

AND SO IT BEGINS

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

A whole lot of us have endured what seems a chilly, wet spring and a July that so far has felt all-too-little like summer. That first cutting of hay was dismal and difficult, held hostage by drizzly and unpredicted rains. While that first cutting is always a challenge to put up, this year vacillated between frustrating and heartbreaking. Long-time stockman Mack Birkmaier bemoaned June weather. “We just can’t get the hay in,” he said. “I don’t quite remember it ever being this bad.”

You don’t have to be a rancher or farmer to have been stricken with depression over the balky arrival of summer. Eighty degrees—the gold standard for summer temperatures to many here — seemed unattainable. Hikers donned—and then shed — rain gear at a record pace. On some days it seemed you got wetter sitting on the beach at Wallowa Lake than you did if you actually went into the water. April and May were especially generous with precipitation, uncorking nearly twice the rainfall of 2018, according to our very own josephoregonweather.com. Temperatures may have seemed cool amid all this drip-ness, but in fact, they hovered around the 30-year average for most of the spring and early summer.

But as summer rounds the first turn and heads into Chief Joseph Days, things are changing. This past weekend saw the first lightning-besotted thunderstorms of the summer—

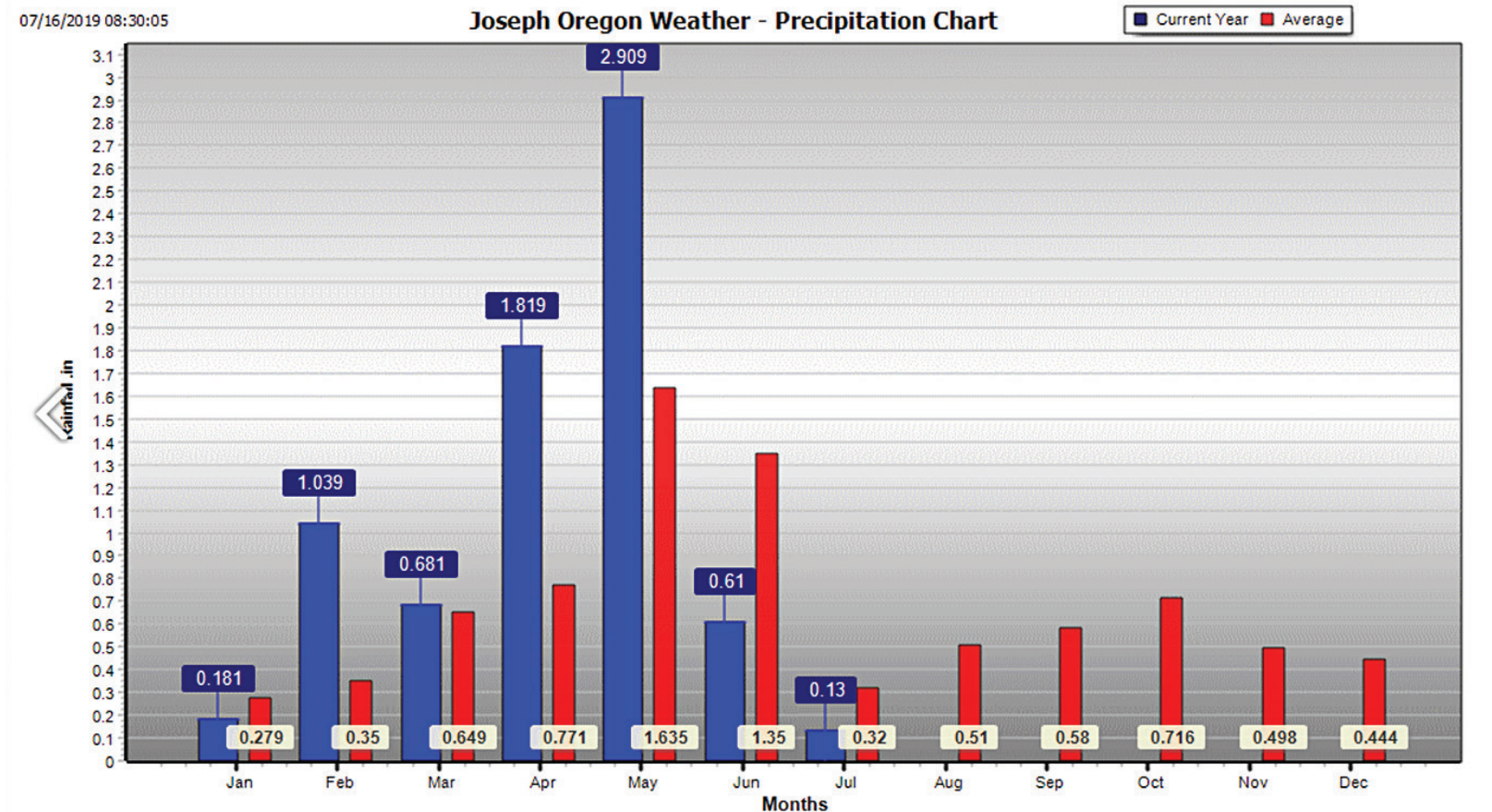
A thumb in the dike

Our leaky southern border will not be fixed with a stronger or higher or more technologically sophisticated wall. The fact is that the whole big world is undergoing a period of mass migrations—people are leaving farms and cities across the globe for other places in their own countries or for other countries. And that includes our good old US of A, where seawater is gulping up parts of the southeast and people are being forced to move to higher ground, where fire and flood sent residents scurrying from Paradise in Northern California last year and high temperatures and fires are disturbing chunks of Southern California this year.

In the public conversations about our southern border crisis, there is far too little talk about the reasons for mass migration. When people are hungry and thirsty, too hot or too cold without protection, or plagued by violence and corruption, they move. Even when the odds of successful migration are low, they move. In Syria, where the pre-war population was 22 million, six and a half million have left the country, almost four million are in Turkey alone! An additional six million are “internally displaced,” i.e. not in their original towns, cities, and farms. Over a million have tried to return—and their situation is not good.

War displaces people—our last major world migration crisis was during and after World War II. And violence short of war is a major factor in world migration today. Over two million have left South Sudan, which is in often violent political upheaval, and over a million have left Myanmar, where religious violence is a major cause.

In India, where farming and



Joseph's precipitation for April and May, 2019 was almost double the amounts received in 2018.

with the exception of the raging early-bird storm in April. Their more than 100 strikes, total for the weekend’s celestial fireworks, sparked small fires near Lostine and Flora. They abolished the Chieftain’s access to the Internet for an entire day. And they are the harbingers of things likely to come.

The weather for the coming week is forecast to be warm, venturing into the high 80s by Monday and Tuesday. No rain. A pattern typical of summer. The high eighty’s in fact are a pretty normal to cool temperature for Joseph in late July. Back in 1949 temperatures reached into the high 90’s and flirted with 100 during Chief Joseph Days. As then-court-member Marian Birkmaier remembered—“It was just so hot during the day that

sometimes you almost couldn’t breathe.” Fact is The National Weather Service’s three month forecast predicts a 50 to 60 percent chance of warmer than normal temperatures across the northwest, with below normal precipitation for July, August, and September. Below normal precipitation here is not very much.

We all know that as temperatures climb and forests and grasslands dry out, the threat of wildfire increases exponentially. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) has issued a tempered warning for the inland northwest, including Wallowa County:

“The above average precipitation expected over the Rocky Mountains and Great Basin may extend into eastern Oregon and Washington. West of the Cascades, especially in

Washington, the most likely scenario favors less summer rain than usual.

At the end of June, fire danger indices have not stayed at levels capable of supporting large fires in timber. With warmer than average temperatures expected in July, fire danger will rise and will likely quickly achieve values required for large costly fires during the first 10 days of the month. Instances of large fires will likely depend on concentration of lightning storms.”

We might also add ‘and on the caution or fecklessness of humans in the back-country.’ We can’t control either of those factors, unfortunately.

And so it’s time to take a deep seat in the saddle and hold tight to the lead rope. Nature is about to open the arena chute’s gate to summer. We have many

forested areas that are overstocked and highly flammable, some of which, including the Lostine Corridor and the forests above Alder Slope, are chock full of grand fir that are dying from the higher spikes in summer temperatures during the past century, according to OSU Extension Forester John Punches.

Let’s hope that this summer, the Wallowas remain a clearly visible part of our landscape, rather than a range obscured by smoke. And let’s also ensure we avoid being culpable for ignition, whether it’s care with campfires and hot exhaust pipes or thinning whatever portion of the woods we might oversee.

The lightning, however, is something we just have to watch in awe, and with crossed fingers.



Rich Wandschneider

drinking have always depended on monsoon rains, erratic weather has left entire cities dry for months. In the New York Times today, we learn that “Chennai [a city of 8 million] went without rain for 200 days. As winter passed into spring and the temperature rose to 108° F, its four water reservoirs turned into puddles of cracked mud... On June 20, the delayed summer monsoon arrived as a disappointing light shower.” People are dependent on water trucks from outside—or they move! And, according to the Times report, “These water crises are now global and perennial [in] cities from Cape Town to Mexico City to São Paulo, Brazil. Nearly half of the human population is living with water scarcity, inhabiting places unable to fully meet their drinking, cooking and sanitation needs.”

My relatives in Southern California are banking on desalinization plants; my son in Phoenix wonders when hotter will be too much. In other words, in our own country the changes in water, fire, and weather are moving people. And when they flee places like California, Arizona, and Texas, they’ll be looking for water and green grass. If Oregon fires don’t scare them off, housing prices here will continue to fly high too.

Yet, the President and many in our country see the influx from Mexico and Central America as our major migration problem. There too, drought is playing a role, and a dis-

ease in coffee is causing economic havoc. But the gang activity in Central America and the drug cartels in Mexico get the most mention at our southern border.

And there too, the first thing is to look at the root causes—drugs, violence, climate, agriculture, water, etc. and then to look for ways to address them. The President of Mexico, Mr. López Obrador, is calling for “a new Marshall Plan,” in Central America, with a \$30 billion initiative to invest in the region and support migrants in Mexico. Mexico has already committed \$30 million to a reforestation project in El Salvador, which will plant over 100,000 acres of trees and create 20,000 jobs. (Meanwhile, the US has cut our aid to these places.)

And we might look to curbing some of OUR exports to Mexico and Central America. American guns—exported legally and smuggled—are involved in half the homicides in Mexico, which leads the world in that ignoble category. And I remember reading years ago that chemicals used in creating the cocaine that American drug users want is exported wholesale and without restriction to manufacturers in Mexico and Central America. Finally, while curbing our own exports of these dangerous products, we might look at curbing our appetites for the drugs that cross the border this way and fuel the violence and displacement their manufacture breeds.

Building a wall is like throwing a handful of sandbags in front of a flooding river, or putting a finger in a dike. There are better ways to spend our money—and to help manage a crisis that extends from the Turkey-Syrian border to borders between Mexico and the US and California and Oregon.

Legality of walk-out fines questioned

By Aubrey Wieber and Claire Withycombe
Oregon Capital Bureau

When Republican senators fled the state in June to avoid voting on controversial legislation, they were gone for nine days.

They drove or flew out of state, stayed in hotels or cabins, and otherwise lived out of sight.

Most went to Idaho, though Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, told the Oregon Capital Bureau he was in Texas. A spokesman for Sen. Dennis Linthicum, R-Klamath Falls, said he was on the East Coast attending a conservative conference.

Some legislators and lobbyists remaining in the Capitol speculated that the 11 senators would tap their political campaign accounts to cover their travel costs.

That doesn’t appear to be the case.

And they also so far haven’t faced the \$500-a-day fines threatened by Senate Democrats that would likely total \$3,500 for each. Senate President Peter Courtney’s staff said Friday he still intended to bill the absent senators, but shared no firm plan for doing so.

Senate Republican spokeswoman Kate Gillem said the threat of fines now “looks like a bluff.”

Sen. Herman Baertschiger, the Senate Republican leader, questioned the legality of imposing fines. He said outside attorneys have been hired to look into it.

“I have a feeling this is going

to get complicated,” Baertschiger said.

There was talk about the fines being deducted from senators’ pay.

“The fines shall be collected by forfeiture of any sum that becomes due and payable to the absent member, including salary and per diem,” Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said on the Senate floor June 20.

But now Senate Democrat leaders say they will send invoices.

The Oregon Capital Bureau reached out to the 11 senators by email and phone, and five responded: Baertschiger, and Sens. Cliff Bentz, Alan Olsen, Bill Hansell and Kim Thatcher.

Bentz said, if he ever gets a bill, he will decide what to do. Olsen said, if he gets one, he’s not paying it.

When the Legislature is in session, lawmakers receive \$149 a day for living expenses. The traveling Republicans still collected that money while they were absent, according to Legislative Administration.

All said they used their own money to pay for travel and confirmed they haven’t been fined yet.

Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, did voluntarily pay \$3,500 in fines and said he did so to set up a legal challenge to such punishment.

Baertschiger said he never advised the caucus to use personal funds but believes each senator did so on their own.

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