said Jessi Brunson, a botanist with the Malheur National Forest's supervisor's office.

"It can push the ecosystem over the edge, so to speak, into an environmental state from which it's difficult to recover," she said.

Because it's now so widespread, however, ventenata falls into the "tolerate" category of weeds under the Forest Service's classification system — the lowest priority for treatment, Brunson said. Other categories for weeds include "eradicate," "control" and "contain."

"The amount of herbicide and cost to control the spe-

cies exceeds what we're able to do," both from the budget perspective and due to environmental study requirements, she said.

The interagency research currently being conducted is expected to help focus resources on areas where ventenata treatment will still be most effective, Brunson said.

Stout, the cattleman, blames the spread of ventenata on grazing restrictions that opened the region to medusa head rye — another invasive grass — and eventually led the way to ventenata.

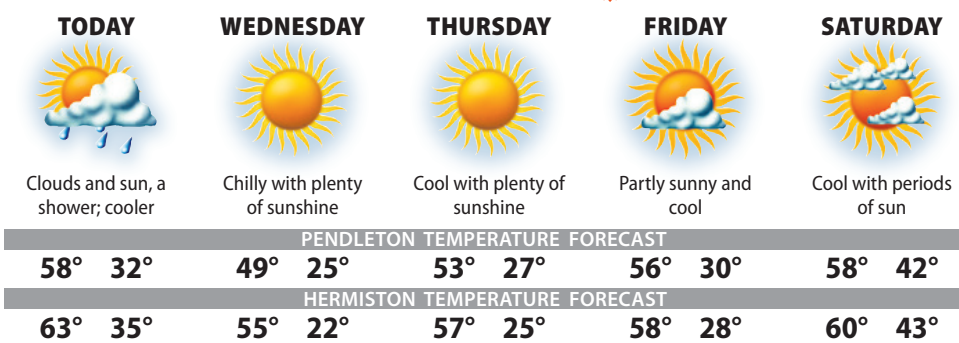
"You have to take the competition away from these (desirable) annual grasses, and they do exactly the opposite," Stout said, referring to federal and state land managers.

Kerns, the Forest Service research ecologist, said the interagency study has not established a link between grazing and ventenata prevalence.

It's possible the weed's behavior is varied across landscape types, such as prairies, forests and scablands, said Tortorelli, the OSU graduate student.

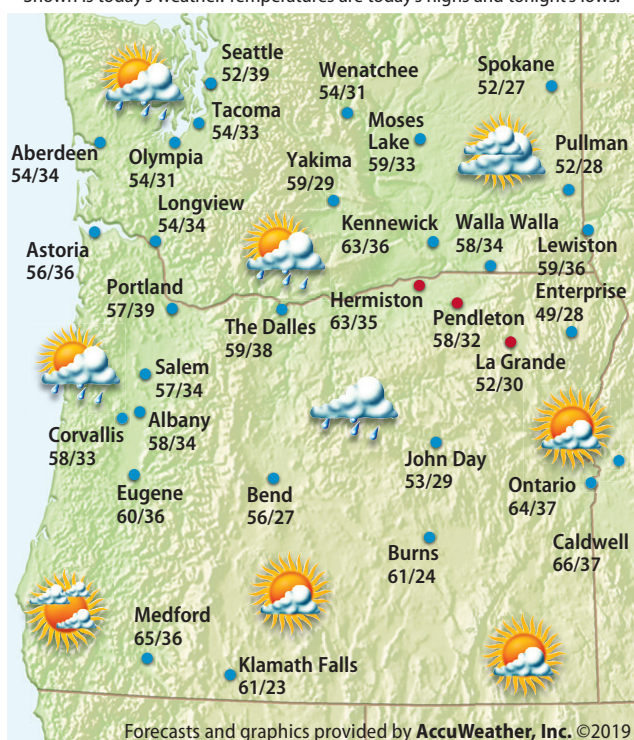
"In each of those community types, it's going to have different impacts in relation to grazing," she said.

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



## ALMANAC

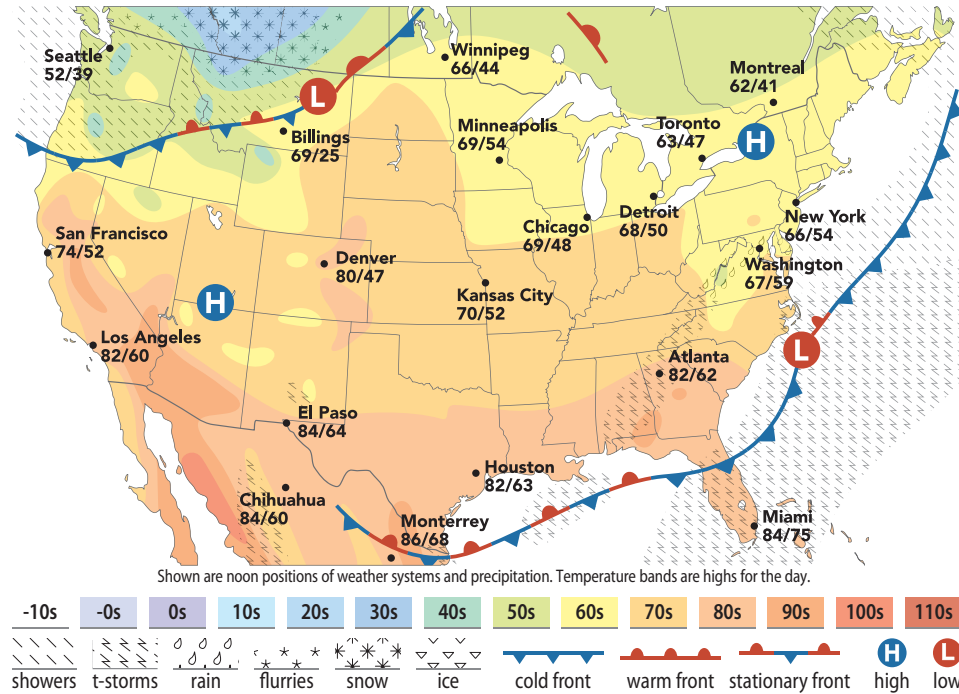
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	76°	38°
Normals	68°	43°
Records	87° (1980)	23° (1898)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	Trace	
Normal month to date	0.22"	
Year to date	10.85"	
Last year to date	7.11"	
Normal year to date	9.16"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	79°	35°
Normals	69°	41°
Records	88° (2014)	25° (2012)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.01"	
Normal month to date	0.12"	
Year to date	4.77"	
Last year to date	5.56"	
Normal year to date	6.68"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Wed.
Boardman	W 10-20	NNE 6-12
Pendleton	WSW 10-20	NNW 6-12
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:02 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	6:23 p.m.	
Moonrise today	4:41 p.m.	
Moonset today	1:36 a.m.	
	Full	Last
	New	First
	Oct 13	Oct 21
	Oct 27	Nov 4

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 99° in Thermal, Calif. Low 8° in Antero Reservoir, Colo.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Missing man's body found

By JAYSON JACOBY  
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — Searchers found the body of Andrew Dean Dennis of Haines late Sunday morning in a nearly sheer rock chute in the Wallowa Mountains, eight days after the 60-year-old Haines man failed to return from a planned one-day deer-hunting trip.

It appears that Dennis died from a fall in the steep terrain near East Eagle Creek, his niece, Candy Sturm, said Sunday.

Sturm said her uncle's body was found near where searchers trapped Dennis' dog, Barney, on Saturday evening. The site is near where Curtis Creek crosses the East Eagle trail, about 2 miles from the trailhead where Dennis parked his vehicle on Sept. 28.

Dennis' body was initially spotted by a drone, according to a post Sturm made on her Facebook page. Searchers found Dennis

about 11:30 a.m. Sunday, according to a press release from the Baker County Sheriff's Office.

"His death appears to be a tragic accident," according to the press release. "No foul play is suspected."

Ashley McClay, the public information officer for the sheriff's office, said a drone operated by the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office search and rescue team located Dennis' body.

McClay said searchers later found his body in what they described as a "waterfall, crevice area" on a steep slope above the East Eagle trail. Sheriff Travis Ash described the location as a chute.

McClay said it appears that Dennis fell on Sept. 28, the day he arrived in the area to hunt for deer.

"We believe that he died the day he went hunting," McClay said.

Sturm said Barney was reunited with Dennis' wife, Patty, and that the dog,

although he has lost some weight, is doing well.

Sturm said she "cannot express enough" to thank all the people who participated in the search for her uncle over the past week.

On her Facebook page Sturm, who traveled from her home at Ridgefield, Washington, to participate in the search, posted: "I watched as men and women came down that mountain after searching from sun up to sun down, some strangers, a lot of friends and family and Uncle Andy's brothers along with SAR members. Sitting by the fire to warm up with tears in their eye they wouldn't give up. Thank you to each and everyone of you that searched."

The search effort included members from Baker, Union, Umatilla, Wallowa and Harney counties, as well as the Oregon State Police and Baker Aircraft and the Oregon National Guard, the latter two supplying helicopters.

## BRIEFLY

### Proud Boys member involved in Portland fights arrested

PORTLAND — A right-wing extremist, who rose to prominence for fighting in Portland during political protests and fled the Pacific Northwest after being indicted on felony assault charges, has been arrested.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported the U.S. Marshals Service detained 23-year-old Tusitala "Tiny" Toese at the Portland International Airport around 10:30 p.m. Friday.

That's according to Brent Weisberg, a spokesman for the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office.

Toese was later booked into the Multnomah County jail on a pair of outstanding warrants.

Toese, who is 6-foot-4 and 265 pounds, gained notoriety as a member of the right-wing groups Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys who fought left-wing activists and others during demonstrations in Portland.

He was scheduled to appear Monday morning in Multnomah County Circuit Court, Weisberg said.

### Oregon must redo guidelines for river temperature

SALEM — A U.S. district court says Oregon must develop new plans to keep the

state's rivers from getting too warm for fish.

A ruling Friday set a series of deadlines that cover more than a dozen rivers, including the Willamette, Umpqua, Rogue, John Day, Columbia and Snake.

Federal law requires Oregon have plans in place to ensure that the state's rivers don't get too warm. These plans are referred to as TMDLs, or total maximum daily loads, under the federal Clean Water Act. Oregon's current TMDLs for temperature are permissive enough to kill salmon and steelhead, which rely on cold water to survive.

This section of the Rogue River was one of the first in America to be protected by the Wild and Scenic Act of 1968.

Nina Bell is executive director of Northwest Environmental Advocates, a plaintiff in the case. She said this ruling is a victory, but the real test comes after the plans are in place.

"It still leaves it in the lap of Oregon agencies and elected officials as to whether they're going to use these plans to address Oregon's largest sources of water temperature in our streams and rivers and that is the logging, farming and taking water out of the streams," she said.

Depending on the location, the state will have between four and eight years to get the work done.

— Associated Press

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