

APRIL

■ High Temperature: 78, on the 19th

• Low Temperature: 20, on the 29th

• Total Precipitation: .84 (avg.: .80)

Cool Weather Slows Melting Of Mountain Snowpack

Wealth of Water



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald
Spring has arrived in the valleys, but winter still reigns along Rock Creek in the Elkhorn Mountains west of Haines.

By Jayson Jacoby
jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

APRIL 3 — When Jeff Colton looked at the shrunken Phillips Reservoir in late January, more a puddle than the oversized pond it's supposed to be, he was worried.

Two months later the reservoir is still pretty puny.

But Colton feels ever so much better even as he gazes across the diminished surface of the impoundment.

“That was scary back in January,” said Colton, who as manager of the Baker Valley Irrigation District distributes

water stored in the reservoir on the Powder River about 15 miles southwest of Baker City.

“I was sweating bullets.”

That water nourishes crops on more than 30,000 acres, mainly in Baker Valley, and the reservoir is a vital cog in the county's irrigation system.

Statistically speaking, the situation at the end of January was dire enough to justify Colton's concern.

On Jan. 31 the reservoir was holding slightly less than 6,400 acre-feet of water — about 8 percent of its capacity.

Only twice since Mason Dam

was finished in 1968 has Phillips been lower on the final day of January — 2002 (4,900 acre-feet) and 1989 (4,233 acre-feet).

But then the weather turned.

Which is to say, winter made its belated arrival.

It was the wettest February on record at the Baker City Airport, with a precipitation total of 1.92 inches.

The storms that soaked the airport with rain and snow delivered mostly the latter to the mountains above Phillips — a key trend because Colton relies on that snowpack to replenish the reservoir each winter.

Wolves attack cow

■ Cow was euthanized due to injuries that state biologists attributed to wolves from Pine Creek Pack

By Jayson Jacoby
jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

APRIL 19 — An adult cow in eastern Baker County was euthanized on Tuesday due to injuries inflicted by wolves from the Pine Creek pack, according to a report from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The cow's owner, Barry DelCurto, found the animal Tuesday morning on a 300-acre private land grazing pasture in the North Pine Creek area east of Halfway. DelCurto, who lost one calf to wolves last April, declined to talk about Tuesday's attack.

He saw two wolves, one of which had a tracking collar, while checking on cattle at about 7:30 a.m., according to ODFW.

ODFW biologists inspected the cow and noted a piece of flesh, 8 inches long and 4 inches across, was missing. There were multiple tooth scrapes

near the edge of the wound “showing clear evidence of attack from a predator,” according to the report.

Biologists found cow tracks and wolf tracks less than half a mile from where the rancher found the injured cow. The report describes this as a “chase scene” with blood on the ground and on vegetation.

“The number and canine spacing of the bite marks, the location of the injury, and the wolf tracks present in the attack scene are clear evidence of a confirmed depredation by wolves of the Pine Creek Pack,” the report concludes.

The Pine Creek pack consists of eight wolves, based on the most recent estimate from ODFW.

The pack killed four calves and injured seven others in April 2018. ODFW officials killed three wolves from the pack during that month.

Walden has town hall

By Casey Crowley
ccrowley@bakercityherald.com

APRIL 1 — More than 30 people gathered at the Baker Elks Lodge Saturday morning for a town hall meeting with U.S. Rep. Greg Walden.

Walden, who represents Oregon's 2nd District that includes Baker County, spoke for about 15 minutes about some of the recent legislation he has worked on before answering questions from members of the crowd for almost an hour.

Questions were chosen at random from a bucket of tickets. Audience members had to grab a ticket prior to

the meeting and wait for their number to be called.

Walden was asked questions on a number of issues including health care, Social Security, climate change, immigration, the Oregon cap and trade bill and more. Walden, a Republican, faced questions about voting with Democrats and a few other Republicans to overturn President Donald Trump's declaration of a national emergency because of a lack of border security. County Commissioner Bill Harvey, a Republican, and Chuck Chase both asked him why he voted against the president's declaration.

Merkley speaks in Baker

By Jayson Jacoby
jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

APRIL 26 — The national debate over last week's release of the Mueller report on the Trump-Russia investigation extended to Baker City on Wednesday afternoon at the conclusion of Sen. Jeff Merkley's town hall at the Senior Center.

Whitey Bloom of Halfway asked the final question of the hour-long event, which attracted about 50 people.

Bloom, who contends that the redacted version of special counsel Robert Mueller's report exonerated President Trump, asked Merkley, a Democrat and a frequent Trump critic, whether the junior senator was “ready to accept those results and move on.”

Merkley, who fielded questions from about 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., disputed Bloom's contention.

“The report doesn't absolve President Trump,” Merkley said.

Bloom countered: “That's up for debate.”

Merkley responded by noting that the report lists 10 separate incidents that could constitute attempts by Trump to obstruct the investigation.

Merkley described these as “various forms of intimidation, obstruction.”

These included Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey and his efforts to remove Mueller as special counsel.

“They certainly look inappropriate to me,” Merkley said.

D.A. says killing of wolf was legal

By Jayson Jacoby
jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

APRIL 10 — Baker County District Attorney Matt Shirtcliff has determined that a Pine Valley cattle rancher was legally justified in shooting and killing one of four wolves he said were chasing his cow dog near his home on March 12.

Lawrence Aguilar, who

lives about 9 miles from Halfway, said he shot the wolf three times with a .223 rifle.

In a press release, Shirtcliff said that “Oregon law clearly allows the use of lethal force to kill a wolf that is biting, wounding, killing or chasing livestock or working dogs.”

Aguilar, who has lived in Pine Valley for 15 years, said the wolves were 10 to 12

yards from the front door of his home in the incident that happened about 7 a.m. on March 12.

“I didn't really feel good about it,” Aguilar said this morning in a phone interview, referring to his decision to shoot the wolf.

He said he was motivated to kill the wolf, rather than fire a shot to try to frighten

the animals away, in part by two previous encounters with wolves on his property.

One of those happened in late February of this year.

Aguilar said he was awakened about 3 a.m. by wolves howling near his home.

He said he went outside and fired 25 to 30 warning shots, hoping to haze the wolves.

City works on parks

By Samantha O'Conner
soconner@bakercityherald.com

APRIL 26 — Baker City is working to make its parks ADA accessible. The project includes building accessible sidewalks at Cedar Acres Park, South Baker Park, and the traffic island at the end of River Park. The city bought ADA-accessible tables from Natural Structures in 2016, and installed them the next year.

“Somewhere along the way we lost the fact that they were actually ADA-accessible tables but we didn't have any ADA access to them,” said Joyce Bornstedt, the city's technical administrative supervisor.

New health education for schools

By Chris Collins
ccollins@bakercityherald.com

APRIL 5 — New state standards for providing health education to Oregon's youngest school children has raised concern among some community residents.

Assistant Superintendent Betty Palmer hopes to bring more understanding about the Oregon Department of Education's new health standards to parents and others interested in the topic at two Monday meetings.

Palmer's presentations will be just a part of both sessions, which are scheduled to

allow the Parent-Teacher Organizations to conduct other necessary business.

The standards were adopted by the state in 2016. Materials to support instruction for Grades 4-12 were reviewed by community partners and parents during a meeting last May.

At Monday's presentations, Palmer will bring what she calls “planning maps” to help explain how materials and guest speakers from the community will help teachers provide information the state has deemed necessary for schools to cover in Grades K-3 under the new health standards.

Rachel Pregnancy Center

2192 Court Avenue, Baker City • 541-523-5357

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