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NORTHEASTERN OREGON

Drought worries linger

Dry January aggravates regional drought conditions

By KATY NESBITT
For EO Media Group

PENDLETON — December and January storms set up the winter of 2022 to be cold and wet, but several weeks without significant snow or rain are creating concerns of another drought year.

Northeastern Oregon is faring better than Central and Southern Oregon, with cold temperatures preventing the early January snowfall from melting. Snow in the last few days has helped inch up snowpack and snow water equivalent levels for the Blue and Wallowa mountains.

According to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service website, monthly streamflow and reservoir conditions for January in the Umatilla-Walla Walla-Willow Basin were above average. Two bodies of water in the southern region of the basin near Heppner are considerably higher than the rest of the basin: Willow Creek is at 187% and Rhea Creek is at 142% of the 30-year median.

Farther south, the North Fork John Day River at Monument is recording 83% of its 30-year median. The basin has one stronghold for water: Camas Creek near Ukiah at 346% of the median.

The Grande Ronde-Burnt-Powder-Imnaha Basin is averaging between 83% and 95% of the 30-year median with one anomaly: Bear Creek, outside of Wallowa, is at 216%.

Snowpack has been holding up, despite the lack of precipitation in the last five weeks.

In the Blue Mountains between La Grande and Pendleton, Emigrant Springs has 45 inches of snowpack and is 148% above average with 10% snow water equivalent.

High Ridge Snotel east of Pendleton has 52 inches of snowpack, 5% below its average, but with 33% snow water equivalent. Milkshakes Snotel on the Washington state line has 71 inches of snowpack, which is 87% of normal with 35% snow water equivalent.

In the Wallows, Mount Howard has 27 inches of snowpack, 25% below average with 32% snow water equivalent. On the south side of the range, Moss Springs Snotel is recording 49 inches of snowpack, which is 15% below average with a snow water equivalent of 32%.

In Baker County, Schneider Meadows Snotel is recording 22%

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Flood waters from McKay Creek surround a tractor and inundate a field of lavender at the Lavender Road Botanicals farm off Southwest 44th Street on April 17, 2019 in Pendleton. East Oregonian, File

Flooding effects

The water receded two years ago, but the recovery from the floods remains

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County continues to recover from the 2020 Umatilla River floods while trying to figure out how to better respond to the next high water event.

Heavy rains combined with a rapidly melting snowpack overwhelmed the banks of the Umatilla River on Feb. 6, 2020, destroying homes, damaging public infrastructure, displacing



A bridge in Thorn Hollow bows as the Umatilla River rises below it on Feb. 6, 2020. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

families and killing one person. Two years later, local officials still are picking up the pieces while

trying to coordinate with a wide array of state, tribal and federal agencies.

“Recovery from a natural disaster like that is years long,” Umatilla County Emergency Manager Tom Roberts said. “It’s not something that happens, generally speaking, overnight or within months. We kind of put our five-10-year hats on.”

Pendleton City Manager Robb Corbett has spent many hours over the past few years thinking about floods, not just the Umatilla River flood from 2020, but also the McKay Creek floods from 2019. Roughly three years after the McKay floods, Corbett said the city is on the verge of soliciting a consultant to make recommendations on how to help prevent significant flooding in the future. The consultant

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Returning to the stage — finally

By JENNIFER COLTON
For EO Media Group

PENDLETON — When “The Sound of Music” closed March 1, 2020, Pendleton’s College Community Theater expected to open its next production in six weeks. Instead, rehearsals at the Bob Clapp Theatre would be canceled for two years.

“Little Women: The Broadway Musical,” the first Pendleton-based theater production since the coronavirus pandemic, runs the next two weekends, Feb. 24-26 and March 3-5, in the theater on the campus of Blue Mountain Community College.

“When COVID hit, it was really scary because nobody knew what to expect,” said Margaret Mayer, president of the CCT board of directors. “We had no idea it would be two years, no one knew. Here we are.”

Almost exactly two years later (“Sound of Music” opened Feb. 20, 2020; “Little Women” opens Feb. 24, 2022), Mayer was back in the theater as music director for “Little Women.” Caitlin Marshall is directing.

“The last two years have been



Samantha Steffey, right, and Pablo Galindo perform as Belle and Gaston Thursday, Feb. 17, 2022, during a rehearsal for Hermiston High School’s production of “Beauty and the Beast” at the high school. The shows final performance was Feb. 19. The musical was among several productions returning to the state in Eastern Oregon. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

really stressful. People need something that can take their minds off everything,” Marshall said. “I really just feel it’s important to keep some kind of normalcy with all the chaos going on.”

That idea of normalcy has prompted shows to come back this month in Hermiston and La Grande, even with COVID-19 impacts. At Hermiston High School, Jordan Bemrose brought

together 70 students for performances of “Beauty and the Beast,” which concluded Saturday, Feb. 19.

“The biggest reason we wanted to jump back into live theater is mostly to give these fantastic students something exciting to look forward to,” she said.

Bemrose added the performing arts students are talented and hard-working and need opportunities to shine.

“With online school, we missed out on so many performance opportunities that now, being back in person, we wanted to make up for that loss of time,” she said. “For many students, singing, acting and playing their musical instruments is their whole life and inspiration and what they aspire to do as careers after high school.”

With the lingering impacts of COVID-19, the Hermiston production required masks to rehearse on stage and careful tracking to avoid quarantine that could cancel rehearsals — or performances. That same fear became a reality this month for Eastern Oregon University’s “We’ve Got Your Number,” a choreographed

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