

Regional bridge projects getting started

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Oregon Department of Transportation is launching a bridge renovation and building drive that will restore six spans in Union and Baker counties and replace another in Wallowa County.

Work is now starting on three of the projects — two in La Grande and one in Wallowa County.

The two La Grande spans are the North Second Street bridge about 250 yards southeast of the Union County Fairgrounds, and McAlister Lane Bridge near the Flying J Travel Center truck stop. Both bridges are over Interstate 84.

Work on the North Second Street bridge started Monday, March 21, and is expected to be completed by the end of July, said ODOT spokesperson Tom Strandberg. The bridge will be closed to motorized traffic until the work is finished but bicyclists and pedestrians, including those with disabilities, will be allowed access through the work zone.

Crews working at the North Second Street site will upgrade bridge rails to current standards, repair and seal deck surfaces, and perform other repairs to keep structures safe and in good condition.

Work on the bridge will not affect traffic on Interstate 84, which runs under the span. ODOT will stage a detour around the work zone.

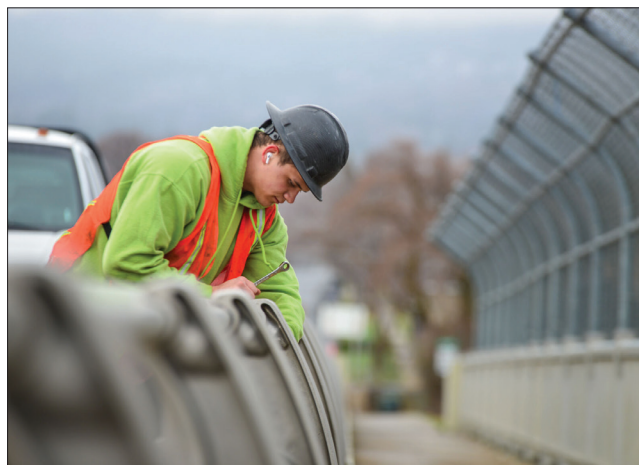
Crews contracted by ODOT began work at the McAlister Lane Bridge over I-84 on March 14. Containment devices were installed to prevent debris from the project from falling to I-84. There will be occasional traffic delays at this site through June when work should be finished, Strandberg said.

Work that will be done later includes the removal and replacement of the existing bridge railing with



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Contractors work on the 2nd Street bridge, La Grande, which crosses over the Grande Ronde River and Interstate 84 on Monday, March 21, 2022. The Oregon Department of Transportation is launching several bridge renovation projects that will take place over the summer. Three projects are currently underway, with two in La Grande and one in Wallowa County.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Joshua Thompson works on removing the railing along 2nd Street, La Grande on the the bridge the crosses over the Grande Ronde River and Interstate 84 on Monday, March 21, 2022.

a new one that meets current vehicular crash standards, the installation of new protective screening and sealing the existing bridge deck to extend the life of the surface.

The work scheduled for Wallowa County will involve the replacement of the Bear Creek Bridge on Highway 82 near Wallowa. Removal of vegetation at the site to allow for bridge building started March 14.

“Basically, we will be

replacing the bridge over the Wallowa River just to the north of the town of Wallowa,” Strandberg said.

The narrow bridge will replace an 80-year-old span that requires upgrades and repairs. The bridge will continue to be used until the new span is completed.

Freeze-thaw cycles have damaged concrete railings, sidewalk and other portions of it, said Vicki Moles, an ODOT commu-

nity affairs specialist.

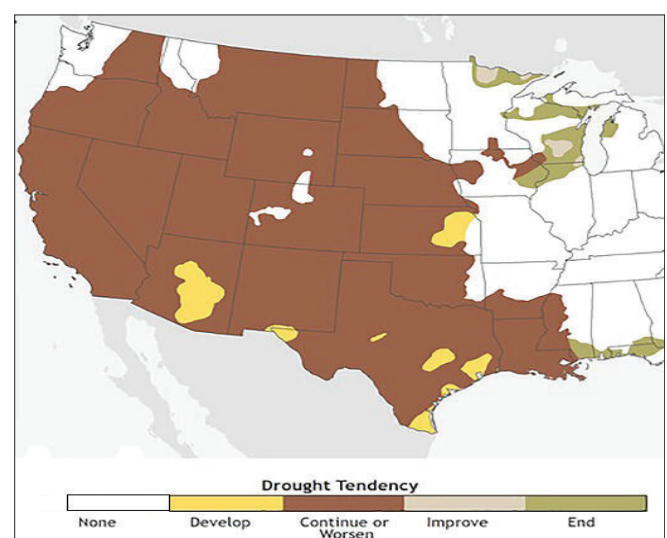
“Erosion and debris jeopardize the bridge’s foundations,” Moles said.

Strandberg said that unless the old bridge is replaced there is a good chance that it would eventually have to be closed for repairs, something that would cause a major disruption for those traveling to and from northwest Wallowa County.

The new bridge, which will cost \$14.3 million, is expected to be completed by fall 2024.

Other bridge projects to be started this year in Wallowa, Union and Baker counties, all on or adjacent to I-84, include the Upper Perry Bridge, about 5 miles east of La Grande; the on- and off-ramp bridges at Exit 259, 2 miles east of La Grande; and the Highway 86 bridge at Exit 302, just north of Baker City.

All of the seven ODOT projects except for replacement of the Bear Creek Bridge are expected to be completed at least by November, according to ODOT.



NOAA

Drought outlook for spring.

West’s drought is expected to deepen

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicted Thursday, March 17, that drought will worsen in the West this spring. The exceptions include Western Washington, Northwest Oregon and Northern Idaho.

Already, 89% of the West is in drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Drought is expected to persist in most places and return to the one-quarter of Arizona that’s now classified as “abnormally dry.”

The West had a wet December, but has been relatively dry since, according to the monitor, a partnership between federal agencies and the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska.

The snowpacks in many basins in the West have declined and are now below normal, according to the monitor.

Among all Western states, Oregon has the highest percentage of area in “exceptional drought,” the worst classification, at 15%, followed by Nevada with 7.5%.

NOAA’s spring outlook was driven by a La Nina, which is expected to persist through the summer. A

La Nina generally leads to cooler temperatures in the northern U.S. and warmer temperatures in the southern U.S.

Between now and June 30, most of the Lower 48 states will have above-average temperatures, NOAA predicted.

Across the Lower 48, 61% is in drought, the most since 2013. NOAA forecasts that drought will expand in Kansas and the Texas Gulf Coast, as well as Arizona.

Below-average spring temperatures are most likely in the Pacific Northwest. The greatest chances for above-average temperatures are in the Southern Rockies and Southern Plains.

Below-average precipitation is forecast for portions of the Central Great Basin, Southwest, Central and Southern Rockies, and Central and Southern Plains, eastward to the Central Gulf Coast.

Above-average precipitation is most likely in parts of the Great Lakes, Ohio Valley and mid-Atlantic regions.

Drought gripped the nine Western states last spring. The drought covered less territory, 73%, but was more severe, with 23% of the region in “exceptional drought.” This year, the spring begins with 3% of the West in exceptional drought.



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