

HIV testing ramps up in Eastern Oregon

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — A campaign to raise awareness about HIV testing is underway in Eastern Oregon.

Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living, based in Ontario, has partnered with End HIV Oregon for a new advertising campaign between April and July that will focus on Pendleton, Hermiston, La Grande, Ontario and their surrounding towns.

“We’ve seen an uptick in HIV-positive cases in rural Eastern Oregon, and sexually transmitted disease cases, and so we thought it was just perfect timing,” said Kirt Toombs, CEO and founder of EOCIL. “We’ve been working on this campaign since 2012, and we thought this was a good time to raise awareness.”

According to the press release, national physician groups recommend that everyone be tested for HIV at least once. But most adult Oregonians have never been tested for HIV. People in more rural parts of the state are even less likely than people living in urban areas to be tested in a timely manner, according to the press release.

Toombs said testing and awareness are especially important because of the increase in positive cases in Eastern Oregon.

“It’s almost quadrupled,” he said. “Even though the numbers are low, we’ve gone from three cases to almost, I believe, 12 cases. And so that’s quite a bit, and that’s definitely made us take a look at what needs to happen around raising awareness and making tools available.”

The campaign will utilize radio ads, billboards and newspaper ads to raise awareness about testing. Toombs said testing already is available, but awareness has been lacking.

“We serve 13 counties here in Eastern Oregon and so we have the tools available, but I think what was missing is that we needed to make people aware that they’re available,” he said.

One of the major points of the campaign is to highlight that everyone has an HIV status, whether they’ve been tested or not.

“We all have an HIV status, and we should all be tested for HIV at least once,



Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living/Contributed Photo
Issak Garcia, Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living’s HIV prevention specialist, stocks shelves with home test kits for HIV.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about HIV testing, prevention and treatment in Oregon, visit endhivoregon.org.

if not more frequently,” said Joseph Fiumara, director for Umatilla County Public Health, in a press release. “I’m thrilled to see this campaign launch here to continue building healthier communities in our part of the state.”

EOCIL provides HIV prevention and case management services in Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco and Wheeler counties. Among those counties, 222 people are living with HIV, according to the EOCIL press release.

As well as raising awareness with the intent of improving the number of tests administered in rural Eastern Oregon, Toombs said reducing stigma associated with the virus is paramount, and advances in medicine and technology have made living with the virus easier.

“It’s night and day from 30 years ago,” he said.

“We’re coming up on the anniversary of the passing of Ryan White (Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act), and so it makes us look back at where we were 30 years ago, and where we are now. Science is just amazing, and (with) the medical care that people are getting now — we’re living longer and healthier lives.”



Toombs

Those medical advances include PrEP, a prophylactic drug that reduces HIV transmission rates by 99%, according to medical studies. Therapy drugs HIV-positive individuals use also can completely eliminate the transmission of HIV if the virus is undetectable by tests, through a process called Undetected = Untransmittable.

“We shouldn’t have to fear having an HIV test or getting treatment,” Toombs said, “or having access to prevention tools that are available to us.”



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo

A gray wolf is seen in Oregon.

Wolf killed in NE Oregon

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

RICHLAND — For the third time this year, authorities are investigating a possible case of wolf poaching in rural Northeast Oregon.

On March 25, Oregon State Police were notified that a collared wolf — OR117 from the Cornucopia pack — was likely dead near Richland, about 40 miles east of Baker City.

Troopers estimate the 1-year-old male wolf died sometime March 12 or 13.

An agency spokesman did not release the cause of death, citing the ongoing investigation. The Oregon Wildlife Coalition is offering an \$11,500 reward for information to help OSP catch whoever may be responsible.

“For us, this is definitely very appalling and frustrating to watch,” said Srusti Kamal, senior Northwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife, one of the coalition’s member groups. “It has serious implications for wolf recovery in our state.”

It is the latest in a string of wolf poaching cases that have made headlines in the area.

On Feb. 15, OSP said a collared female wolf was shot and killed near Cove, about 15 miles east of La Grande.

Another collared female

wolf from the Chesnimnus pack also was shot Jan. 8 about six miles southeast of Wallowa.

Between February and March 2021, eight wolves were poisoned near Mount Harris in Union County, including all five members of the Catherine pack. Groups and individuals are offering nearly \$50,000 in reward money for tips leading to an arrest in that case.

Four wolves were illegally killed in 2020, according to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife’s most recent annual wolf report. One incident resulted in no charges after investigators determined the shooter mistook the wolf for a coyote.

Most of Oregon’s 173 known wolves are concentrated in the northeast corner of the state. The ODFW removed gray wolves from the state endangered species list east of highways 395, 78 and 95, though the species is once again federally protected in Western Oregon following a court ruling in February.

Kamal said human-caused wolf mortality is “a pervasive problem that needs addressing in our state.”

In 2020, there were eight wolves poisoned and another eight that were killed legally for habitually preying on livestock, about 10% of the known population at the end of 2019.

Ranchers have long argued they need lethal control of wolves to protect their livestock from chronic attacks. Last year, the ODFW confirmed 87 animals were killed or injured by wolves, including 51 cattle, 28 sheep, six goats and two guard dogs. That was more than double the number in 2020.

To help combat poaching statewide, the Oregon Department of Justice recently hired a special prosecutor, Jay D. Hall, who will focus exclusively on fish and wildlife crimes.

State lawmakers approved \$4.2 million in 2019 to establish the Stop Poaching Campaign. Part of the funding was used to hire Hall, part was used to hire four new OSP Fish and Wildlife troopers and one new sergeant, and part will go toward promoting education and awareness.

Michelle Dennehy, ODFW spokeswoman, said the agency hopes rewards offered through the state’s Turn-In Poachers program, or TIP, will also offer enough incentive for people to come forward with information.

The TIP program is managed jointly by OSP, ODFW and the Oregon Hunters Association. Anyone with information is urged to call the TIP hotline at 1-800-452-7888. Callers can remain anonymous.

VISIT US
ON THE WEB
www.Wallowa.com

Meet our Dentists!

Dr. Joe Pierri, DMD

Dr. Ronald Le, DMD

Dr. Nick Best, DMD

Dental Services Available 5 Days a Week!

Winding Waters Medical, Dental & Mental Health Care
Your Health Care Home for Our Community
541-426-4502

Enterprise Joseph Wallowa

2022

I ♥ Northeast Oregon

PHOTO CONTEST

Visit wallowa.com and enter today!

True Value

BARGAINS OF THE MONTH

While supplies last.

25.99 SALE PRICE
-4.00 MAIL-IN REBATE*
FINAL PRICE
21.99

Roundup®
Gal. Ready-to-Use Extended Control Weed & Grass Killer Plus Weed Preventer
L 161 996 B4

1.1 gal. Ready-to-Use Weed & Grass Killer, 17.99 after \$4 Mail-in Rebate*
L 232 544 1
*Limit 2 per offer. Consumer responsible for taxes.

M-F 8AM-5:30PM • SAT 8AM-5PM • SUN 9AM-3PM

Hurricane Creek Road
Enterprise, Oregon
541-426-3116

WALLOWA COUNTY
GRAIN GROWERS

BEHIND EVERY PROJECT IS A True Value.
Sale Good Thru April 30th