

# Oregon man survives rolling pickup

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Joe Strus had never been so happy to have a package of hot dogs.

The buns were just a bonus.

The meals he made of those provisions were among the few pleasant parts of an otherwise painful experience that Strus, 63, of Richland, Washington, last week in the mountains north of Keating Valley.

After the rocky edge of a remote forest road gave way beneath the weight of his 2006 Dodge three-quarter ton flatbed pickup around dusk on Sunday, May 2, the truck rolled once, landing on its wheels near a small stream.

“My beautiful truck is not so beautiful anymore,” he said. “I hit pretty hard.”

It all started because Strus, who moved to Baker County around 2005, wanted to go fishing at Balm Creek Reservoir. He had tried to reach the reservoir some days before from the west, via Medical Springs, but was turned back by snowdrifts.

On May 2, Strus decided to try a different route, via Forshey Meadow to the east. He got close, but again was foiled by snow.

Although he didn't get a chance to hook some trout, Strus said he had a new remote control predator call and he figured he'd try to summon a coyote.

He took Forest Road 7025, a route along Goose Creek, several miles north of Keating Valley, that he'd never driven. Strus acknowledges, with the rueful chuckle of a person who wonders later what he was thinking at the crucial moment, that his judgment wasn't sound.

When the road deteriorated into something closer to a trail, and with dark coming on, Strus said he thought about turning back.

“I should have turned around,” he said. “But the kid in me said go a little farther.”

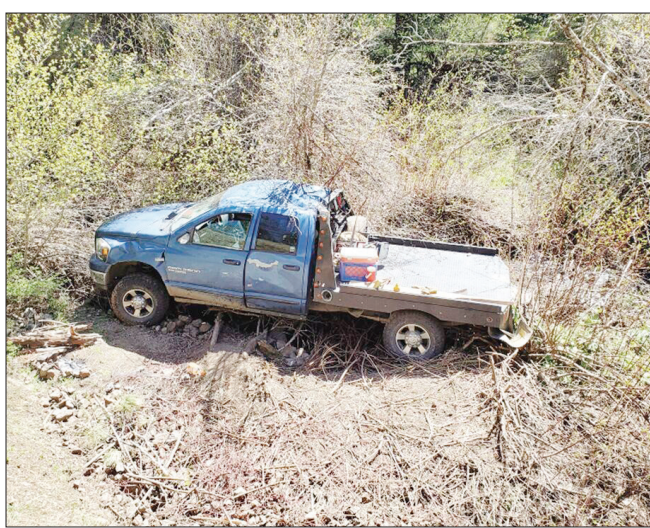
He did — just far enough to reach the spot in the road.

Strus said he felt one rear wheel sink, and when he pushed the accelerator the front end of the truck “reared up just like a horse.”

Then the truck rolled in what seemed, he said, “like slow motion.”

Strus said it looked as though a burrowing animal had dug into the bank, weakening the road. Whatever the cause, he was stuck, at nightfall, in the chilly mountains.

Strus said he wasn't especially worried, though.



Travis Ash/Contributed Photo

Joe Strus' pickup truck landed upright after rolling off a remote road north of Keating Valley on May 2, 2021.

Although his prized truck suffered dents and a couple of broken windows, it was upright and the engine ran fine.

He had most of a tank of a gas.

And, perhaps most important, he had an eight-pack of hot dogs, a bottle of orange juice and two beers. But before he took stock of his situation, he sat inside the cab and gave himself a talking to.

“I just was beating myself up for making a bad decision,” he said.

Besides the food, a warm coat and some camping gear, Strus had his cellphone.

He didn't have service in the creek bottom, so he climbed the nearest hill.

He was able to send a text to his girlfriend, but he never received a reply and couldn't be sure the message had gone through. When he tried to make a phone call he got a message that he could only make a 911 call. Strus said he decided not to do that.

He wasn't in any immediate danger, and he figured that if his girlfriend didn't get his message, and nobody came looking for him, he could always walk out.

“I didn't want to put anybody else in harm's way

to come out and look for me,” he said.

And although he didn't think many people traveled the road where he got stuck, Strus was nervous about leaving his pickup truck.

He had a couple of rifles and a shotgun, and with the windows broken there was no way to secure the guns.

During Monday, May 3, he stayed close to the truck.

He gathered stones to build a fire ring and kindled a blaze to cook the hot dogs.

After he finished the orange juice he used the container to get water from the creek. Strus said he wished he had a water purifier, but he said the stream was cold and clear.

Strus said he was glad his pickup ran despite rolling over. He started the engine occasionally to let the heater ward off the nighttime chill.

An automated weather station several miles to the east recorded temperatures as low as 30 degrees early on May 3.

“It really got cold,” he said.

The following day he considered his situation. He had eaten the last of the hot dogs.

Strus said he concluded that either nobody was searching for him, or they didn't know where to look.

He found a stout limb to use as a walking stick and, once the temperature had warmed, he started walking, retracing his driving route.

Strus hadn't gone far when he came across a large pile of fresh bear scat on the road, almost within sight of his truck.

“He must have smelled those hot dogs,” Strus said.

He had covered about 2 miles when he heard the burble of a motor.

It was an ATV, ridden by Brian Ratliff, a biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife who was investigating the death of a calf in the area.

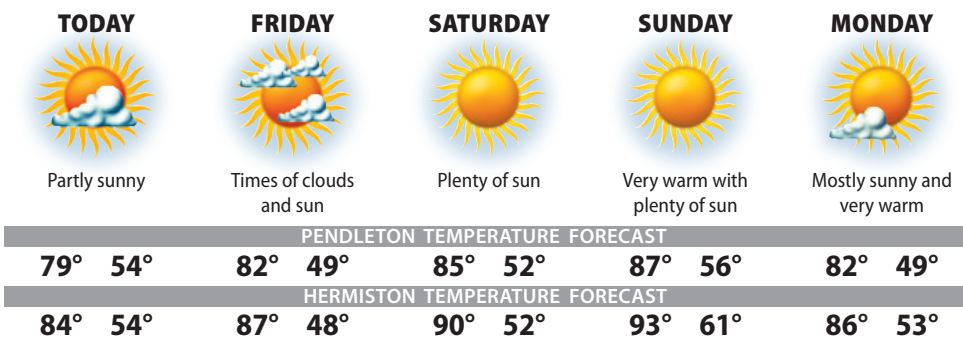
Strus said he greeted Ratliff with a question — “You guys aren't looking for me, are you?”

Ratliff was not — Strus, unable to get a text message out, hadn't been reported missing. Ratliff told Strus to wait, then rode to a place where he could text Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash.

Strus said the sheriff, whom he knows, arrived less than an hour later and drove him to Richland.

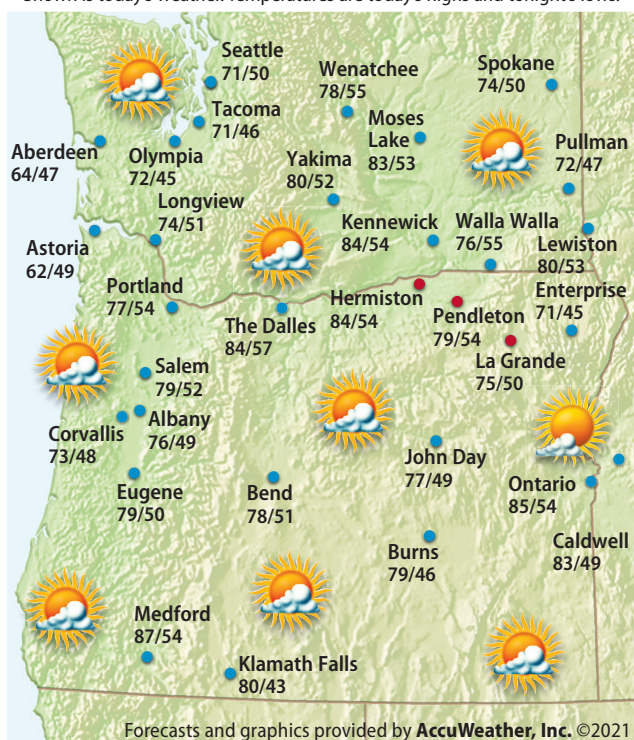
Strus said he learned that the U.S. Forest Service has installed signs warning people not to try to drive down the road where his truck rolled.

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

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



## ALMANAC

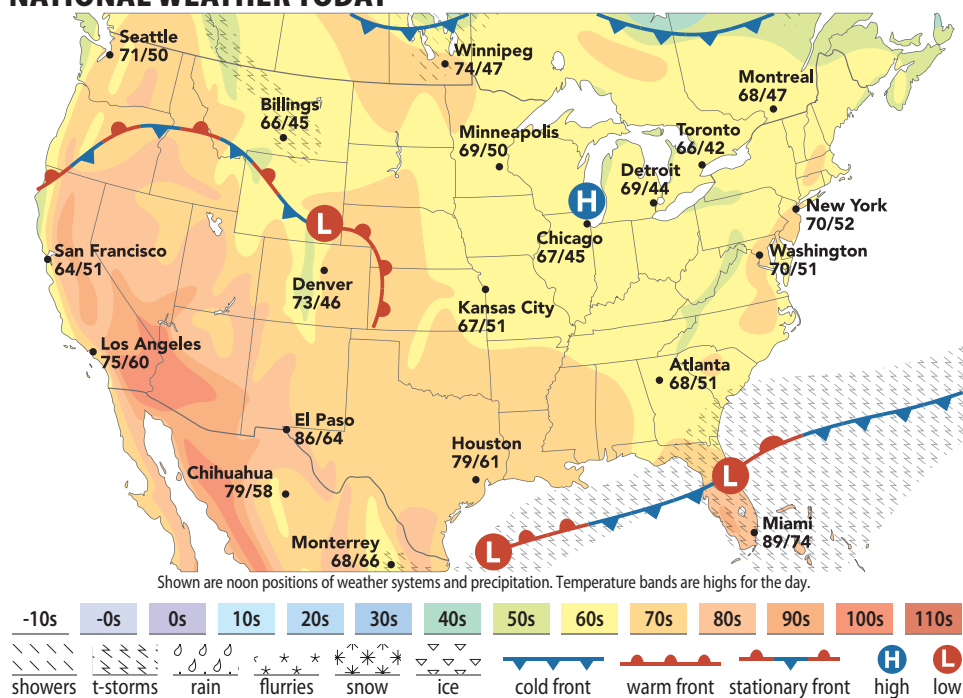
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	79°	45°	
Normals	70°	46°	
Records	102° (1931)	29° (1916)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.26"		
Normal month to date	0.45"		
Year to date	3.82"		
Last year to date	5.96"		
Normal year to date	5.56"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	83°	47°	
Normals	72°	46°	
Records	99° (1993)	31° (2012)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.18"		
Normal month to date	0.46"		
Year to date	1.46"		
Last year to date	0.90"		
Normal year to date	4.45"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	NE 3-6	Fri. NNW 4-8	
Pendleton	N 6-12	NW 6-12	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	5:26 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	8:17 p.m.		
Moonrise today	6:33 a.m.		
Moonset today	10:31 p.m.		
First	Full	Last	New
May 19	May 26	June 2	June 10

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 101° in Needles, Calif. Low 15° in Gould, Colo.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



## OREGON LEGISLATURE

# Remote testimony could be here to stay at the Oregon Capitol

By CHRIS LEHMAN  
The Oregonian

SALEM — At the south entrance to the Oregon Capitol sits a kiosk. With the building closed to the public, the kiosk has one job: to allow people who walk up to the Oregon Legislature to testify virtually before a committee.

The public hasn't exactly jumped at the chance to talk to lawmakers by standing outside of the Capitol and speaking into a camera. According to the Legislative Policy and Research Office, the kiosk has been used just four times since it was installed last year.

But what Oregonians have taken to is the chance to testify from their living rooms. So far this session, with committee hearings held entirely on virtual platforms, people have signed up to address legislative committees more than 14,000 times. That's already well over the number who sought to testify in person in 2019, with more than six

weeks remaining in this year's session.

“Most of the changes to our lives that we've seen during COVID are ones that we would prefer to leave behind, but this is not one of them,” said Mary Kyle McCurdy, the deputy director of 1000 Friends of Oregon. “It really has opened up meetings and hearings and public decision-making to so many Oregonians.”

More than 1,200 committee hearings have been conducted using video-conference technology since the beginning of this year's session. According to the Legislature's Information Services Department, roughly 98% have been free of technical problems that have resulted in an interruption of the meeting.

Lawmakers are considering a bill that would require both the Legislature and local governments to offer remote testimony as an option, even when the pandemic is in the rearview mirror. House Bill 2560 has already been approved in the House and

awaits a vote on the Senate floor. The measure would allow testifying via telephone to count as remote testimony.

No one is publicly suggesting that once COVID-19 protocols are relaxed, lawmakers continue to use remote hearings exclusively. There are more than a dozen hearing rooms sitting unused at the Capitol, and lawmakers are just as eager as everyone else to see people in person again. Floor sessions are held in person, but without any members of the public in attendance.

But the horse is out of the barn when it comes to allowing people to have their say from the comfort of their homes.

“There have been fewer trips over the Cascades in dangerous weather conditions,” said Misty Mason Freeman, the director of the Legislative Policy and Research Office. “It's given folks the opportunity to testify from a space that's comfortable to them, including being able to testify with kiddos at home.”

## IN BRIEF

### Pasco crash leaves 1 dead, 1 injured in car that collided with semi driven by M-F man

PASCO, Wash. — A police chase in Pasco, Washington, ended in a death on Sunday, May 9, on Highway 395 and Foster Wells Road.

Karlie Moore, 23, of Pasco, died on the scene when the 2002 Hyundai Elantra she was riding in — which was being pursued on Foster Wells Road by Franklin County Sheriff's Office deputies — crossed onto Highway 395 and collided with a semitruck, according

to a Washington State Patrol report.

The collision occurred at about 4:15 p.m. according to the police report.

The semi truck was driven by Harold Matuterivera, 40, of Milton-Freewater. Matuterivera was not injured in the collision.

The Hyundai Elantra was driven by Ricky G. Cruz, 28, of Pasco. Cruz was injured and transported by helicopter to Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane.

No information is available on why the vehicle was being pursued. According to the police report, charges are pending against Cruz.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

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