

Fire:

Continued from Page A1

“Last year was a record fire season for the Umatilla National Forest,” Watrud said. “This year, it’s still drought, years of drought, where there definitely is the potential for another significant fire season again this summer.”

Drought conditions in Washington have gradually improved since the record-breaking hot, dry summer of 2021, when 100% of the state was at least abnormally dry and nearly 60% was experiencing severe, extreme or exceptional drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

But by the end of March, nearly 99% of Walla Walla County was still experiencing severe drought, which can increase the number of wildfires and adversely impact crops, fish, livestock and water supply.

Drought conditions in Walla Walla County were substantially improved by April precipitation, however. As of Thursday, May 19, most of the county is now in moderate drought, which can lower river flows and increase fire risk and dust storms, and a wide swathe of the county along the Oregon border is only considered abnormally dry, which has minimal impacts.

Neighboring Columbia County is in a slightly better position, with around a third of the county in moderate drought conditions.

But to the south, Oregon is in a significantly worse position. While only slivers of Umatilla and Morrow counties are in moderate drought conditions, their neighbors to the west, east and south are all experiencing drought of some kind. Areas of Walla County, in the northeast corner of the state, range from abnormally dry to extreme drought.

An exceptional drought — the worst rating given by the U.S. Drought Monitor



Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, File

Firefighters take a break in the shade July 24, 2021, during the Green Ridge Fire in the Blue Mountains about 30 miles east of Walla Walla.

— has lingered for months throughout a large portion of Grant County, Oregon, which abuts Umatilla County to the south.

Much of Central Oregon is experiencing similar levels of extreme or exceptional drought.

“The outlook in these areas will be dominated by surface water supply shortages and drought impacts through the remainder of the year,” wrote the Natural Resources Conservation Service in a May 1 report.

Recent precipitation in the Northwest has staved off the start of the fire season, but fire potential remains above-normal, according to Eric Wise with the Northwest Area Coordination Center. That potential is driven by drought conditions and projections of warmer and drier weather in coming months, he said.

The area of most immediate concern is Central Oregon, Wise said.

“As we head into the summer months, that concern starts to spread up into Central Washington and Southwestern Oregon,” he said. “Ultimately, we’re showing above-normal potential going up into the Columbia Basin and up into North Central Washington as we get into the

August time frame.”

Storms and snowpack

By the beginning of April, prior to the mid-month storms, snowpack in the Umatilla National Forest’s three basins averaged at around half of what is usual by that time of year, according to data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

But by May, snowpack in the three large basins jumped to between 105-125% of normal for this time of year. The John Day Basin jumped by 42% of median — based on an average of snowpack by May 1 for the last 30 years — to 111%. By May 1, 2021, snowpack across the three large basins had ranged from 55-84% of normal.

Still, April storms were not quite sufficient to make up for lower-than-normal precipitation earlier in the water year, which begins in October, said Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor for Oregon NRCS.

The large water basin collectively made up by the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins, which are located south of Walla Walla but water the forest to the north into Washington state, almost reached normal precipitation levels. By May 1, precipitation was

98% of median.

But to their east, the large basin collectively made up by the Grand Ronde, Powder, Burnt and Imnaha basins was still only at 90% of normal precipitation, less even than in 2021. Still, across the three water basins, overall precipitation is currently closer to normal levels than last year.

Higher precipitation shortly before the beginning of fire season could be a double-edged sword, however, with accelerated grass growth possibly contributing to the spread of fires once they’ve started, wrote Darcy Weseman, public affairs officer for the Umatilla National Forest, in an email.

Forest officials are still hopeful that a healthy snowpack and closer-to-normal precipitation will bode well for the summer ahead, however.

“As we sit today, I’m breathing a little easier,” Watrud told county commissioners earlier this month. “But it really will just depend upon what the ignitions are in terms of lightning and human starts this summer.”

“And, boy, if we just get a good dose of rain about every two weeks throughout the summer, that just makes a world of difference.”

Navy:

Continued from Page A1

older torpedoes that exploded when the tip struck a submarine or ship, the Mk-48 has advanced proximity fuses to detonate with maximum explosive force. The Mk-48 torpedo dives under the hull of ships and detonates at the keel, the blast breaking the back of the ship.

The USS Oregon has a quiver of variety when it comes to weaponry. It can fire surface-skimming Harpoon anti-ship missiles, a weapon that is now reaching Ukrainian coastal defense troops fighting Russia’s attempt to bottle up the port of Odesa.

The submarine also is equipped with BGM-109 Tomahawk cruise missiles that can reach targets on land up to 1,500 miles away. It can carry conventional and nuclear warheads.

The Oregon also can house and deploy Navy SEAL commando teams on covert operations.

Pump-jet propulsion instead of traditional screws with blades power the sub through the water, reducing the amount of bubbles and noise — called cavitation — that sonar can pick up.

The submarine’s S9G nuclear reactor gives the USS Oregon a top speed of 25 knots submerged. Its reactor will run for about 30 years without any additional fuel. The nuclear power gives the submarine virtually unlimited range and the ability to stay submerged for up to three months.

The advanced systems of the submarine also cut the size of crew needed at sea. The submarine has 15 officers and 120 crew. The battleship could operate with 600 officers and crew.

The Navy has commissioned 19 Virginia-class submarines — the USS Oregon is the 20th. Eight more are under construction, including what would become the USS Idaho.

Vice Admiral Michael J. Connor told Congress in 2015 the USS Oregon and its sister boats were “game-changers” in maintaining a balance of power with Russia and China.

“The undersea arena is the most opaque of all warfighting domains,” Connor said. “It is easier to track a small object in space than it is to track a large submarine, with tremendous firepower, under the water.”

The commissioning of the USS Oregon ends a long gap in U.S. Navy history without a ship named for the state. The submarine is the fourth vessel to bear the state’s name. The first was in 1842, and the last was decommissioned in 1919.

Pushing to name a ship for Oregon

When the new Seawolf-class fast-attack submarine was introduced to the fleet, one was named USS Connecticut. Since the introduction of the Virginia-class submarines, nearly all have been named for states.

In 2011, Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, inquired about naming a ship after Oregon. A constituent’s letter had noted a long gap in having a USS Oregon in the fleet.

Merkley wrote a letter to then-Navy Secretary Ray Mabus asking him to put Oregon near the top of the queue for submarine naming.

“It would be a great honor to the sailors, marines, military service members as well as citizens of Oregon to have one of the newest naval submarines named in their honor,” Merkley wrote.

In October 2014, Mabus came to the Battleship Oregon Memorial in Portland to announce that a fast-attack submarine with hull number SSN-793 would be named the USS Oregon.

The Navy plans on keeping the new USS Oregon much longer than its predecessor’s namesake. The Navy forecast the USS Oregon will be in service until at least the mid-2050s.

May 28, 2022, was officially day one in the Navy for the new USS Oregon.

Flooding:

Continued from Page A1

where Makayla Lee and some friends were stacking gravel bags to mitigate the flood.

Lee said she lives there and awoke around 9:50 a.m. and saw water flowing through her backyard. A boat belonging to her coworker, Treyal Groesbeck, was drifting in the flood. By the afternoon, she said, the water was all around her home, giving her “riverfront property.”

On the plus side, she said, the house is on a foundation 4 feet tall, and while getting to the front door might be difficult, the water had a ways to go before getting inside the place.

Lee said she has lived at this site for the last two years, and the flooding in 2020 was not nearly so bad on Tutuilla and Patawa creeks.

The city at around 4 p.m. closed access to Tutuilla Road to thru-traffic at Southwest Nye Avenue due to high water on the road.

McKay Creek holding the line

Pendleton City Manager Robb Corbett reported on May 30 he heard of some groundwater seeping into a basement in town but he was not aware of any flood waters getting into homes in Pendleton.

Community Park also has “some water creeping in,” he said, but nothing indicated McKay Creek crested its banks.

“We were watching it very closely to make sure that for the most part the water was staying within the stream,” he said.

One of the problems with Tutuilla and Patawa creeks, he explained, is the lack of monitoring gauges on that drainage, so there is no way to know in advance of a coming flood.

“With McKay, we have the gauge above the reservoir, so we know what is coming into the reservoir, we know how



Phil Wright/East Oregonian

Jason Kelly, of Kelly Lumber Supply Inc., Pendleton, wades through flood waters Sunday, May 29, 2022, on the business’ back lot to connect a battery to a fifth-wheel camping trailer to get the hydraulics to work before trying to remove it.

full the reservoir is, we can monitor just what is happening,” he said.

The Bureau of Reclamation, which operates McKay Dam, reported the reservoir was 94% full as of May 29. The city that day reported the bureau around 7 p.m. began increasing outflows from the McKay Reservoir to 1,400 CFS. The move was to allow for visual monitoring of the water flow before dark.

The city on May 30 reported the bureau was holding flows at 1,400 CFS and would reevaluate that at 4 p.m.

Sheriff’s office preps residents to flee

The Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office on May 29 reported its personnel would contact residents along McKay Creek from the reservoir spillway to the Pendleton city limits to tell them to be ready to evacuate if there was flooding. The sheriff’s office reported it made the same announcement to residents on Umatilla River Road along the Umatilla River up to North Fork Campground.

Jill-Marie Gavin with the Confederated Umatilla Journal reported flooding was

happening May 29 on the Umatilla Indian Reservation along Emigrant Road.

The Confederate Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation reported public safety crews were working to sand-bag flood areas and divert water runoff. The tribes temporarily closed several roads, including Montanic and South Market roads.

“Stay safe,” CTUIR urged. “Don’t risk driving through flooded roads.”

The National Weather Service office on May 30 warned local rivers and streams will be fast flowing and cold for several more weeks.

“A mere 6 inches of fast-moving flood water can knock over an adult,” according to the online posting. “It takes just 12 inches of rushing water to carry away most cars and just 2 feet of rushing water can carry away SUVs and trucks. It is never safe to drive or walk into flood waters.”

Rivers in the spring have several common dangers, the NWS reported, including weak and loose banks that can give way. And most rivers still are taking in mountain runoff, so the waters are cold.

DON'T DRINK THE WATER⁽¹⁾

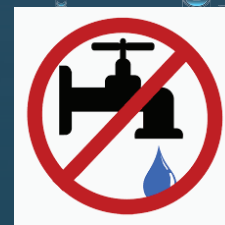
Nitrates in Boardman water *a threat to life*⁽²⁾

Port of Morrow “Reckless”⁽³⁾

Recent testing of private wells reveals dangerously high levels of Nitrates.

Nitrate Poisoning may cause:

- * Birth Defects
- * Miscarriage
- * Colo-rectal Cancer
- * Bladder Cancer
- * Kidney Cancer
- * Anemia
- * Thyroid Dysfunction
- * Among other diseases.



Repairs to contaminated wells and filtration systems can be costly.

Do you or a loved one have a claim?

Please call **1-800-831-9399**

or email mike@worthingtoncaron.com

Know Your Rights

- 1 East Oregonian, Tuesday May 10, 2022
- 2 East Oregonian, Tuesday May 10, 2022 (Emphasis added)
- 3 DEQ, Jan. 11, 2022 (\$1.3M fine)

Attorneys licensed in California. Lawyer Ad. Investigations ongoing.
Worthington & Caron, P.C.* www.WorthingtonCaron.com 1-800-831-9399