

Oregon water outlook a matter of haves, have-nots

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

SALEM — The 2021 irrigation season is shaping up to be a tale of two Oregons.

River basins in the northern part of the state are in comparatively good shape, with snowpack at or above normal from Mount Hood to the Willamette Mountains, according to the latest outlook from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Southern Oregon, however, is another story.

Exceptionally dry weather has pushed the region deeper into drought, threatening water supplies for both farms and fish. Local irrigation districts, facing all-but-certain shortages, are doing what they can to stretch what little water they have stored in lakes and reservoirs.

“It is looking to be a pretty dire year, particularly in Southern and Central Oregon,” said April Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Congress. “It doesn’t look like we’re getting much moisture in those areas where we need it.”

Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor for the NRCS in Portland, said March was particularly dry. Total precipitation statewide fell from 99% to 90% of average for the water year dating back to Oct. 1, 2020.

“The month itself was below normal and below average in all cases, just due to the lack of storm impacts,” Oviatt said.

Though snowpack across the



Owyhee Irrigation District/Contributed Photo
Jay Chamberlin, director of the Owyhee Irrigation District in Southeast Oregon, said the district’s board of directors approved a reduced water allocation for growers in 2021.

state has held steady at 111% of average, measurements show a clear disparity from north to south.

On the north side, the Hood, Sandy and Lower Deschutes basins have 135% of their average snow-water equivalent — the amount of water that is contained in snow. The Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins are also well above normal at 132%, and the Grande Ronde, Burnt, Powder and Imnaha basins are at 120%.

The Willamette Basin, home to the majority of Oregon’s high-value and specialty crops, is also faring

well at 121% of the average snowpack.

Meanwhile, the Rogue and Umpqua basins in Southwest Oregon are at 85% snowpack, the Klamath Basin is at 77%, the Owyhee Basin is at 78% and the Lake County and Goose Lake basins are at 67%.

Oregon’s snowpack typically peaks around mid-March, Oviatt said. That means time is running out to make up any significant ground.

“We’re past that now,” Oviatt said. “Those opportunities have gone by the wayside.”

Many reservoirs in Southern Oregon are sitting well below 50% full. Streamflows are also below 50% in some areas, ahead of the hot summer months.

Gov. Kate Brown has already declared a drought emergency in Klamath County. Jackson, Lake and Baker counties have requested drought declarations.

Irrigators in the Klamath Project, which serves approximately 230,000 acres of farmland in Southern Oregon and Northern California, anticipate their water allocation will be 130,000 acre-feet, less than one-third of historical demand.

Inflows into Upper Klamath Lake, which feeds the Klamath Project, were just 74% of normal since Oct. 1, 2020, making it the worst year on record since 1981.

Jim Pendleton, manager of the Talent Irrigation District in the Rogue Basin, said they are facing a similarly critical situation.

Normally, the district stores 80,000 to 85,000 acre-feet of water in three reservoirs — Hyatt Lake, Howard Prairie Lake and Emigrant Lake. This year, the three reservoirs combined have just 17,000 acre-feet of water, their lowest totals since 1961.

“Just running the numbers, we may not even start the system until the first of June,” Pendleton said. “Even at that, I think we’ll be lucky to make it to mid-August.”

Looking east to the Owyhee Basin, Jay Chamberlin, manager of the Owyhee Irrigation District, said board members approved a reduced

water allocation of 3 acre-feet per acre. Growers typically receive 4 acre-feet per acre during a full water year.

Owyhee Reservoir is currently 60% full, and Chamberlin said they will likely draw the reservoir down significantly in 2021.

“We’re going to empty the tank,” he said. “That really sets us up for a bad situation next year. We won’t carry over any storage if we pull it all down to cover this year’s demand.”

The district started releasing water on April 6, which is several days early. Chamberlin said growers needed moisture on the ground to allow their onion and sugar beet crops to break through the dry, crusty soil surface.

In addition, Chamberlin said the district will immediately begin pumping supplemental water from the Dunaway Pumping Station along the Snake River.

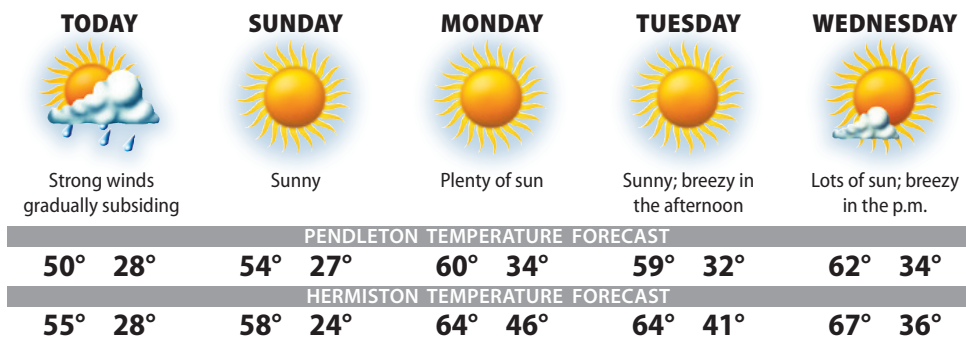
“We’re in a drought,” he said. “It’s going to require us to do some extra type of measures to make sure we can stretch that (allotment) out.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Prediction Center is calling for an increased chance of lower temperatures across much of Oregon over the next month, and an equal chance of increased or decreased precipitation.

Pendleton said he is holding out hope for a wet spring.

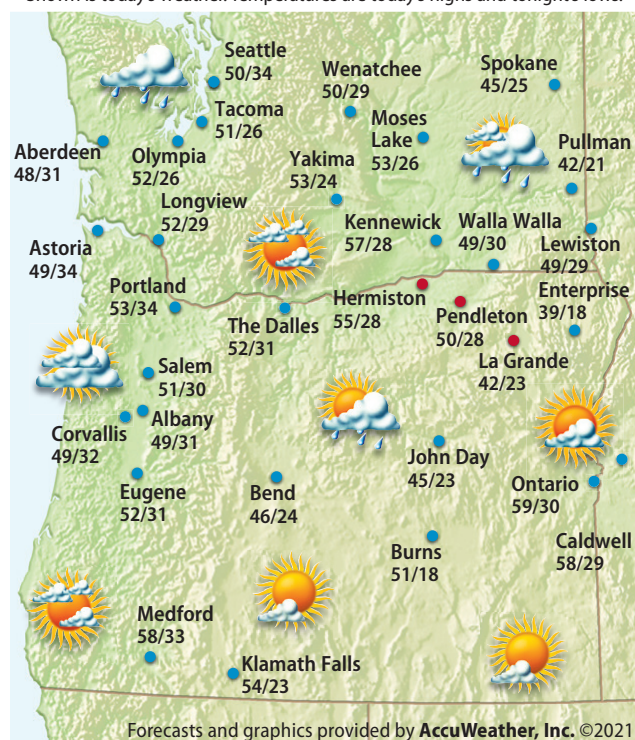
“We need something,” he said. “Divine intervention, or whatever it takes.”

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



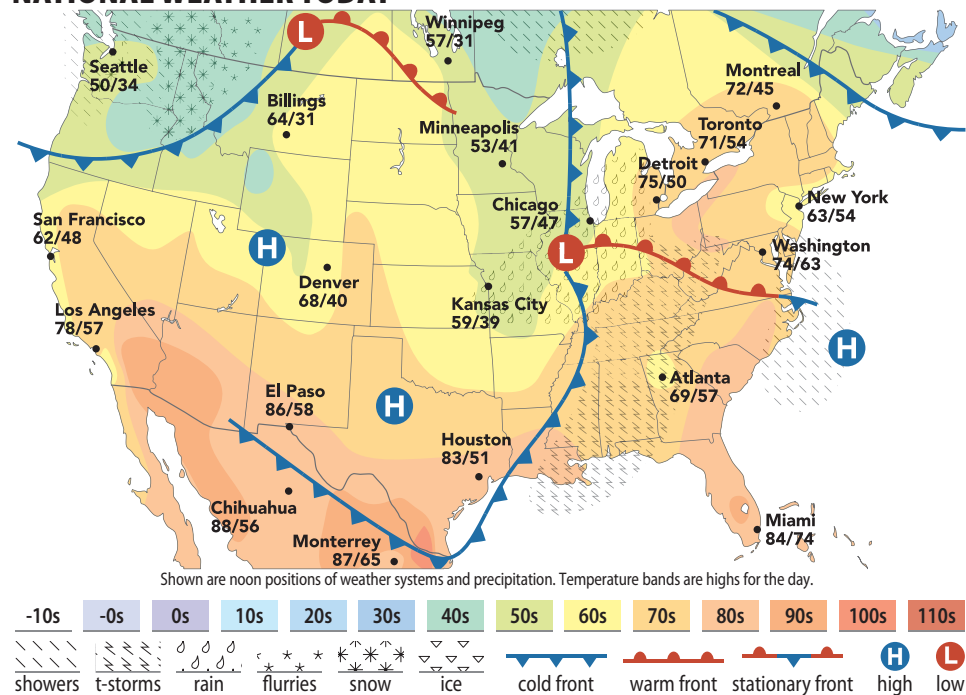
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	58°	30°
Normals	60°	38°
Records	89° (1925)	27° (2010)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	
Month to date	Trace	
Normal month to date	0.40"	
Year to date	3.34"	
Last year to date	4.98"	
Normal year to date	4.36"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	64°	25°
Normals	63°	39°
Records	82° (2016)	24° (1959)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	
Month to date	Trace	
Normal month to date	0.21"	
Year to date	1.20"	
Last year to date	0.48"	
Normal year to date	3.32"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Sun.
Boardman	WSW 12-25	NNW 3-6
Pendleton	W 15-25	NNW 4-8
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	6:18 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	7:35 p.m.	
Moonrise today	6:12 a.m.	
Moonset today	6:19 p.m.	
MOON PHASES		
New	First	Full
Apr 11	Apr 19	Apr 26
		May 3

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday’s National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 107° in Zapata, Texas Low 5° in West Yellowstone, Mont.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon reports small number of COVID cases in vaccinated people

By **RYAN HAAS**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — The Oregon Health Authority reported a small number of cases on Thursday, April 8, where Oregonians who had received their full vaccinations later contracted COVID-19.

The state defined the “breakthrough” cases as instances where a person had received their final dose of vaccine and then contracted COVID-19 at least 14 days later.

Of the more than 700,000 Oregonians who are now fully vaccinated, health officials identified only 168 breakthrough cases as of April 2. That is equivalent to roughly 0.024% of that fully vaccinated group. Three of those 168 died.

“It’s a reminder that while

the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines are all highly effective at preventing severe COVID-19 illness and death, no vaccine is 100% effective, and vaccine breakthrough cases will occur,” the Oregon Health Authority said in a statement.

The cases occurred across the state in 25 counties. According to health officials, many of the people who had breakthrough cases experience asymptomatic infections. A small percentage of the cases became ill enough to require hospitalization, and three people died. The state said most of the cases occurred in people who were older than 65 and who had underlying health conditions.

“State and local epidemiologists are continuing to track and investigate vaccine break-

through cases and are working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to collect information that may provide insight into characteristics associated with vaccine breakthrough,” the health authority said in its statement.

Oregon is not alone in seeing small numbers of COVID-19 cases after vaccination. Washington state reported a similarly small number of breakthrough cases at the end of March.

Health officials said people who receive vaccination can limit the risk of breakthrough cases by continuing to practice basic health safety even after being vaccinated, such as wearing masks when around other people, socially distancing and avoiding large gatherings.

IN BRIEF

East Oregon county declares drought emergency

BAKER CITY — The Baker County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a resolution on Wednesday, April 7, declaring a drought disaster in the county and asking Gov. Kate Brown and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to follow suit.

State and federal drought declarations could make county property owners eligible for financial aid and other assistance, and give state water regulators more flexibility in allocating water.

Baker County could become the second of Oregon’s 36 counties to have a state drought declaration.

Brown on March 31 declared a drought in Klamath County, the first such declaration of 2021.

Baker County also declared a drought disaster in late summer 2020.

Wallowa man held on Utah sex charges

WALLOWA — A Wallowa man accused of multiple counts of sex abuse of a child in Utah was arrested on March 31 at his Doug-

las Street home by Wallowa County Sheriff’s Office deputies, according to a police report.

Michael Anthony Alexis, 52, was arrested on a nationwide felony warrant issued by the district court in Washington County, Utah, for four counts of aggravated sex abuse of a child. Washington County Detective Sgt. Nate Abbott said on Thursday, April 8, that the alleged offenses took place over about a year’s time from 2019-20. Although he couldn’t identify the alleged victim, Utah law indicates anyone younger than 14 is considered a child.

“The charge indicates it was a child,” Abbott said.

He said after the alleged crimes, Alexis apparently relocated to Wallowa County. When the allegations were brought to the attention of the Washington County Sheriff’s Office in the past couple of months, an investigation was opened and investigators sought Alexis out.

“We reached out to him and he was uncooperative,” Abbott said.

As a result, the district court there issued an arrest warrant and Wallowa County deputies found and arrested Alexis.

Alexis remains in the Umatilla County Jail without bail.

— EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: In the Page A6 community brief, “Lunch and Learn focuses on cannabis in the workplace,” published Thursday, April 8, the story misstated the day of the virtual luncheon program. The program is at noon Tuesday, April 20.

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