

## Grand Ronde sewage scores in upper levels in drug test

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Want to know how prevalent illicit drug use is in Oregon communities?

University researchers think they know a good place to find the answer — local sewage treatment plants.

On March 4, 2008, 96 municipalities representing 65 percent of Oregon's population agreed to submit single-day samples of their sewage for testing at the University of Washington-Seattle, Oregon State University in Corvallis and McGill University in Montreal.

Researchers tested the samples for three drugs that are excreted by users — cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA (ecstasy).

The one-day snapshot of drug excretion levels in pre-treated sewage found upper levels of meth, ecstasy and cocaine residue in the sample submitted by the Grand Ronde Sanitary District.

"Substantial proportions of both methamphetamine and MDMA are excreted unchanged," the report, which appeared in the journal *Addiction*, stated.

"This work is the first to demonstrate the use of wastewater samples for spatial analyses, a relatively simple and cost-effective approach to measuring community drug use," said University of Washington drug epidemiologist Caleb Banta-Green.

"Current measures on the true

prevalence of drug use are severely limited ... We believe these data have great utility as a population measure of drug use."

Overall, researchers found that cocaine residue in Oregon was significantly higher in urban areas and below the level of detection in some rural areas, but was still found in 80 percent of samples.

Meth residue was ubiquitous in the state, detectable in all 96 municipalities, rural and urban.

And ecstasy was at quantifiable levels in less than 50 percent of the communities tested, and found more often in urban areas than rural.

In Grand Ronde, which has more than 258 hookups to its Sanitary District, the amounts of all three drug residues were in the "upper level." Test results were divided into upper, middle and lower levels.

However, researchers warn, these single-day measurements do not provide a complete measurement of drug excretion for a community or the entire state, and should not be ranked.

For instance, researchers cited that sewage samples were taken on a Tuesday while cocaine use usually peaks on weekends.

"They are comparable only to the degree of relative high, medium or low occurrence (tertiles)," researchers said.

Kevin Dobie, superintendent of the Grand Ronde Sanitary District,

says his wastewater treatment plant receives about 55,000 gallons of sewage a day during the summer and as much as 450,000 gallons during the winter. The increase is attributable to water runoff.

Dobie said he was not surprised that Grand Ronde's sample ranked in the upper levels on all three tests.

"I've been here 16 years," Dobie said. "I know what goes on out there."

The Sanitary District services three churches, two schools, an RV park and the Tribe's Health Clinic and Community Center, as well as the first phase of Chxi Musam Illihi and Elders' rentals (Ilip Tilixam).

"Seventy-four units altogether," said Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority Executive Director Carina Kistler Ginter.

In addition, Grand Meadows' 36 home lots and the Housing Authority office and shop buildings are connected to the Sanitary District.

Spirit Mountain Casino has its own wastewater treatment plant.

However, getting a true picture of Grand Ronde-area drug use, even from sewage, is still as murky as the influent itself.

Tribal member and Tribal Director of Program Operations John Mercier said that some Tribal housing is not connected to the wastewater system and many Grand Ronde households are still on septic systems.

According to the Polk County Sheriff's Office, Grand Ronde accounted for 94 of the county's 237 drug offenses, or 39.6 percent, in 2008. Sixty-four of those 94 originated at Spirit Mountain Casino.

The only other West Valley community to participate in the study was Willamina, which registered lower levels for meth and cocaine, and did not have a quantifiable level of ecstasy in its sewage sample.

Researchers think this new way of gauging a community's overall drug use can have wide-ranging applications, from determining police coverage to public health funding.

"We believe this methodology can dramatically improve measurement of the true level and distribution of a range of illicit drugs," Banta-Green said. "By measuring a community's drug index load, public health officials will have information applicable to a much larger proportion of the total population than existing measures can provide."

"Estimating community drug index loads based on wastewater treatment plant sampling is a promising drug use surveillance tool with potentially diverse applications," the report said.

"Data on drug index loads are of value for planning local drug prevention, intervention and treatment efforts at a much smaller geographic level and with better timeliness than was possible previously." ■

## 'Three Stumps' features rope to swing

SWIMMING continued  
from front page

Lumber gate on a sharp right turn is a good landmark to help find this location. The swimming spot is a rock climb down from the road.

Three Pools is a part of Agency Creek and gets its name from the pools created by the creek's waterfalls flowing into its holes made of rock. Even though there isn't much area for actual swimming, Three Pools is a perfect spot for relaxing because of the hot tub-like bubbles that the creek emits from its fast waters.

The second swimming spot is "St. Johns Falls," which is on the Yamhill River near Andy Riggs Road.

St John's Falls is home to a deep swimming hole and natural rock dam. The rock dam creates the waterfalls that give St John's Falls its name. These waterfalls flow into another deep swimming area.

From the south side of the river's bank are high areas where people can jump and dive into the water. Unlike the forest canopy that blocks the sun from many of Agency Creek's swimming areas, the Yamhill River features many open areas to offer swimmers warm summer sun.

The third swimming spot is on the south shoulder of South Yamhill River Road, about a quarter-mile from the Willamina/Sheridan intersection of highways 18 and 22.

The swimming area is on the

### Red Cross swimming advice

If you plan on paying a visit to a swimming hole in the Grand Ronde area, please remember some of these important swimming tips provided by the American Red Cross:

- Swim with others. Never swim alone. Consider wearing a life jacket.
- Enter the water feet first. Enter the water headfirst only when the area is clearly marked for diving and has no obstructions.
- Adults should never leave a child unobserved around water. Practice "reach supervision" by staying within an arm's length of young children and weak swimmers.
- Take frequent breaks (about once an hour) where everyone gets out of the water, drinks water, reapplies sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) and rests.
- Watch out for the "dangerous too's" — too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity.

Yamhill River. The swimming hole is home to a tree overhanging its waters. A rope hangs from the tree for swimmers to jump into a deep area of water. Like its other Yamhill River contemporary St. Johns Falls, this location is wide and out in the open for exposure to the sun.

The fourth swimming hole is the well-known and popular spot "Three Stumps."

Three Stumps is up Agency Access Road. This swimming spot is home to Agency Creek. Three Stumps gets its name because of the three tree stumps on the cliff overhanging its water. From the cliff, people can jump off the three tree stumps and swim in the water.

Three Stumps also features a tree overhanging the water. On this tree is a rope for people to swing off of into the water. Three Stumps can be found down a trail right across from the rock quarry on Agency Access Road.

On a recent hot Tuesday afternoon, local resident Dennis Elmer

was watching his three grandchildren enjoy Three Stumps.

"It's just a nice spot," Elmer said. "The hole is deep for the kids to have fun, but not get hurt. The kids just like it."

The fifth swimming spot is the well-known yet rarely seen "Little Hawaii," which is about 2.5 miles from a yellow Stimson Lumber Gate on Fire Hall Road.

Little Hawaii is a part of Rock Creek. Probably the most intriguing feature of Little Hawaii is a natural underwater rock slide that swimmers can slide down the creek and into the swimming hole area.

Another feature of Little Hawaii is its wide and deep swimming area. Surrounding the rock slide area are several waterfalls, which may be why this area received its exotic name.

Anyone attempting to access Little Hawaii should be aware that it is located on the private property of Stimson Lumber Co., thus making walk-in only allowed and motor vehicle transport prohibited. ■

### Unmarked grave sites

We need your help — If anyone knows the location of an unmarked grave or knows the name of someone who was buried at the Grand Ronde Cemetery and their grave has not been marked, contact Mike Larsen, Facilities Manager, at 503-879-2407. ■