

DEQ study tracks quality of Walla Walla Basin groundwater

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

MILTON-FREEWATER — The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is calling for long-term monitoring of nitrates, bacteria and pesticides in the Walla Walla Basin to protect groundwater from future contamination.

DEQ sampled 100 residential and agricultural wells around Milton-Freewater in Northeast Oregon as part of a groundwater quality study in 2016. Results were published on Dec. 22, identifying 41 chemicals in the water.



Haxton-Evans



Oregon Department of Environmental Quality/Contributed Photo

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality sampled 100 residential and agricultural wells around Milton-Freewater in Northeast Oregon as part of a groundwater quality study in 2016. The results were published on Dec. 22, 2020, identifying 41 chemicals in the water.

Not all chemicals are harmful. Some, such as low levels of minerals, exist naturally in groundwater.

Levels of contaminants were mostly within the Environmental Protection Agency's standards for clean drinking water, though according to the study, nitrates, lead and bacteria did exceed health standards in some wells.

"We plan to present this data to folks locally, so they can be more informed about the risks to themselves and anybody who uses their

groundwater wells," said Paige Haxton-Evans, state-wide groundwater quality monitoring coordinator for DEQ. "We also recommend some long-term monitoring of these contaminants."

Oregon lawmakers approved the Statewide Groundwater Quality Monitoring Program in 2015 to gauge groundwater contaminants in vulnerable basins.

"Many people rely on groundwater for domestic, industrial and agricul-

tural reasons," Haxton-Evans said. "We want to get a baseline understanding of the quality of Oregon's aquifers, and hopefully going forward get trending data to understand how those aquifers may change over time."

The Walla Walla Basin, which straddles the Oregon-Washington state line, is a densely agricultural area known for its high-value fruit orchards and vineyards. For its study, DEQ sampled wells exclusively on the Oregon

side of the basin, from Milton-Freewater west to Umapine, south to Athena and east into the Blue Mountains.

Volunteers allowed DEQ to sample their wells twice in 2016 — once in late winter, and again in the fall to detect any seasonal differences.

The study revealed widespread presence of nitrates, though not at high enough levels to trigger immediate health concerns. Nitrates are found in agricultural fer-

tilizers and can be harmful if consumed, especially by infants.

Of the 100 wells sampled, only one had nitrate levels slightly above the safe drinking water threshold of 10 milligrams per liter. Twenty percent of wells, however, did have "elevated levels" of nitrates above 3 milligrams per liter, hence the need for continued monitoring, Haxton-Evans said.

"This shows it is common to have nitrates leaching in through soils," she said.

Some 37% of wells had some level of coliform bacteria, including three wells with E. coli. Haxton-Evans said the findings reinforce public health recommendations that well owners test for bacteria annually.

DEQ also found 20 pesticide-related chemicals in wells, representing 12 parent pesticides. The most common was desethylatrazine, a breakdown product of atrazine, which is used primarily on crops and turf grass.

None of the pesticides exceeded EPA health standards.

Lead was found in trace amounts in 69 wells, three of which exceeded the EPA's safe drinking water level of 0.015 milligrams per liter. Haxton-Evans said the Oregon Health Authority has already contacted those well

owners. The study did not detect any amount of arsenic in groundwater.

For the first time under the Statewide Groundwater Monitoring Program, DEQ did test for perchlorate in the Walla Walla Basin. Perchlorate is a product found naturally in arid environments, as well as in some nitrate fertilizers.

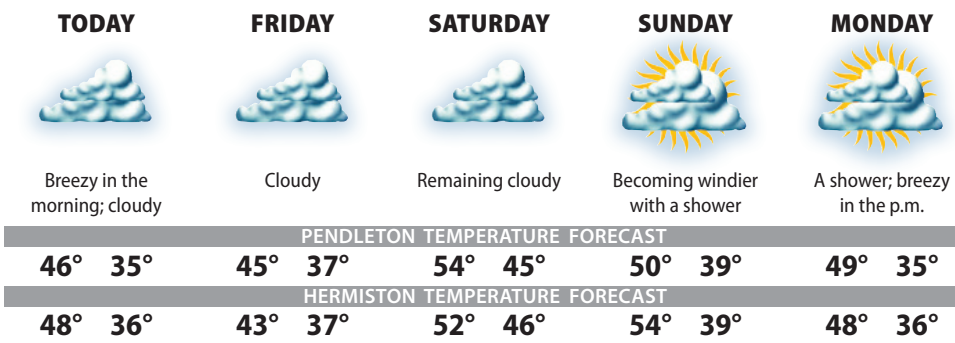
Seven wells did contain perchlorate, at a maximum concentration of 1.64 micrograms per liter. That is below the safe drinking water threshold of 7 micrograms per liter for children, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Haxton-Evans said she is not certain how the data may impact farms and ranches, though it is useful for them to know which chemicals are in the groundwater, and understand levels may change over time.

"We don't really investigate sources of contamination," she said. "That's outside the scope of this study and report."

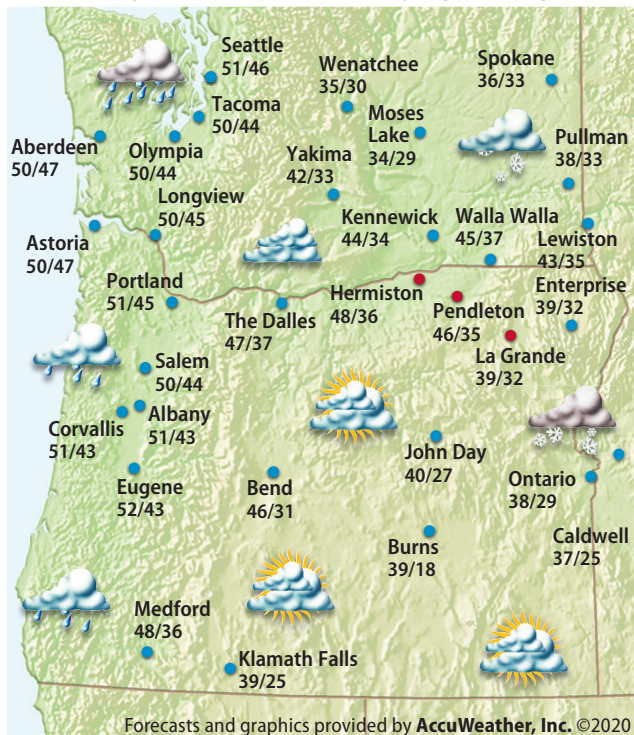
DEQ has published similar reports on groundwater quality in the North Coast and Mid-Rogue Basin watersheds. Haxton-Evans said a report on Harney County groundwater in Southeast Oregon should be completed in early 2021.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



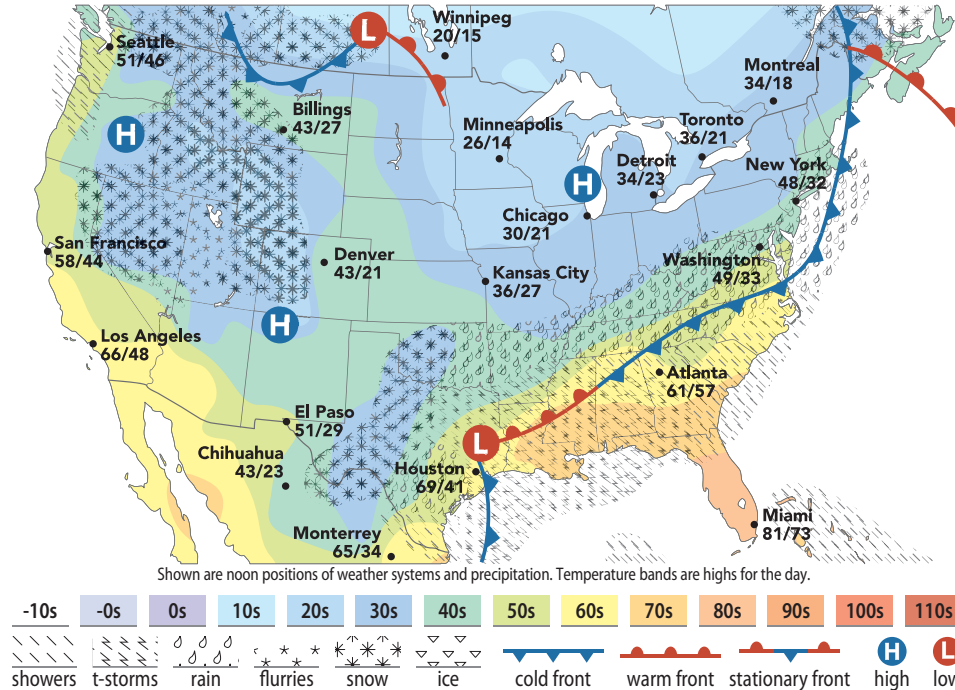
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	45°	30°	
Normals	39°	26°	
Records	63° (1920)	-12° (1968)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.21"		
Month to date	1.01"		
Normal month to date	1.55"		
Year to date	13.20"		
Last year to date	12.33"		
Normal year to date	13.06"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	37°	32°	
Normals	39°	27°	
Records	66° (1949)	-13° (1990)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.11"		
Month to date	0.63"		
Normal month to date	1.41"		
Year to date	4.57"		
Last year to date	5.08"		
Normal year to date	9.91"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	SW 7-14		
Fri.	NNE 4-8		
Pendleton	WSW 8-16		
Fri.	SSE 6-12		
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	7:36 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	4:21 p.m.		
Moonrise today	5:58 p.m.		
Moonset today	9:06 a.m.		
Last New First Full			
Jan 6	Jan 12	Jan 20	Jan 28

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 86° in Kingsville, Texas Low -41° in Yellowstone N.P., Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



First Day Hikes will continue at state parks on New Year's Day

By **JAMIE HALE**
The Oregonian

SALEM — There's no better place to say "good riddance" to 2020 than the natural beauty of one of Oregon's state parks.

Whether you're throwing the old year into the ocean or shouting joyfully to the mountains, the annual First Day Hikes event on New Year's Day offers a slice of a Northwest nature in which you can celebrate.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department announced earlier this month that the traditional event will continue on the first day of 2021, though the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has forced a few changes.

Most notable is the absence of any ranger- or volunteer-led hikes, leaving visitors to explore parks on their own. Some parks will instead display posters showing recommended hikes and ranger favorites, the parks department said.

Park officials also are asking that visitors continue to follow public health guidelines, including keep-



Terry Richard/The Oregonian

Oregon's White River Falls State Park near Tygh Valley and Maupin can be a white world of ice if you catch it at the right temperature in January. The falls is one of the most powerful in Oregon, coming as it does off the White River Glacier on Mount Hood.

ing distance from people not in your household and wearing face masks when distance isn't possible. People are encouraged to visit parks close to their homes, and to avoid parks that are overcrowded.

As always, parking will be free at all Oregon state parks on Jan. 1, 2021. While most state park sites don't usually charge parking fees, 25 of the most popular places do, including Sil-

ver Falls, Fort Stevens and Smith Rock state parks. The parks department sells day passes as well as annual park passes for the rest of the year. Parking will also be free at Washington state parks on New Year's Day.

First Day Hikes will come on the heels of Winter Whale Watch Week, another winter tradition at Oregon state parks that will go on without rangers or volunteers this season.

IN BRIEF

Two found dead in Elgin, Major Crime Team investigating

ELGIN — Two people were found dead in Elgin, according to a press release from the Union County Sheriff's office.

According to the release, the Union County Dispatch Center received a 911 call from an unidentified male requesting law enforcement assistance at in the early morning hours of Tuesday, Dec. 29. The call came from a remote area southeast of Elgin.

"At this point in time, law enforcement does not believe there is an active threat to the community and they are continuing to investigate," the release stated. "No further

information is being released at this time until law enforcement notifies the next of kin."

A deputy with the sheriff's office and an Oregon State Police trooper responded. They found two deceased individuals upon arrival. The reporting party was also at the scene, and that person received aid from the Elgin Ambulance and La Grande Fire Department.

The Union County Major Crime Team, which includes officials from the Union County Sheriff's Office, La Grande Police Department, Oregon State Police and Union County Attorney's office, were called out to investigate.

— EO Media Group

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.

EAST OREGONIAN

— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —

211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays

EastOregonian.com

In the App Store:



East Oregonian (USPS 164-980) is published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, by the EO Media Group, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, OR. Postmaster: send address changes to East Oregonian, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801.

Copyright © 2020, EO Media Group

Circulation Dept.

For mail delivery, online access, vacation stops or delivery concerns call 800-781-3214

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Local home delivery	Savings (cover price)
EZPay	\$9.75/month	50 percent
52 weeks	\$135	42 percent
26 weeks	\$71	39 percent
13 weeks	\$37	36 percent

*EZ Pay = one-year rate with a monthly credit or debit card/check charge

Single copy price:

\$1.50 Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

ADVERTISING

Regional Sales Director (Eastside) EO Media Group:

• Karrine Brogoitti
541-963-3161 • kbrogoitti@eomediagroup.com

Advertising Manager:

• Angela Treadwell
541-966-0827 • atreadwell@eastoregonian.com

Multimedia Consultants:

• Kelly Schwirer
541-564-4531 • kschwirer@eastoregonian.com
• Audra Workman
541-564-4538 • aworkman@eastoregonian.com

Business Office

• Dayle Stinson
541-966-0824 • dstinson@eastoregonian.com

Classified & Legal Advertising

1-800-962-2819 or 541-278-2678
classifieds@eastoregonian.com or legals@eastoregonian.com

NEWS

• To submit news tips and press releases: call 541-966-0818 or email news@eastoregonian.com
• To submit community events, calendar items and Your EO News: email community@eastoregonian.com or call Renee Struthers at 541-966-0818.
• To submit engagements, weddings and anniversaries: email rstruthers@eastoregonian.com or visit eastoregonian.com/community/announcements
• To submit sports or outdoors information or tips: 541-966-0838 • sports@eastoregonian.com

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

Commercial Print Manager: Holly Rouska
541-617-7839 • hrouska@eomediagroup.com