

DRONES

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“It can be a tool for ranchers,” he said. “You can program it so it’ll do the same thing everyday.”

Even though the drones don’t work well in rain, Folck said they can withstand snow or wind.

Although he acknowledges that for some ranchers the technology might be daunting or expensive, Folck believes the benefits are worth the time spent learning to use drones — and it’s not as hard as many might think.

“If they have a (smart) cellphone and home computer they can grasp this in a month,” Folck said.

While he said he’s not interested in selling the



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

Drones can herd cattle and read water meters on irrigation systems.

drones or making any money from classes, Folck is considering having a clinic of sorts to teach people how to fly and operate the drones.

“If people are interested, I’ll get them started,” he said. “I’m at the point in my life where I have time now and I want to share it.”

After working on the 2007 book “Lest We Forget” documenting the history of the Burnt River Valley — history is a topic he and his wife are passionate about — Folck said his latest project is using his drones to map the entire valley from Unity to Bridgeport. He intends to begin this

after he receives the new drone he’s looking to purchase when it’s released later this week — the DJI Mavic Pro 2.

Another thing that sparked Folck’s passion for drones was his lifelong love for photography.

Folck said he even sold the couple’s house in Arizona himself by listing it on Zillow with photos he took with his drone.

(The Folcks moved to Arizona from Unity but disliked their new state and returned to Unity.)

Within an hour of posting his house, he said he received a call from a man from Las Vegas with an offer who cited the drone photos as a reason he wanted the property.

“They’re not just toys,” Folck said.

COUNCIL

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Nilsson said he has not decided whether he will actually finish collecting signatures and register as a candidate.

Nilsson pleaded guilty last November to criminal mischief after he was cited at the abandoned lime plant near Huntington. He has also filed a notice that he might file a civil

lawsuit against the city based on his complaint about how a search was conducted at his home last year.

Thomas, who pleaded guilty Monday to driving under the influence of intoxicants following his arrest June 19, has previously said he was considering not running. Thomas did not respond to a call from the Herald in time for this story.

Others who can collect signatures are Randy Daugherty, who is a former

councilor; Slade Elbert, Raymond Rienks, Doni Bruland, Michael Finney, Steve Howland, Lynette Perry and Carly Annable.

The top three candidates in the Nov. 6 election will be elected to four-year terms. The fourth-place candidate will be elected to a two-year term.

More information about the candidate filing process and requirements is available by calling Smith at 541-524-2033.

FIRES

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The Harrison fire is burning in steep terrain with poor access for fire crews, according to a press release from the Umatilla National Forest.

The fire is burning in an area with subalpine fir trees, which tend to burn quickly and produce embers that start new spot fires ahead of the main blaze.

Firefighters built a control line around the bottom of the fire Tuesday and

started lining its flanks.

A helicopter dropped water on hot spots, and three single-engine tankers and two large tankers dropped retardant to block the fire’s spread.

The Forest Service has closed the Lost Creek and Ben Harrison trails in the North Fork John Day Wilderness, as well as a large portion of the Greenhorn unit of the wilderness south of the Olive Lake Road and west of Clear Creek.

The Oregon Department of Forestry is handling

a 75-acre lightning fire near Beaver Ridge about 13 miles southwest of La Grande.

Among the fires reported either Monday or Tuesday on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest or land protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry

- Near McBride Campground, eight miles northwest of Halfway, 0.1 acre
- Summit Creek area, five miles west of Halfway, 0.1 acre
- Summit Spring area, northwest of Wolf Creek Reservoir and 27 miles

northwest of Baker City, 0.25 acre

- Wolf Creek area, 14 miles southwest of La Grande, 0.1 acre
- Castle Ridge, four miles northeast of Cove, 10.5 acres
- Sandy Saddle, 13 miles west of Joseph, 0.67 acre
- Kimmell Historical area, six miles north of Minam, 29.6 acres
- Lackey Lake area, Eagle Cap Wilderness 16 miles east of Union, 0.1 acre

WEST NILE

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In Umatilla County, 14 “pools” of mosquitoes — a pool consists of 10 to 50 bugs — tested positive, and in Malheur County seven mosquito batches were infected with the virus.

There have been no confirmed cases of people contracting the disease this year in Oregon.

About 20 percent of people who are infected by a mosquito bite come down with a fever or other symptoms, according to the Health Authority.

About 1 in 150 people become seriously ill.

Between 2004 and 2017, there were 183 human cases of West Nile virus in Oregon, and three of those people died.

A majority of the human cases — 100 — happened in just two years, 2006 and 2007. There was one death in each of those years, one of those in Baker County.

The lack of a positive test for West Nile virus in Baker County mosquitoes might be a statistical anomaly, Hutchinson said.

The mosquito species that most commonly carries the virus around here — culex tarsalis — hasn’t been as prevalent this summer as last.

By this time in 2017, Hutchinson said, he had sent 463 pools of mosquitoes, mainly tarsalis, to the OSU lab for testing.

So far this summer he has sent 259 pools.

Tarsalis numbers were much higher last summer, something Hutchinson attributes to water. Tarsalis mosquitoes usually lay their eggs in permanent water sources such as ponds and sloughs (as opposed to floodwater mosquitoes, which breed in seasonal sources such as flood-irrigated fields), and the heavy snowpack of the 2016-17 winter made for abundant areas of standing water.

“Last year was above

average, especially for tarsalis mosquitoes,” Hutchinson said. “This year is closer to average.”

Notwithstanding all the negative tests this summer, Hutchinson said he wouldn’t be surprised if the OSU lab confirms West Nile virus in Baker County mosquitoes soon.

Depending on the weather, he expects to continue trapping tarsalis mosquitoes for at least the next three weeks.

In 2017 the last of the nine batches of tarsalis mosquitoes infected with West Nile virus was trapped in Baker County on Sept. 5.

In most years the vast majority of infected mosquitoes are either culex tarsalis or culex pipiens.

Hutchinson said pipiens mosquitoes are rarely trapped in Baker County — just two or three of the 259 pools he has sent for testing this summer were the pipiens variety.

Virus vectors

The primary hosts for West Nile virus are birds in the corvid family, which includes crows, ravens, magpies and jays, Hutchinson said.

Birds of prey and robins can also be infected, he said.

When a female mosquito bites an infected bird (only female mosquitoes bite, as they need blood to nourish their eggs) it can contract the virus and then spread it to other birds as well as people and horses, Hutchinson said.

Culex tarsalis mosquitoes tend to target birds early in the summer, which explains why that species is such an effective vector of the virus, he said.

Later in the summer, tarsalis mosquitoes will also home in on people.

The floodwater mosquitoes that breed earlier in the summer are less effective at spreading the virus in part because they are more indiscriminate feeders, Hutchinson said.

“They’ll bite anything with blood,” he said.

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