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## Oregon drier than last year as fire season begins

Nearly 80% of state listed in 'severe' drought

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
*Capital Press*

CORVALLIS — Historically dry conditions are raising concerns that another long wildfire season may be ahead in Oregon.

Experts at Oregon State University held a virtual forum Monday, June 21, to discuss this year's

drought and fire conditions. Meanwhile, several large blazes are already burning thousands of acres and temperatures are expected to reach into the triple digits statewide.

"Right now, we are drier at this point than we were at this point last year," said Larry O'Neill, state climatologist with the Oregon Climate Service. "I think we're in the thick of it right now, at least in terms of the drought conditions and how it projects onto wildfire risk."

As of June 21, the S-503 Fire was the largest, burning 6,201 acres near the Warm Springs Reservation in

Central Oregon. The fire started June 18, and was 10% contained. A cause has not been determined.

In Southern Oregon, the Cutoff Fire started June 19 and has burned 1,150 acres on state forestland about 6 miles north of Bonanza. It is 12% contained, and the cause remains under investigation.

Earlier this month, a pair of lightning-sparked fires in Northeast Oregon — the Joseph Canyon and Dry Creek fires — torched 9,195 acres of timber and rangeland. Those two fires were mostly contained on June 11.

Meg Krawchuk, an associate professor at the College of Forestry, said conditions on the ground are more characteristic of what firefighters might expect in July, rather than June.

"When we have early and long-standing drought, we're more likely to have fires burning," Krawchuk said.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, all of Oregon is listed in some stage of drought, including 77% in "severe" drought, 36% in "extreme" drought and a little under 5% in the worst category of

"exceptional" drought.

The driest conditions are spread over Central and Eastern Oregon, according to O'Neill, the state climatologist. Klamath, Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson and Wasco counties all experienced their driest or second-driest spring on record, he said.

In addition, the USDA reports that 80% of the state's cropland and livestock pastures are rated as either "short" or "very short" of soil moisture.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Wheat lines the edge of a field on June 23, 2021, as a combine harvester harvests at Starvation Farms outside of Lexington.

### COVID-19

## County remains at high risk

76 cases reported last week, the sharpest increase in weekly cases since April

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Umatilla County is one of six counties in Oregon that remained at high risk in Gov. Kate Brown's latest, and final, coronavirus risk level assessment.

Brown, who announced the risk levels Tuesday, June 22, said Oregonians no longer will hear about risk levels as the state inches closer to the 70% vaccine threshold. As of June 22, the state was less than 45,000 people shy of the goal, which will mark the end of pandemic-related health and safety restrictions in the state. An Oregonian/OregonLive tracker says Oregon should reach the mark by July 3.

Among counties in Northeastern Oregon, Umatilla County is an outlier when it comes to risk levels. Baker, Union, Wallowa and Morrow counties all remained at lower risk for weeks, and some for months.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said there could be a number of explanations for this, including the county's greater population density and its industrial facilities increasing the risk of infection, but it's difficult to pin exactly why the county continues to report relatively high case counts.

The data shows Umatilla County ultimately will be dragged across the finish line when the state reaches 70%. But county officials are worried that reopening may lead to case spikes in the county due to its low vaccination rate.

"Somehow, being over the line gives the impression that COVID is over," Umatilla County

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# Grim outlook

Wheat farmers, experts look toward stark harvest as drought consumes most of Oregon

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — The wheat harvest started early this year on Starvation Farms, named for the frequently harsh growing conditions on the 7,000-acre plot of land roughly 10 miles north of Lexington.

Chris Rauch, the farm owner, said conditions are looking grim for this year's

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Andre Rauch navigates a combine harvester Wednesday, June 23, 2021, across a field near Lexington while harvesting wheat at Starvation Farms.

## 'There were no options'

Owner of chimp credits deputy with saving her daughter's life

By **PHIL WRIGHT**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Tamara Brogoitti's voice on the 911 call is clear and direct.

"My pet chimpanzee has attacked my daughter," Brogoitti told a dispatcher. "She's bleeding profusely. And the animal has to be shot."

The attack occurred Sunday morning, June 20, at Brogoitti's home and ranch on Rieth Road, across from the entrance to the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office. Brogoitti, 68, spoke about the attack and death of Buck publicly for the first time June 22.

"There are no ... he was my son," she said. "What I do want to do, I want to thank the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office."

In particular, she thanked the deputy who had to pull the trigger.

"He sent Buck to heaven and saved my daughter," she said. "It was a horrible thing that happened. For the rest of my life I will thank that man for what he did."

She said the deputy acted with professionalism in a crisis.

"My daughter was losing blood, and emergency personnel needed to get to her," she said. "There were no options."

The body cam video the sheriff's office released June 22 of the shooting shows Buck from a distance in an

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This photo from 2015 shows Buck, the adult male chimpanzee Tamara Brogoitti cared for at her ranch near Pendleton. A Umatilla County sheriff's deputy on Sunday, June 20, 2021, shot and killed the primate after it attacked Brogoitti's adult daughter. People For The Ethical Treatment of Animals in April warned the state Brogoitti allowed the ape to roam her property and therefore violated her permit to keep Buck.

Buck Brogoitti Animal Rescue/Contributed Photo

