

Buffalo Flats project aims to reduce ice jams

By **DICK MASON**
EO Media Group

UNION — The ominous sight of ice jams on Catherine Creek and Little Creek just east of Union may someday be less frequent.

Mike Knutson, a hydraulic engineer for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, said formation of ice jams on the two creeks will be reduced if the proposed Buffalo Flats Restoration Project becomes a reality.

Knutson said the project would widen portions of both Catherine and Little creeks to help reduce ice jams. The work along Catherine Creek would remove a section of Medical Springs Highway and replace it with a reconfigured roadway. Such a step would allow a narrow portion of Catherine Creek’s channel to expand. He noted the creek would push large ice blocks into this floodplain, reducing pressure in the creek.

“They would melt in the floodplain,” said Knutson, the engineer for the proposed Buffalo Flats project.

This would reduce the chance of winter ice jams, such as a 120-yard jam that formed on Catherine Creek in January 2014 east of Union. The jam posed a serious threat to Union, but



Ice jams along Highway 203, such as this one in 2014 on Catherine Creek outside of Union, present the danger of flooding. A new project to widen Catherine Creek and adjoining Little Creek would help to eliminate the jams.

EO Media Group file photo

fortunately did not cause any major flooding.

Knutson said when water backs up behind an ice jam, it causes pressure, and when the water breaks through all at once, it can cause flooding.

The Union Soil and Water Conservation District would lead the project in collaboration with Buffalo Peak Land and Livestock, whose owners want to help

restore Chinook salmon, steelhead and bull trout habitat while continuing to have a viable ranching operation. Andrea Malmberg, land manager of Buffalo Peak, said at the meeting if agriculture is practiced correctly it can improve the habitat of many species, including those which are endangered. Chinook salmon, steelhead and bull trout are listed as threatened

under the federal endangered species act.

The Buffalo Flats project would restore segments of Catherine and Little creeks so they would meander as they did before their channels were straightened many decades ago for agricultural reasons. It would involve a 1.5-mile portion of Catherine Creek and 1.4-mile segment of Little Creek. The stream segments would

encompass a 240-acre area belonging to Buffalo Peak.

Knutson said widening the creeks would not expand the floodplain onto property outside the Buffalo Peak land, noting the plan calls for measures to ensure that does not occur, such as installing terraces and possibly elevating the reconfigured stretch of Medical Springs Highway.

James Webster, conservation district manager, said if large pieces of ice were swept from the floodplains to stream channels it would not cause problems due to the new meander. Webster explained if ice were pushed into a stream channel, momentum from the new curvature of the creek soon would push it back to the floodplain.

Allen Childs, a biologist with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, said the tribes completed a similar restoration project two years ago in a stretch of Catherine Creek about 4 miles east of Union. He said the Southern Cross project is having a positive effect on young salmon and steelhead. Childs also said in 2019 this stretch of Catherine Creek had the highest density of juvenile salmon and steelhead of any he sampled in

the stream.

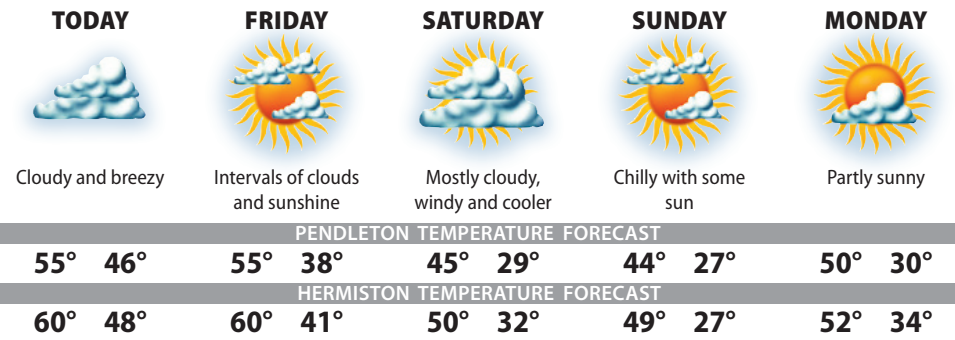
Webster said the Buffalo Flats project would protect young steelhead and salmon, providing pools with hiding cover for juvenile fish to stay when there are high flows. This would prevent fast water from pushing the fish downstream too quickly. Webster said when young fish move out of their rearing habitat on Catherine Creek too soon, they are more vulnerable to predators because of their small size.

Developing a plan for the Buffalo Flats project could take the conservation district another two years. After Buffalo Peak Land and Livestock gives approval for the plan, the district would seek funding for it from the Bonneville Power Administration and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board with the help of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed.

Jesse Steele of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed said at the meeting the Buffalo Flats project would likely cost between \$4 million and \$6 million.

Should a plan for the Buffalo Flats Restoration Project obtain that funding, Webster said it would take between two and three years to complete.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



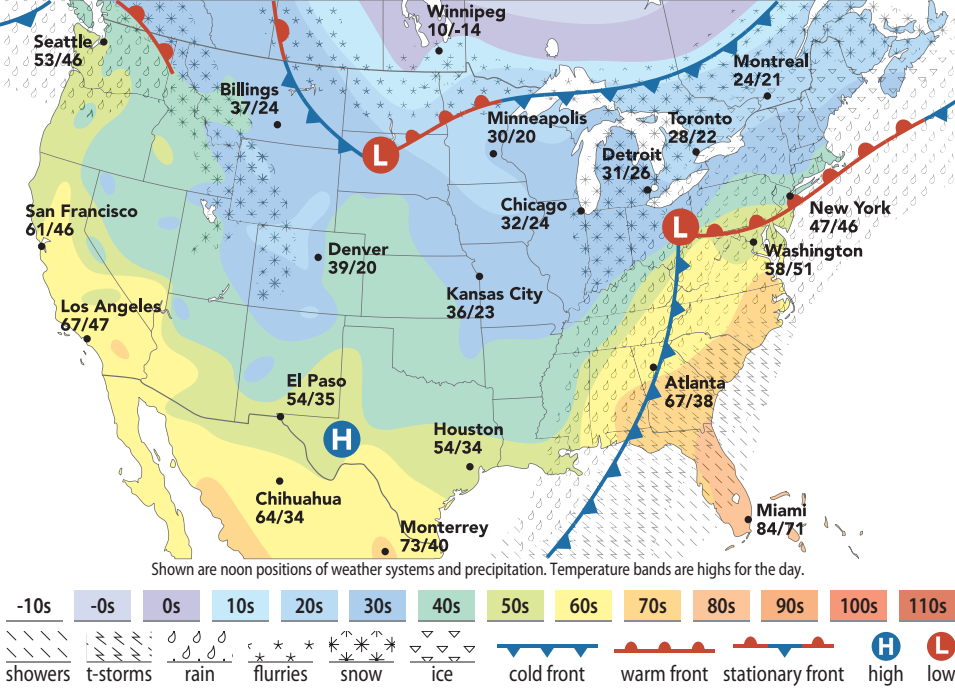
ALMANAC		
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	46°	33°
Normals	44°	28°
Records	65° (2015)	-12° (1989)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.95"	
Month to date	1.26"	
Normal month to date	0.23"	
Year to date	3.28"	
Last year to date	2.86"	
Normal year to date	1.61"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	53°	35°
Normals	45°	29°
Records	61° (1967)	-10° (1989)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.03"	
Month to date	0.03"	
Normal month to date	0.17"	
Year to date	0.27"	
Last year to date	2.21"	
Normal year to date	1.45"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Fri.
Boardman	WSW 12-25	WSW 8-16
Pendleton	WSW 10-20	WSW 8-16
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:11 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	5:08 p.m.	
Moonrise today	2:14 p.m.	
Moonset today	5:20 a.m.	

NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 86° in Immokalee, Fla. Low -35° in Daniel, Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Judge rejects state Sen. Brian Boquist’s public records lawsuit

By **JAKE THOMAS**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Senate President Peter Courtney and legislative employees didn’t improperly withhold public records requested by state Sen. Brian Boquist, a Marion County Circuit Court judge has determined.

The judge’s decision is the latest in an ongoing feud between the Dallas Republican and one of the state’s most powerful lawmakers that started during last year’s combative legislative session.

In June 2019, the Senate Conduct Committee received a complaint over remarks Boquist made during the session that were considered threatening. As Republicans threatened to walk out of the Oregon Capitol to prevent a vote on a greenhouse gas-reduction bill, Gov. Kate Brown said she would send state troopers to bring way-

ward legislators back.

Boquist said during a TV interview that Brown should “send bachelors and come heavily armed.” He also made remarks on the Senate floor directed at Courtney, saying “If you send the state police to get me, Hell’s coming to visit you personally.”

His remarks drew formal complaints to the committee. In turn, Boquist complained that he had been denied due process. He also requested documents from the Office of Legislative Administration about the complaints against him and a related legislative probe.

In July 2019, Boquist, representing himself, sued Courtney in Marion County Circuit Court alleging that documents were withheld by legislative staff, in violation of the state’s public records law.

On Feb. 3, Marion County Circuit Court Judge Daniel Wren issued a legal opin-

ion disagreeing with Boquist after holding hearings earlier. In the opinion, which will later be formalized in a judgement, Wren wrote that legislative employees were justified in redacting information identifying the person who filed a complaint against Boquist.

Wren wrote that disclosing the person’s name would “indeed have a chilling effect on other complainants coming forward to report inappropriate behavior or workplace conduct.” He said other documents were confidential because of attorney-client privilege.

Courtney’s office declined to comment and Boquist wasn’t immediately available for comment.

Last month, a federal judge dismissed a related lawsuit by Boquist that alleged his civil rights had been violated by legislative leaders. He has appealed the ruling.

BRIEFLY

College Place man found dead last week killed by gunshot

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The College Place man found dead last week at the mouth of the Walla Walla River was killed by gunshot, officials said in a release Tuesday.

Arcane J. “AJ” Wilkinson, 20, was reported missing “under suspicious circumstances” to College Place police in mid-December 2019.

He was identified as the dead man on Jan. 29 by the Walla Walla County Sheriff’s Office. After Tuesday’s autopsy, a sheriff’s office release announced they were investigating the case as a homicide.

“This is the only information we are able to release at this time,” the release stated.

Wilkinson apparently had ties in Washington, Oregon and Louisiana, according to his family.

A kayaker told authorities he saw a body at 8:11 a.m. on Jan. 29 near an inlet where the Walla Walla River meets the Columbia River and led authorities to the spot at about 8:40 a.m., Walla Walla County Under-sheriff Joe Klundt said.



Wilkinson

Sheriff’s office deputies, Columbia Basin Dive Rescue and Walla Walla County Fire District 5 crews pulled the body from the river.

Wilkinson hadn’t communicated with family and friends for several weeks. Family members also said he had left behind his possessions. College Place police released information on his disappearance on Jan. 8.

Those with information can call the sheriff’s office at 509-524-5400.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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