

# Forest Service officials scramble to find fire lookout

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Joel McCraw needed to find someone willing to spend the summer atop a mountain that has a three-state view but is far out of sight of any coffee shop or grocery store.

His task wasn't as daunting as it might sound, thanks in part to Facebook.

The job is fire lookout on Mount Ireland. The 8,346-foot peak is the apex of a granitic shoulder that extends several miles west from the spine of the Elkhorn Mountains and forms the divide between the Powder River and North Fork John Day River basins as well as the boundary between Baker and Grant counties.

Mount Ireland is one of more than a dozen prominences in Northeastern Oregon where the traditional method of finding wildfires — a person working inside a tiny building on a high point, looking for the telltale tendril of smoke — persists.

Several decades ago there were more than 50 lookouts in the region that were staffed each summer.

But over time, with surveillance by airplane more feasible, and a proliferation of roads making it easier for fire crews to access remote areas, most lookouts were closed, and many removed.

Mount Ireland remains a valuable cog in the fire-detection system in part because of its elevation — if you head west from the peak you won't hit a higher summit until you get to the Cascades.



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest/Contributed Photo

The fire lookout on the summit of Mount Ireland, 8,346 feet, is staffed each summer. The lookout has a view that extends over parts of three national forests — Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur. The metal building replaced a wooden structure in 1957.

But its location also is ideal, said McCraw, the fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's Whitman District.

From Mount Ireland's summit, the lookout can see swathes of the Wallowa-Whitman as well as parts of its neighboring national forests, the Umatilla and Malheur, McCraw said. On especially clear days the views extend east into Idaho and north into Washington.

"It's a pretty critical one," McCraw said.

Mount Ireland also overlooks the municipal watershed for Sumpter, where a wildfire could threaten the city's water supply, McCraw said.

But of course a lookout is only as effective as the person who works there, scanning the hundreds of thousands of acres where a fire could start.

And for the past two years, McCraw has had to scramble to hire someone for the position, which pays about \$16.90 per hour.

In 2020, Mount Ireland's long-

time lookout wasn't able to return to the lofty perch, but McCraw had a fair amount of time to find a replacement.

Typically the lookout doesn't start work at Mount Ireland until late June or early July, when most of the snow has melted and the wildfire risk begins to rise.

This spring McCraw's challenge was even more acute. The lookout he had enlisted for the job backed out late in May. Someone then suggested McCraw explain his dilemma to

associations of fire lookout enthusiasts, of which there are several.

The Oregon Fire Lookouts posted about the situation on its Facebook page on June 4.

McCraw said he has had a "very good response" from the post, and several candidates have been in touch.

McCraw said on June 9 he will be able to fill the vacancy in time to have Mount Ireland staffed.

The person he hires will have an interesting summer, to be sure. Mount Ireland is pretty remote even by lookout standards.

You can't drive to the peak. The roughly 3½-mile hiking trail offsets its modest distance with a significant elevation gain of 2,300 feet — roughly equivalent to climbing the Astoria Column about 18 times.

(Except without stairs.)

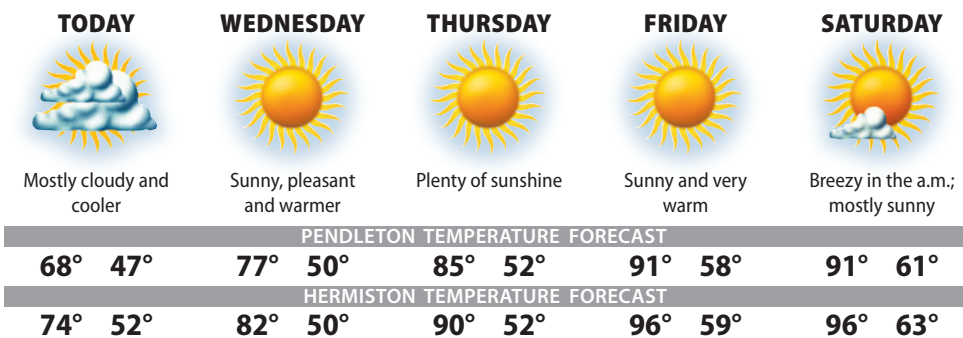
The nearest settlement is Granite, about 8 miles from the trailhead. Sumpter is about 15 miles.

McCraw said the Forest Service each year hires a helicopter crew to haul in water, propane and other supplies to the lookout. A technician checks the radio equipment on the peak, which includes an antenna and a repeater.

The Mount Ireland lookout usually works until mid to late September, depending on the weather.

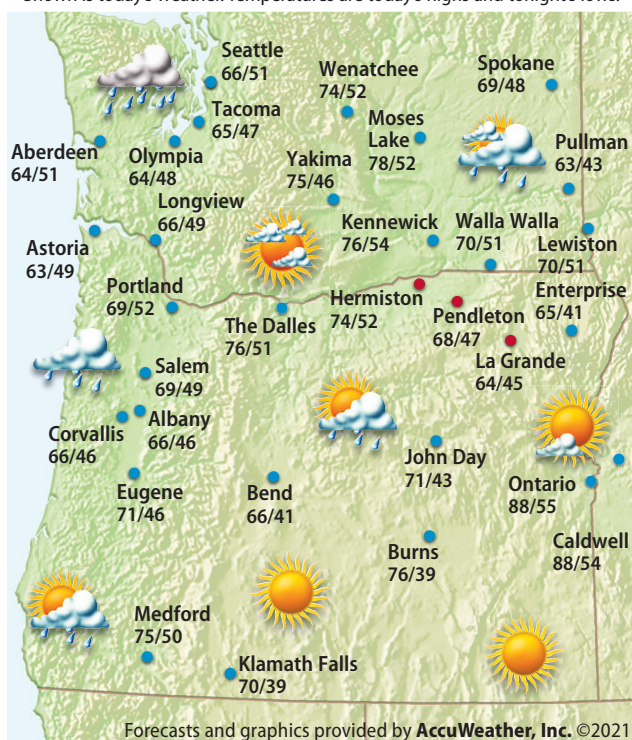
Snowstorms are possible in any month at that elevation, but McCraw said in some years dry weather persists into October so the lookout stays on duty through deer season.

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

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



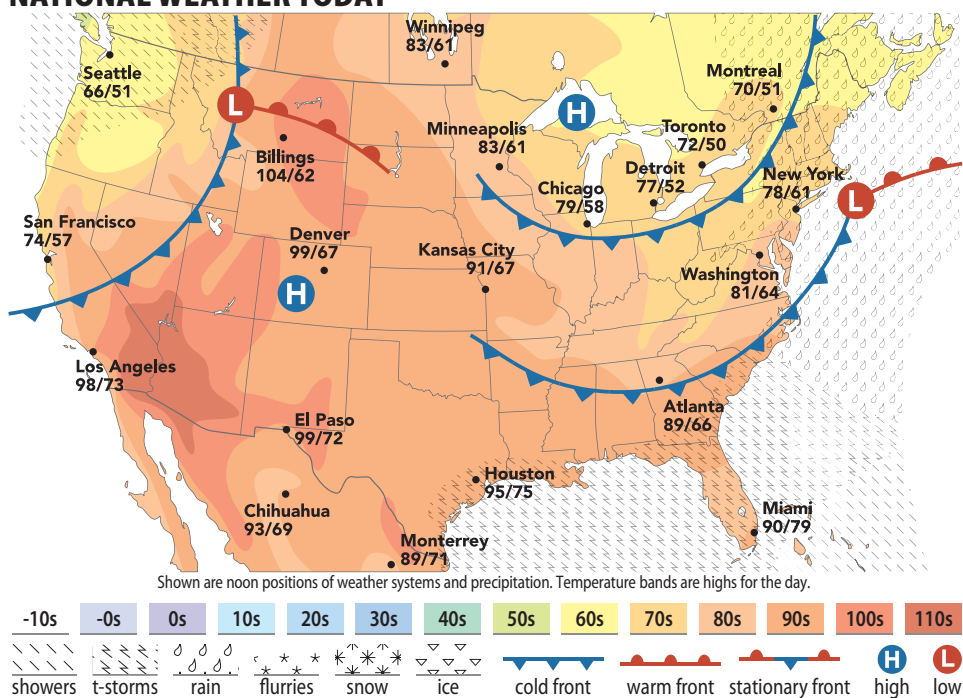
## ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	85°	54°
Normals	78°	52°
Records	103° (1933)	37° (1930)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.14"	
Normal month to date	0.72"	
Year to date	4.17"	
Last year to date	8.27"	
Normal year to date	7.23"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	88°	55°
Normals	79°	53°
Records	102° (1933)	37° (1930)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.07"	
Normal month to date	0.33"	
Year to date	1.77"	
Last year to date	1.60"	
Normal year to date	5.44"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Wed.	
Boardman	WSW 8-16	WSW 4-8
Pendleton	WSW 8-16	NW 4-8
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	5:05 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	8:46 p.m.	
Moonrise today	9:55 a.m.	
Moonset today	12:19 a.m.	

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 114° in Needles, Calif. Low 28° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Eastern Oregon University holds drive-thru commencement

By CARLOS FUENTES  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Most years, Eastern Oregon University's graduation takes place in Community Stadium, with extra stands brought in to accommodate the large number of families and friends in attendance.

This year, there were no extra seats brought in — in fact, there were no seats at all.

The 2021 commencement was a drive-thru ceremony, meaning that each graduate could only bring a car full of people to watch them walk across the stage to receive their diploma from University President Thomas Insko before returning to the car and exiting the school.

The ceremony, which took place on Saturday, June 12, on the west side of the EOU campus, was the result of months of deliberate planning, according to

Vice President of University Advancement Tim Seydel.

"We came up with the idea of the hybrid drive-thru, which decreased all of the in-person contact but still gave students the chance to walk across the stage," he said. "When we talked to students, they were really excited. We didn't want to push it off again, so doing it in person was a big hope."

Walking out of cars adorned with balloons, banners and other decorations, 236 graduates crossed the stage for more than 2½ hours, including a few 2020 graduates who had a virtual commencement last year.

"It feels very surreal," said Megan Brown, who graduated in 2020 with a degree in business administration. "Having an actual ceremony feels so much better than the 3-second blip last year. I worked really hard to graduate a year early, so it feels

good for my son to be here and watch me cross the stage."

This year's ceremony also included graduates from Oregon State University's Agriculture and Natural Resource Program at EOU and Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing La Grande Campus, which usually holds a separate commencement ceremony.

In total, 745 students graduated from EOU this academic year, many of whom could not attend the ceremony. According to Seydel, this will likely be the last graduation restricted in size due to COVID-19.

"In previous years, this is normally a huge event, there's thousands of people that come to the stadium, and it's just a really overwhelming and fun experience," he said. "We're hoping that next year we'll be able to do it normally again, with families and students in the stadium."

## IN BRIEF

### Baker City woman accused of assaulting officers

BAKER CITY — Baker City Police have accused a local woman of throwing broken glass at officers, kicking two of them and assaulting a corrections deputy during her arrest on domestic assault charges last week.

Police on Wednesday, June 9, arrested Valerie Jean Brinton, 53, and booked her into the Baker County Jail on two counts of fourth-degree assault (domestic violence), two counts of assaulting a public safety officer, one count of attempted assault of a public safety officer, two counts of reckless endangering and a count of resisting arrest.

Officers talked to Mark Brinton, Valerie Brinton's husband, who had a bleeding cut on his head about the size of a quarter, according to a report by officer Mark Powell.

Mark Brinton's head and clothing were soaked in motor oil, according to the report, which also noted Mark Brinton is blind.

Mark Brinton told police his wife hit him

several times with her hand and poured the oil on him.

When officers found Valerie Brinton in a travel trailer, she refused to come out. She then threw a piece of glass and "another object" at officers outside, according to Powell's report.

Officers pulled Brinton from the trailer through the window, the report stated, during which she kicked detective Shannon Regan in the face. Officers handcuffed Brinton. They did not shock her with a stun gun during the arrest, police said.

Before police drove her to the Baker County Jail, Brinton attempted to kick detective Chris Sells in the groin, according to Powell's report.

At the jail, Brinton continued to fight and resist, Powell wrote in his report, including grabbing and pinching deputy Brandon Mastrude.

None of the officers needed medical treatment, Duman said.

—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.

— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —  
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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.  
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