

Spring rains put wheat at risk of sprouting, fungus

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

ADAMS — Umatilla County's exceptionally heavy spring rains put at risk what could be a bumper wheat crop. After a nearly disastrous drought last year, the water deficit has not only been made up, but some areas have already suffered from fungus growth.

"There are problems with the moisture," said

wheat rancher Bud Schmidgall, former Athena mayor. "Wheat can get foot rot, and you have to spray. Or it can sprout in the head. In some lower elevations, I've seen fallen down wheat. That's a sign of the fungus."

Growers are applying quite a bit of rust fungicide, Oregon State University soil scientist Don Wysocki noted. He works at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center near Adams.

"When you get a lot of moisture and good yield, it's beneficial to rust," he said. "At this crop stage, growers can't apply fungicide themselves. Some put it on earlier, but this late you have to apply by air, either helicopter or fixed wing airplane."

At a minimum aerial application costs \$14 to \$20, Wysocki said.

"But at today's prices that's only about two bushels of wheat," he observed.

"The return on investment is there."

Christina Hagerty studies cereal pathology at CBRAC. She reported rust is the main battle in high-yielding wheat years.

"So growers with susceptible varieties are making complex economic decisions to apply fungicide," she said. "Luckily, rust has arrived late this season. The later the rust arrives, typically the lower yield loss we see."

The popular soft white winter wheat variety Magic is more susceptible to rust than other strains, Wysocki explained. Many growers are treating their Magic crops with fungicide.

"Magic has yielded well," he said. "With 2-gene Clearfield production system, Magic can use Beyond herbicide. You have that option, if done earlier. It's too late now."

On balance this year has

been a blessing, Wysocki continued.

"Only once or twice in a lifetime have growers seen high prices and high yield," he added. "They don't come along very often in a 40-year career. This is the kind of year in which growers end up retooling. They can afford to buy new equipment and keep it running for a long time."

Implement dealers should do well, Wysocki concluded.

PENDLETON

Merkley gets update on food warehouse

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley was in Pendleton on Friday, June 17, to tour the food bank Community Action Program of East Central Oregon operates and find out more about expanding those efforts.

The CAPECO warehouse serves as a one-stop shop for low-income houses to receive the food that they need and sends goods to other local food banks, but the facility has its limits. CAPECO receives plenty of food from grocery stores and other resources — too much, in fact. The warehouse is not equipped to handle perishable foods and unable to receive food in bulk.

Merkley, a Democrat, secured \$2 million in community-initiated project funding for CAPECO to support the construction of a multi-use facility.

"I'm really glad we could procure funds for a place like this," Merkley said. "Food banks are near and dear to my heart."

CAPECO CEO Paula Hall said the CIP funds are going to be a springboard for the organization.



Antonio Arredondo/East Oregonian

Sen. Jeff Merkley, left, talks with Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock on Friday afternoon, June 17, 2022, at the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon food warehouse in Pendleton.

"It's something that I hope our community will be proud of and something for generations to come," she said.

With the closing of Pendleton's senior center, Hall said she sees the organization opening its doors to Pendleton's senior population as well. The warehouse at this time has no availability for such hopes.

Hall said CAPECO is looking at two lots in the Pendleton area to build a new warehouse. Moving the location would save the program \$25,000 a year and allow for more events.

"We really want the new

building to be used by the community, not just for our needs," Hall said.

The food center also will serve as a regional food bank, a communal place for seniors to have meals, a site to prepare home-delivered meals for homebound seniors and people with disabilities and more.

"Depending on the footprint we have," Hall said, "we could even have an outdoor garden for kids to see the plants grow and get their hands on them."

Other possibilities for the new location include kitchens for meals, washing stations

for perishables and more storage for fresh and frozen food.

Merkley expressed his gratitude for Hall and her team's work. After the tour, he presented Hall with a flag flown at the U.S. Capitol as thanks for her work toward eliminating and destigmatizing hunger.

"You don't have to know anything about hunger, you don't even have to experience hunger," Hall said. "But you can be part of the solution."

Merkley on this swing through Eastern Oregon began the day at the Eastern Oregon Economic Summit in Hermiston, then in the early afternoon toured Echo's potable water system. The senator secured \$450,000 for the Echo as another community-initiated project through the fiscal year 2022 federal government funding package.

The funding will allow the city to replace aging service connections and update from old paper maps to a GIS digital mapping system of the new connections and corresponding valves. This modernized mapping will allow Echo to manage the system better and create an accurate digital system for all future related maintenance work, which will reduce the financial burden on Echo residents.

Echo's lack of burning laws raises red flags for one vocal resident

By YASSER MARTE
East Oregonian

ECHO — Echo lacks local laws enforcing open burning, and that has raised the concerns of resident Bobby Jo Schultz.

"In a desert area out here as dry as it gets, it is irresponsible to light a burn barrel and walk off and leave it," she said while discussing how her neighbor's burn barrels of wood in their yard. "I'm concerned that the fire will spark and spread."

Schultz brought her complaint to city officials and the city council, but without local laws proscribing the do's and don'ts of open burning, there is little for officials to do. Still, the Echo Rural Fire Protection District recommends the town's residents follow fire safety guidelines from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

"So there is not a 'no burn season,' so a person is able to burn 365 days a year," Echo Fire Chief Delbert Gehrke said. "Technically you can burn legally as long as you follow DEQ guidelines."

The Umatilla County Department of Land Use Planning oversees open and agricultural burning for county areas. Gina Miller, the county code enforcement coordinator, said local fire districts and cities follow a protocol that defers to both the county and DEQ guidelines. She said the county uses meteorological information to determine each day at 6 a.m. if burning is OK.

"We are sending out alerts for 'no burn' days on our webpage, we have phone lines people can call and for agriculturists we send out a mass emergency text we call a 'red flag,' if certain weather conditions call for it," Miller said.

The county office also relies on readings of the particulate matter in the air to determine pollutant levels. These readings are vital for residents who suffer respiratory issues.

According to Miller, the effects of air quality on public health go

into considering a county-wide burn ban. Certain days involving large public events such as the Pendleton Round-Up, Pendleton Whisky Music Fest and the Walla Walla County Fair would require a county-wide ban on open burning as well.

As the summer nears and wildfire season commences in the Pacific Northwest, Umatilla County Code Enforcement works to help spread awareness to residents.

"This summer we will add a feature to give out health information to caution those with lung problems and asthma," Miller said. "We don't have the link up yet, but it'll be up soon on the umatilla-county.gov website."

Because Echo is in a fire district, if someone were reported burning illegal material such as tires, petroleum, rubber, plastic, wet garbage or industrial waste, the fire department could put out the fire.

But the fire district relies on voluntary firefighters, and voluntary firefighters are unable to issue citations or fines for such violations, Gehrke explained. However, the Stanfield Police Department, which provides law enforcement services to Echo, should be able to hand out citations and court summons for these nuisances, if the situation calls for it. The fire district also can call upon a state fire marshal if the circumstances involve serious criminal matters, such as arson.

"We don't enforce anything, we just put out fires. Enforcing codes and ordinances is up to the city," Gehrke said.

Echo City Administrator David Slaght said the city looks into complaints, and he has handed out code enforcement violations for weeds, garbage and more. But during his time as city administrator, he has not yet come across a reason to hand out any fire infractions.

Gehrke was on that same page.

"We are fine as it currently stands," Gehrke said. "No complaints."

6 of top 10 dirtiest power plants in Oregon are local

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Two Oregon environmental groups on Thursday, June 16, posted their findings for Oregon most climate-polluting power plants, and the results look grim for plants in Umatilla and Morrow counties — at least for now.

Six of the top 10 dirtiest plants in the entire state are in the two counties, according to research from the Environment Oregon Research & Policy Center and Oregon State Public Interest Research Group Foundation.

"Climate change is here and already impacting lives," said Celeste Meiffren-Swango, state director at Environment Oregon. "We need to do everything we can to move away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy."

That action already has taken place in Boardman, where Portland General Electric Co. in 2021 dismantled the final coal-powered plant in the state. The pair of environmental groups rated it the dirtiest plant in Oregon in 2020.

The two sister groups looked at data from the Envi-



Michael Durham/Contributed Photo, File

Portland General Electric's Carty Generating Station in Boardman came in at No. 3 on a list Thursday, June 16, 2022, detailing Oregon's top 10 climate-polluting power plants.

ronment Protection Agency's eGRID, a comprehensive database that shows the environmental characteristics of nearly all of the nation's power plants.

According to the report, Oregon's top 10 most climate-polluting plants in 2020 were responsible for 98.4% of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from the power sector while generating 32.2% of total electricity. The total emissions of Oregon's top 10 power plants are 9.7 million metric tons, which is equivalent to 2 million cars on the road for a year.

While none of Oregon's power plants fell in the top 100 dirtiest in the country, this doesn't mean the power plants were in the clear. The top operating plant, Calpine Corporation's Hermiston Power Plant in Hermiston, produces more than 1.56 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

With coal plants out of the picture, next up could be natural gas plants. These plants, mostly operated by Portland General Electric, also are changing.

"Our natural gas plants constitute a part of our gener-

ation fleet that is changing, and will continue to do so," Allison Dobscha, a spokesperson for PGE, said. "These plants will serve a different purpose in the future than they do today, serving more as capacity resources that can provide flexibility and reliability when needed."

The remaining nine plants on the list use methane gas, and the proposed shift away from gas to cleaner energy is something Meiffren-Swango is hopeful for.

"This list underscores how methane is an extremely potent gas," the Environment Oregon director said. "We will figure out better ways to power our lives before it's too late."

With Oregon Gov. Kate Brown signing a clean energy bill that promises 100% renewable energy for electricity by 2040, Meiffren-Swango said she believes that change is coming, and soon.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Milton-Freewater raises waste removal rates

MILTON-FREEWATER — Milton-Freewater City Council at its meeting June 13 voted unanimously to raise rates for garbage and waste removal services by 10% for city residents.

New rates will take effect July 1, and customers will see the increases on their billing statements in mid-July or early August.

City Manager Linda Hall said the rate hikes are needed due to increased costs for fuel, tires,

landfill permits and landfill maintenance.

Milton-Freewater customers pay \$14.65 per month, and the new rate will bump that up to \$16.12.

"The extra \$1.47 a month that citizens will pay will cover a portion of the costs to provide the service," Hall said.

Despite the increase, Milton-Freewater rates are less expensive than other nearby cities.

The city of College Place's monthly waste removal fee is \$23.35, and Walla Walla's is \$25.80.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

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