



137th Year, No. 53

WALLOWA.COM

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

Wallowa County Voices



Mary Welch
Joseph

Mrs. Claus loves the small-town feel of Joseph

JOSEPH — Mary Welch is well-known around Joseph, especially at Christmastime. She's Mrs. Claus during the Jingle Thru Joseph parade.

In fact, it was her marriage to Santa — Dennis Welch — that brought her to Joseph six years ago from John Day. Dennis is the lead of the city's Parks Department there and his bushy white hair and beard make him just right to portray Santa Claus in the parade.

But Mary spends most of the year working as a phlebotomist at Wallowa Memorial Hospital, one who draws blood for lab technicians to analyze. She's been doing that for about three years.

"But I've been accessing veins for 17 years," she said. "I love it."

She recently shared her thoughts about living in Wallowa County.

What's your favorite thing about Wallowa County?

I have a lot of favorite things about the county. I love the lake. I love the small-town feel of living in Joseph.

Are you getting cabin fever yet?

Never. I'm from Northern Wisconsin. The winters here are nothing.

What are you looking forward to once the weather warms?

Taking our boat out.

What do you think of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

It's horrible. I think any crimes against humanity are horrible.

How is the high price of fuel affecting you directly?

It's killing me. I have to drive. It's only 8 miles from my house to the hospital, but I can't really afford gas. It's too much.

What's your advice for people who are thinking about moving here?

Check and see if there's any place to live before coming here, because there aren't many places to rent and if you want to buy, you'd better have a lot of money. I know that's not a very popular thing to say, but it's the truth.

— Bill Bradshaw,
Wallowa County Chieftain

DROUGHT EMERGENCY

Wallowa County still attempting to recover from last year, commissioner says

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Another year of drought was declared by the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners during its meeting Wednesday, April 6.

"We don't have a lot of information other than we're in D4," Nash said, referring to the most-extreme drought condition. The county was listed as D4 all summer until the fall.

"We've been in D3 since, over a good portion of our county," he said, referring to a less-severe designation. "So there is reason enough there to declare drought. We have somewhere between 50% and 70% snowpack in the mountains."

The commissioners issued a drought declaration in May 2021, a full month later than this year.

But the snowpack is only where the moisture comes from to the valley floor.

"Most of our soils, especially in the northern portion of the county, are extremely dry," he said. "Reports vary on watering conditions for livestock from full capacity in the pond storage to not so much. It does vary from site to site throughout the county. The bearing it has, I think, we have some potential wet weather coming. May and June are really the critical times for Wallowa County and so we could be getting ahead of ourselves a little bit, but for where we are right now, 88% of Oregon is in a drought condition."

At this, Nash recommended moving toward a drought declaration.

See Drought, Page A8

Wet spring needed to improve current conditions

By **RONALD BOND**
Wallowa County Chieftain

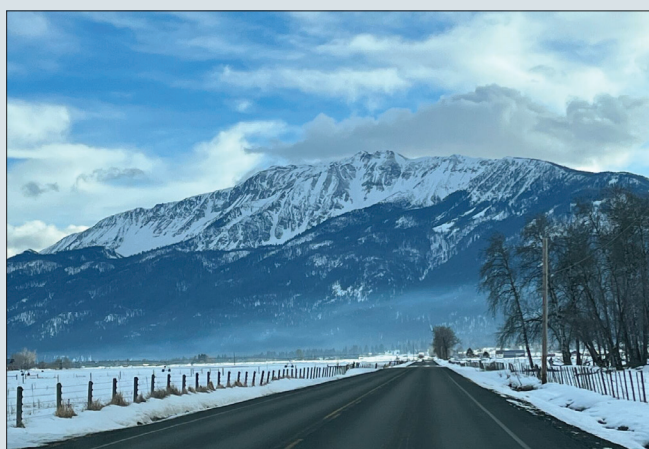
ENTERPRISE — Spring is traditionally the wettest season of the year in Wallowa County.

That is going to have to be the case this year to prevent already-concerning drought conditions from reaching extremes.

Nearly half of Wallowa County, as of last week, is in extreme drought conditions, or D3, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Conditions are such that the county commissioners on April 6 declared a drought emergency, doing so more than a month earlier than they did in 2021.

Drought conditions did not improve much during the winter, according to the Drought Monitor. At its worst last summer, the website showed more than 83% of the county in D3, with a small sliver reaching the worst level, which is D4, or exceptional drought. The conditions were at this level from late August until mid-October.

Even the best conditions were not great, as early winter snows did little to bring improvements. The best conditions were a five-week stretch in January and early February that saw the county's D3 level drop to



Katy Nesbitt/For EO Media Group, File

Weeks of subfreezing temperatures have held snow in the higher elevations of Northeastern Oregon, as is evident in this February 2022 photo of the Wallowa Mountains. Despite reasonable snowpack levels in the high country, however, most of the region is still facing severe drought conditions.

just more than 38%. It has ticked upward since, and as of April 5, when the last recording was taken, was at 49.13%.

The entire county is in at least D1, which is a moderate drought, and 96.3% of it is in D2, a severe drought, or D3. The county has been entirely in the D1 range, or worse, since June of 2021.

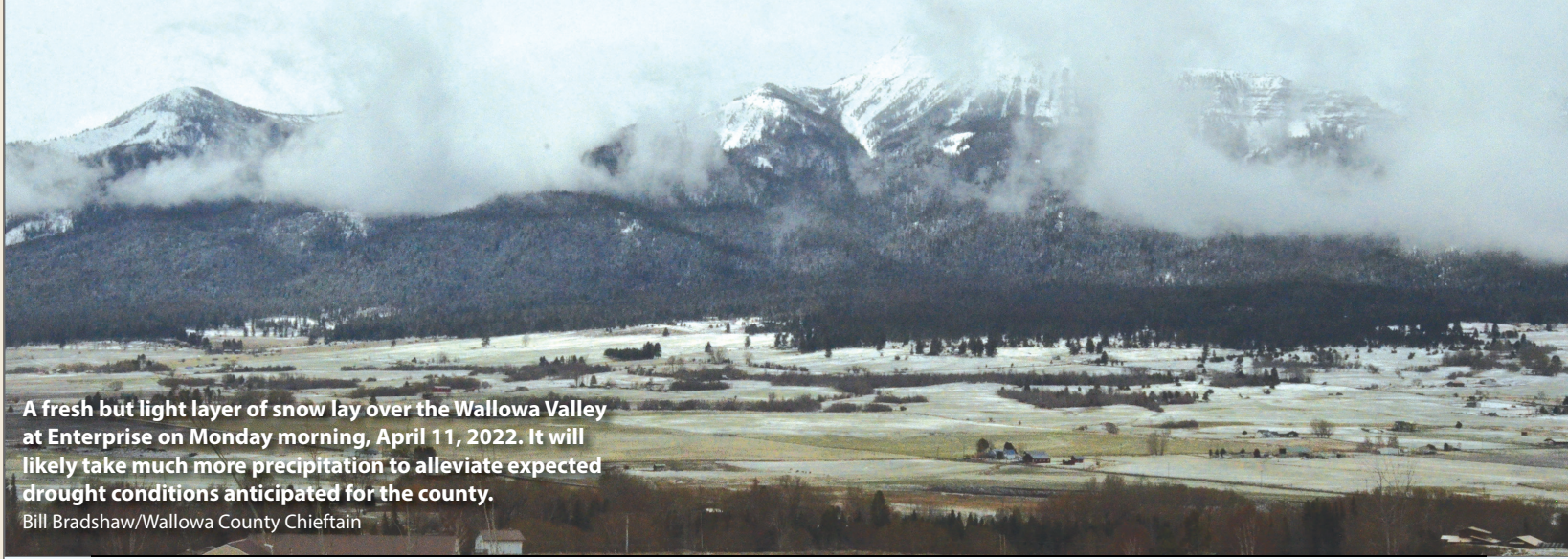
The county dried out quickly last year, as well. In early April 2021, there were no drought conditions, according to the Drought Monitor, and by mid-April, barely a fraction of the county, less than 2%, was even considered abnormally dry, or D0. But by early

May, the entire county was in at least D1, and conditions have not let up since.

Depending on one's location in Wallowa County, April, May and June are the wettest months on average, according to weather.gov. In Joseph, the average amount of rain that comes down at that time is 5.94 inches.

But last year, both April and June were more than an inch below average, with June nearly 1.4 inches below at 0.59 inches (the average is 1.97, making it the wettest month of the year). The website does not have data for May.

See Spring, Page A8



A fresh but light layer of snow lay over the Wallowa Valley at Enterprise on Monday morning, April 11, 2022. It will likely take much more precipitation to alleviate expected drought conditions anticipated for the county.

Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Greater Idaho organizers get OK to gather signatures

Group needs 242 valid signatures by Aug. 10 to get a spot on the Nov. 8 ballot

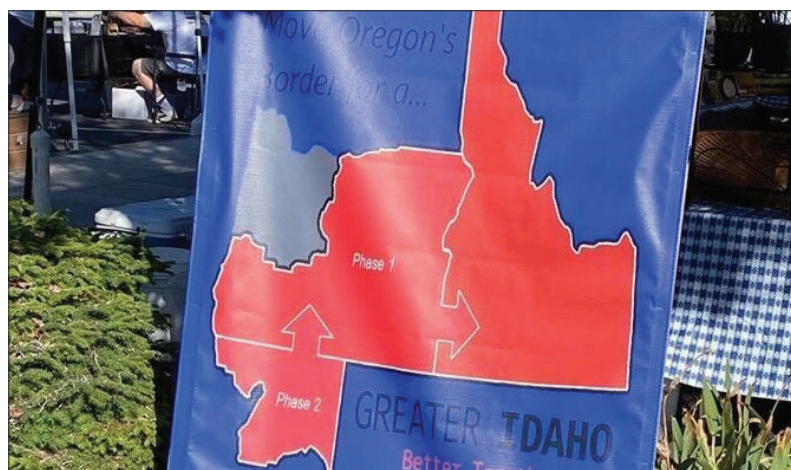
By **RONALD BOND**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — Proponents of the Greater Idaho movement are again making a push to add Wallowa County to the fold.

Organizers announced Thursday, April 7, that Wallowa County Clerk Sandy Lathrop approved circulation of a petition to get the Greater Idaho ballot initiative in front of voters during the November general election.

The group needs to gather 242 valid signatures and submit them to Lathrop by Aug. 10 to garner a spot on the Nov. 8 ballot. According to information on the website greateridaho.org, the group's goal is to gather 295 signatures.

"It's a percentage of the amount of people that actually voted for the (governor race) back in 2018"



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

Proponents for the Greater Idaho movement received the OK last week to begin gathering signatures for a petition they hope to get on the November 2022 ballot.

in the county, said Lathrop, who approved the petition April 3. That year is chosen, she added, because it was the most recent year that a governor was elected to a full term.

The clerk added it's a pretty simple procedure on her end. She received several forms from the petition-seekers, then just had to verify the content.

"I double-check to make sure that everything (is OK) — a lot of I's are dotted, T's are crossed (and that) it conforms to the regulations," she said.

Should the ballot initiative make it to voters and pass in November, it would require the county commissioners to meet twice annually "to discuss the issue of moving the

Oregon/Idaho border to include rural Oregon into Idaho," according to a press release. The measure is almost verbatim the one that Wallowa County residents turned away by just 41 votes in the 2020 general election, as that measure would have required commissioners meet three times a year.

According to text of the petition, the commissioners would be required to meet on the fourth Wednesday of each February and August.

Presently, eight counties have approved Greater Idaho ballot measures: Baker, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Lake, Malheur, Sherman and Union counties, with approval rates ranging from 51% to 74%. Three additional counties — Douglas, Josephine and Klamath counties — are slated to vote in May.

All told, the group is targeting part or all of 22 counties across Eastern and Southern Oregon to become part of the Greater Idaho movement.

See Idaho, Page A8

