

Invasive weed of the week

By Jeffrey Pettingill

The enemy

Scentless chamomile (*Tripleurospermum perforatum*).

The strategy

This biennial bushy, branched plant has recently been found invading many of our roadsides, pastures and other disturbed sites. This plant has white flowers with a yellow center similar to an oxeye daisy. Daisies usually produce one or two flowers per plant where this plant can produce hundreds of radiant flowers. The leaves are feathery looking and the plant grows to about 2 feet high.

Attack

Scentless chamomile is a prolific seed producer. Once established the plant does an excellent job of outcompeting desirable plants. Due to the plant's unusual characteristics livestock normally choose not to eat it. It likes to grow along waterways where the seeds can float down the waterway and contaminate other lands. Where it exists in pastures the livestock tend to eat everything else around it beyond recognition. As it is a fairly dense plant it really shades out desirable plants.

The defense

Scentless chamomile is



Photos by Rich Old

Scentless chamomile in bloom. The biennial plant is a prolific seed producer.

Series Continues

Jeffrey Pettingill, weed control supervisor for Baker County, will be writing an occasional article about a common noxious weed in the area. Pettingill encourages people to call him if they have weed questions or see a species they're not familiar with. His office number is 541-523-0618 and his cell is 541-519-0204.

is best, but if not possible to get it early try applying the herbicide when the flowers are in the bud stage.

This is a new plant to the region so we all need to do our part to keep it from becoming the next noxious weed.

COVID-19

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Bennett said Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City has reported an increase in the number of people coming to the hospital after they were interviewed by a contact tracer from the Health Department.

Many of those people, along with others who had potential COVID-19 symptoms, have been tested recently, Bennett said.

The Oregon Health Authority on Monday reported that 546 Baker County residents had tested negative for the virus, up by more than 40 from late last week.

That's 3.25% of the county's population of about 16,800.

Bennett said those tests are diagnostic, meaning they are intended to determine whether a person is currently infected.

The OHA tally doesn't involve antibody tests, which can determine whether a person was previously infected with the virus.

Bennett said contact tracers, who try to interview people who might have been in close contact with a person who tested positive, recommend all those who were in close contact to self-isolate, regardless of whether their test was negative.

That's due in part to the test not being 100% reliable, Bennett said.

He said he's heard from various sources that the test's accuracy runs between 50% and 80%, meaning that in from half to 20% of cases a person who is infected could have a negative test result.

Gina Bennett (no relation to Mark Bennett), a Baker

City resident who was tested last week after having several symptoms consistent with COVID-19, including a fever, headache and body aches, said she received her test result Monday morning, and it was negative.

However, she said the person who called her from St. Luke's Clinic in Baker City, where she was tested, told her the test was about 70% reliable.

Bennett, 64, said she is self-isolating for at least 10 days after her symptoms resolve. She said she planned to do so regardless of the test result.

"My concern is for the community, of course," Bennett said. "I felt it was important that I go (to be tested)."

Geographic data

It's not possible, based on publicly available data, to pinpoint, even by ZIP code, the addresses of the six Baker County residents who recently tested positive.

The Oregon Health Authority issues a weekly report that shows positive cases by ZIP code. However, for areas with fewer than 10 cases the agency lists only the range of "1-9" rather than the actual number.

Baker County's first confirmed case was a resident who lives in the 97814 ZIP code, which includes Baker City and much of Baker Valley.

The latest state report still shows a "1-9" range for 97814 — as it would even if all seven people who tested positive have an address in that ZIP code.

The Health Authority also doesn't not connect positive cases to individual ZIP codes with fewer than 1,000 residents, instead aggregating those cases.

None of Baker County's other ZIP codes has more than 1,000 residents, so if there are any positive tests in any of those areas they wouldn't be listed, by that ZIP code, in the report.

Concerns about weekend gatherings

Jane Lemar of Baker City said she was surprised, and upset, when she walked her dog past Geiser-Pollman Park Sunday morning and saw a group of people attending the annual God and Country worship service.

Lemar, who said she counted at least 170 people at about 10:30 a.m. and what she estimates was twice that number an hour or so later, said she was bothered by what seemed to her a lack of social distancing and very few people wearing masks.

"From my perspective it looked like everyone was clustering in groups," Lemar said on Monday.

The statewide face mask mandate that Gov. Kate Brown announced last week doesn't apply to outdoor gatherings.

Phase 2 of the state's reopening plan, which Baker County entered June 6, does limit outdoor gatherings to 250 people.

Baker City Police Chief Ray Duman said Monday afternoon that the department hadn't received any complaints about Sunday's event.

Lemar sent an email listing her concerns, along with photographs she took at the park, to City Manager Fred Warner Jr. and to members of the city's parks and recreation board.

"These people have a right to worship, no doubt, that I

support," Lemar wrote in her email. "Safely. Not gathered closely singing loudly without masks on."

Lemar said she's particularly worried about gatherings that could contribute to the spread of the virus because her adult daughter, Katie, who lives with her, has a rare metabolic disorder called cystinosis, is diabetic, a cancer survivor and has had a kidney transplant.

Those conditions mean Katie is in a higher risk category should she be infected with the virus, Lemar said.

Lynette Perry of Baker City Events, which puts on Sunday afternoon concerts at the park during the summer, said the events have never drawn as many as 200 people so she's not concerned about approaching the 250-person threshold.

Several people posted comments on the Herald's Facebook page expressing their concerns about a photograph on the newspaper's website showing spectators sitting in bleachers at the Haines Stampede rodeo on Saturday.

Commenters said they were bothered because it appeared that fans weren't complying with social distancing, and also that few were wearing face masks.

The Herald sent a question to the rodeo's Facebook page, and received this response Monday afternoon: "At this time we have received nothing but positive feedback."

Wyden seeks extension of jobless benefits

By Peter Wong
Oregon Capital Bureau

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden has renewed his effort for an extension of unemployment benefits as the Oregon Employment Department continues to work on 70,000 claims filed by people newly eligible for those benefits.

Wyden, the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, joined Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York last week to introduce legislation that will set one of the Democrats' markers for the next congressional aid plan for the coronavirus pandemic.

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MASKS

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"Police response will depend on what the situation is," Duman said.

For example, if a person defies the order to wear a mask and refuses to leave an area, or instigates an altercation, police will respond, Duman said. If employees instigate a fight by taking it upon themselves to remove customers, however, that scenario might have a different outcome.

"Does an employee have the right to physically force a person out of a store?" Duman said. "We will be discussing that with the DA."

Complaints also could be forwarded to the appropriate state agencies, such as the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) or the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), he said.

Duman said customers should consider the choice they are making when deciding whether or not to wear a mask into a business such as Albertsons or Safeway grocery stores, which can require them to wear masks.

"Customers can comply or they don't get to eat," he said. "They have a choice. Life is about choices."

Police officers also continue to use discretion in deciding whether to wear masks when responding to calls. And they have been granted permission to testify before the grand jury through livestream video rather than appearing in person.

It's vital to keep his officers healthy in order to continue to serve the community effectively, Duman said.

As a worst-case scenario, officers might not respond to some service calls, a practice that some larger agencies already have implemented.

In cases of vandalism, for example, Duman said victims could fill out a crime report online and send it to police for further

"I think we're in this for a period of time, so we're trying to make the best of it."

— **Ray Duman,**
Baker City Police chief

investigation and then file a report with their insurance company.

The public also will be asked to wear masks when they enter the front lobby of the police station at 1768 Auburn Ave.

Masks are required in the lobby of the Baker County Sheriff's Office as well, said Ashley McClay, Sheriff's Office spokeswoman. The office is continuing to process by appointment concealed handgun licenses, boat licenses, public fingerprinting and necessary civil process paperwork, and operating the drug take-back program.

Corrections officers are wearing masks in the jail and deputies also use their discretion to either wear a mask or maintain social distance of 6 feet or more when responding to calls, McClay said.

She and Chief Duman agree that people seem to miss the point that wearing a mask — or not wearing a mask — whether viewed as a political statement or not, is aimed at protecting other people, not necessarily the mask wearer.

"It's about others," McClay said.

Duman added that however the governor's directive is perceived in the community, Baker City Police officers will do their best to comply with the governor's executive orders.

"I think we're in this for a period of time, so we're trying to make the best of it," he said.

Duman said it is in the public's best interest to help curb the spread of coronavirus to keep businesses open.

"What people don't get is that if the trend doesn't break and we end up going back to phase one, everything is going to be shut down," he said.

If you are traveling for the 4th of July, drive safe!



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