

Closed for 15 years, Prairie Wood Products is up and running again

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

PRAIRIE CITY — Prairie City residents woke up last week to a sound they had not heard in years.

A working sawmill. The Prairie Wood Products sawmill officially reopened on July 11 for its first full day of operations.

The D.R. Johnson Lumber Co. announced last month that it intended to reopen the mill, which was shuttered 15 years ago. To staff the operation, the company hosted a two-day job fair at Chester's Thriftway in John Day.

Plant manager Tom Moore said the mill hired roughly 25 people. He said once the planer is up and running, he would be looking to hire between 15 and 20 more employees.

Prairie Wood Products President Jodi Westbrooks said the company was happy to be able to hire the staff needed to get the mill running again.

"They are working hard," she said. "I've been in the mill watching them go as hard as they can."

Westbrooks said there are some kinks the sawmill has to work out with the old equipment. But all in all, she said, things are running smoothly at the mill.

"It is going," she said,



Dustin Wright of John Day, part of the gang edger crew at Prairie Wood Products, shortens a saw blade July 14, 2022. Prairie Wood Products in John Day officially reopened July 11.

"and we are thrilled."

Moore, who used to work for the D.R. Johnson-owned Grant Western sawmill in John Day, told the Blue Mountain Eagle the mill's mothballed cogeneration plant has some issues that must be worked through before it can be fired up again.

Craig Trulock, Malheur National Forest supervisor, told the newspaper last month the cogeneration plant could provide a way to remove biomass from the

forest. Currently, he said, there is no market for that material.

The biomass, which consists of small logs, branches and bushes that would otherwise get burned up in the forest or left on the ground, could be ground and burned in the cogeneration plant to generate heat and electricity, Trulock said.

Westbrooks said the company plans to get its timber supply from a combination of public and private lands and will purchase logs

from independent loggers and landowners.

Brett Morris, the owner of Morris Forestry, said in a July 15 interview that he already had delivered nine loads of logs to the sawmill. "(Prairie Wood) is really cranking up production," he said.

Morris said he works as an independent logger in the spring, but during fire season he works as a wild-land firefighter with his logging equipment, which makes him good money.

With Prairie Wood open, he said he would be running his logging company during fire season.

In the long term, he said running his business would be better for him and his family.

"My family will appreciate that I won't be gone for two to three months in the summertime," Morris said.

Morris said his company had been about a month behind schedule with the late spring rain, but things are going well now.

He said if the mill had not been open in Prairie City, he would have had to haul logs to Elgin or Pilot Rock for milling. With rising fuel costs, there would have been a good chance he would not have been able to operate.

"My little company couldn't afford to haul (logs) that far with the way fuel is right now."

Having the mill open benefits local private landowners with respect to fuel reduction and removing wildfire risks, Morris added.

While Prairie Wood hopes to collaborate with the Malheur National Forest and other public agencies on forest restoration projects, Moore said the mill has primarily been working with private landowners so far.

He said the company hopes to build other relation-

ships going forward.

Moore said he could not say how many board feet of timber the mill plans to process because it is in its "infancy stages."

Nonetheless, Moore — who worked for Malheur Lumber before coming to Prairie Wood Products — said that reopening the mill has been a great feeling.

"It is not every day," he said, "that you get to bring something back from the dead."

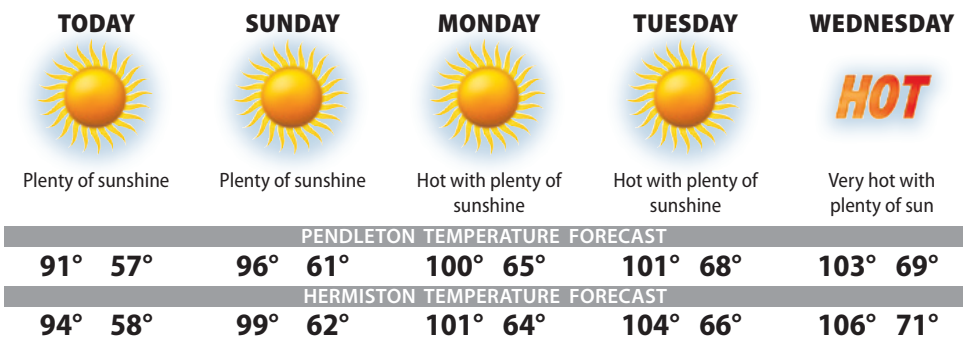
The Prairie City mill was purchased by the D.R. Johnson Lumber Co. in 1976. Two years later, the family-owned company added a stud mill and planer. Then, in the late 1980s, the company installed a cogeneration power plant.

The sawmill, which operated successfully in Prairie City for more than 30 years and employed upwards of 100 people who worked two different shifts, shuttered in 2008 amid a housing market crash that led to a lack of available sawlogs.

D.R. Johnson restarted the mill in early 2009 but shut it down permanently by the end of the year. The cleanup of the mill, which sits at the west end of Prairie City, concluded in 2019.

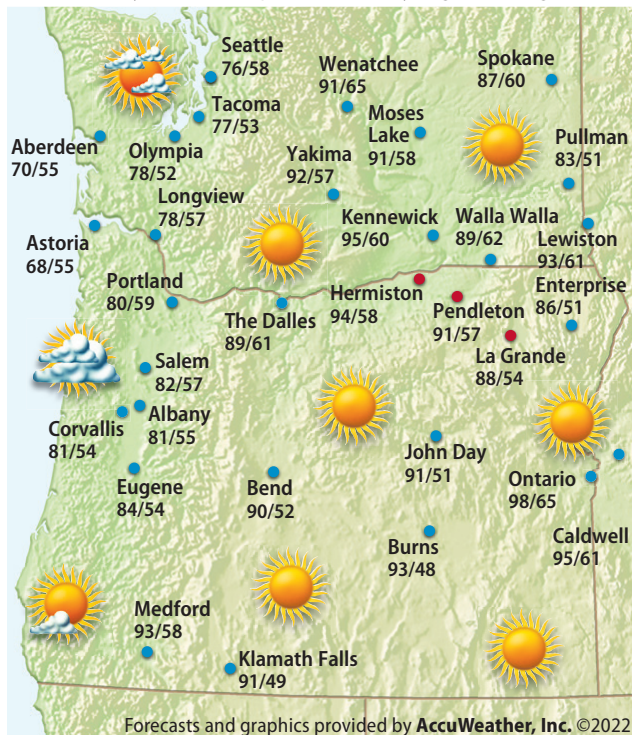
Since then, much of the mill equipment has remained on site, along with the co-gen plant.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



ALMANAC

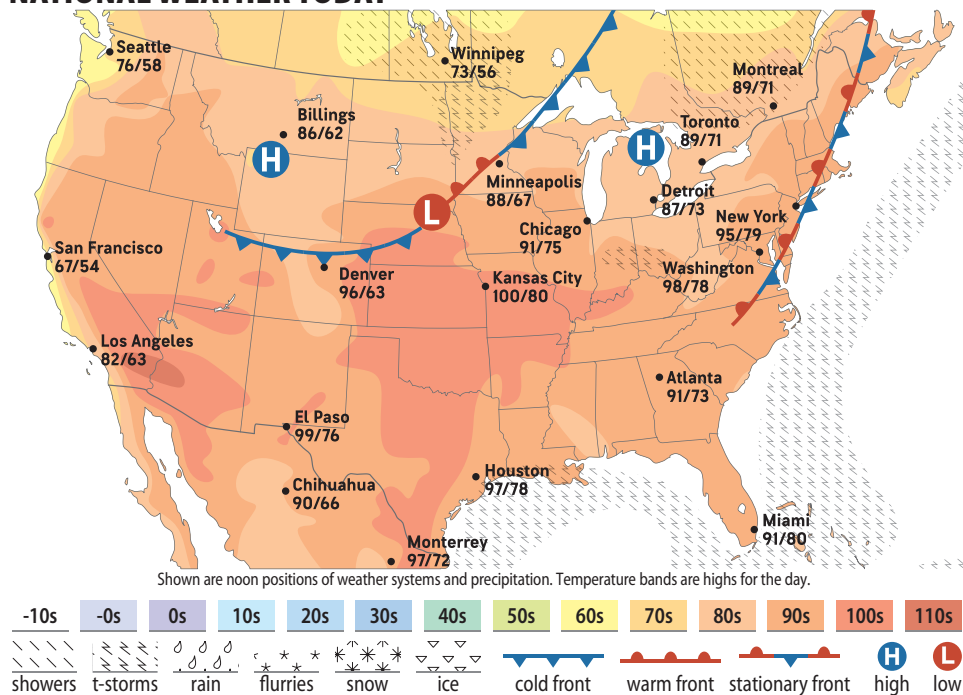
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. Fri.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Friday	90°	69°
Normals	91°	60°
Records	111° (1905)	41° (1897)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.31"	
Normal month to date	0.27"	
Year to date	11.13"	
Last year to date	4.32"	
Normal year to date	8.22"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. Fri.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Friday	89°	70°
Normals	95°	60°
Records	108° (1938)	43° (1982)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.03"	
Normal month to date	0.09"	
Year to date	7.48"	
Last year to date	2.46"	
Normal year to date	5.11"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Sun.	
Boardman	WSW 7-14	SW 4-8
Pendleton	W 7-14	NNW 6-12
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	5:28 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	8:34 p.m.	
Moonrise today	1:13 a.m.	
Moonset today	5:03 p.m.	

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 116° in Needles, Calif. Low 32° in Afton, Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



ODF fire managers raise restrictions

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Rising fire danger, due to drier and warmer conditions, is prompting the Oregon Department of Forestry to increase public use restrictions in Northeast Oregon.

The added public use restrictions are intended to prevent or minimize human-caused wildfires and to protect natural resources and public health and safety.

"This year has been unique in the sense that we are seeing large fires around the region several weeks ahead of when we would normally expect them. With the thunderstorms that have been hitting the area, we must consider our options in reducing the number of preventable fires," said Steve Meyer, Baker City wildland fire supervisor.

Public use restrictions are being amped up because measurements that fire managers use to estimate seasonal fire severity are indicating extreme fire conditions across the region, according to an Oregon Department of

Forestry press release.

The public use restrictions now in place include the following fire prevention measures:

- Open fires are prohibited, including campfires, charcoal fires, cooking fires and warming fires.
- Portable cooking stoves using liquefied or bottled fuels are allowed. Propane fire pits are not allowed.
- Debris burning is prohibited, including the use of burn barrels.
- Nonindustrial chainsaw use is prohibited.
- Smoking is prohibited while traveling, except in vehicles on improved roads, in boats on the water, or at a cleared area free of flammable vegetation.
- The use of motor vehicles, including motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles is prohibited except on improved roads, except in the commercial culture and harvest of agricultural crops.
- Possession of the following firefighting equipment is required while traveling, except on state highways, county roads and driveways:

one shovel and one gallon of water or one 2½ pound fire extinguisher.

- The cutting, grinding and welding of metal is prohibited.
 - The mowing of dried and cured grass with power driven equipment is prohibited.
 - The use of fireworks is prohibited.
 - The use of exploding targets is prohibited, as is the use of tracer ammunition or any bullet with a pyrotechnic charge in its base.
 - Any electric fence controller in use must be: listed by a nationally recognized testing laboratory or be certified by the Department of Consumer Business Services; and operated in compliance with manufacturer's instructions.
- The Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests, as well as Bureau of Land Management lands are currently under public use restrictions in Northeast Oregon. Fire restrictions for these forestlands in Northeast Oregon can be found at www.bmidc.org.

IN BRIEF

Young La Grande mother suffers sudden cardiac arrest

LA GRANDE — A La Grande woman, Vanessa Durfee, 26, the daughter of Sheree Henderson and Ed Durfee of Elgin, suffered a sudden cardiac arrest at her residence on Sunday, July 17.

Her 6-year-old daughter found her unresponsive and alerted Vanessa's partner, Troy Jones, who immediately called 9-1-1 for emergency medical assistance. According to her aunt, Sandra Roda, Durfee was intubated and admitted July 17 to the intensive care unit at Grande Ronde Hospital, where she has undergone tests to determine the cause of her condition. To date no medical reason can be ascertained.

"The doctors have done all the testing they can do, and there's no explained reason why Vanessa had a sudden cardiac arrest," Roda

said. "They performed a drug screening, and it was negative, so there's no known reason for this. We're also unsure how long she was without oxygen. She might have gone without oxygen for up to 20 minutes. Right now, she's sedated and has some major brain swelling due to the time she was without oxygen."

The physicians will be reevaluating Durfee's condition on July 23, said Roda, who works as a neurological trauma nurse in ICU at the Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane.

Durfee is a graduate of Elgin High School and is currently a stay-at-home mother of two daughters, ages 6 and 1. The family has established a GoFundMe account to help the young family with the costs related to her medical emergency and her absence from home.

"As a long-time resident of the community, anything the community can give her would be extremely beneficial," Roda 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.

EAST OREGONIAN
— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays

EastOregonian.com

In the App Store:
EO **EO**
E-EDITION

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.
Copyright © 2022, EO Media Group

Circulation Dept.
For mail delivery, online access, vacation stops or delivery concerns call 800-781-3214

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Local home delivery	Savings (cover price)
EZPay	\$10.75/month	50 percent
52 weeks	\$135	42 percent
26 weeks	\$71	39 percent
13 weeks	\$37	36 percent

Single copy price:
\$1.50 Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

ADVERTISING

Regional Sales Director (Eastside) EO Media Group:
• Karrine Brogotti
541-963-3161 • kbrogotti@eomediagroup.com

Multimedia Consultants:
• Angel Aguilar
541-564-4531 • aaguilar@hermistonherald.com
• Melissa Barnes
541-966-0827 • mbarnes@eastoregonian.com
• Audra Workman
541-564-4538 • aworkman@eastoregonian.com

Business Office
• Dayle Stinson
541-966-0824 • dstinson@eastoregonian.com

Classified & Legal Advertising
Classified advertising: 541-564-4538
Legal advertising: 541-966-0824
classifieds@eastoregonian.com or legals@eastoregonian.com

NEWS
• To submit news tips and press releases: call 541-966-0818 or email news@eastoregonian.com
• To submit community events, calendar items, engagements, weddings and anniversaries: email news@eastoregonian.com, call 541-966-0818 or visit eastoregonian.com/community/announcements.
• To submit sports or outdoors information or tips, email sports@eastoregonian.com.

COMMERCIAL PRINTING
Commercial Print Manager: Holly Rouska
541-617-7839 • hrouska@eomediagroup.com