

County reports 4 new COVID-19 cases

By Jayson Jacoby
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Baker County reported one new case of COVID-19 on Wednesday, following three new cases on Tuesday, the highest one-day total since Sept. 6, when there were eight.

The eight cases on Sept. 6 were from Meadowbrook Place assisted living com-

munity in Baker City. The outbreak there, which included 27 cases, has ended, according to a press release from Meadowbrook. During the 10-day period ending Sept. 21, the county recorded only one new case. There have been nine new cases in the ensuing nine days, bringing the county's

total since the start of the pandemic to 99, according to the Baker County Health Department. The number of weekly tests has also increased recently, from 76 the week of Aug. 30-Sept. 5 and 76 the week of Sept. 6-12, to 102 and 99, respectively, for the next two weeks.

ROAD

Continued from Page 1A
Joelleen Linstrom, who lives with McCarty and attended Wednesday's meeting, said after the meeting that McCarty locked the gate because he is concerned about people starting fires and trespassing on his property. McCarty posted a sign on the gate that includes his cellphone number. Linstrom said McCarty has made the code to the lock available to several agencies, including the Oregon State Police, Baker County Sheriff, Oregon Department of Forestry, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Commissioners met with the county's attorney, Drew

Martin, for about an hour during an executive session, which was closed to the public, before convening in a public session. During the public session commissioners unanimously approved a motion, made by Commissioner Mark Bennett, to direct the road department to remove the lock and to install a sign asking travelers to stay on the road. Bennett said Wednesday afternoon that the county's goal is to have the gate unlocked without having to cut the lock. Many years ago the county put up a sign near the gate noting that the road passes through public land. Bennett said the county will also ask the Department of Forestry to install a sign near

the gate listing the current fire danger. The conflict centers on whether the public has legal access to the road as it passes through McCarty's property. Bennett on Wednesday afternoon referred to an 1891 county document that describes the surveying of a road along Pine Creek. The document includes a map of the route that, based on the township, range and sections shown on the map, appears to follow the route of the existing road through McCarty's property. In a written statement to the Herald from McCarty and Linstrom, they write that the title report McCarty received while his purchase of the property was pending does not

show a public road or list any public easement through the property. "The sole focus of Mr. McCarty's inquiries to the County," the written statement reads, "is to determine whether, in fact, a public road exists across his property." This isn't McCarty's first legal tussle with the county. About a decade ago the county sued McCarty's company, Columbia Basin Helicopters, claiming the business violated county zoning laws. A judge ruled in 2015 against the county, and later ordered the county to pay McCarty \$324,000 in legal fees he incurred defending against the county's lawsuit.

WELL

Continued from Page 1A

Owen said the city will continue to increase water rates based on the federal cost of living rate, but there are no plans for larger increases to pay for specific large projects. The new well will be the city's second. The other well, which the city drilled in 1977 near its water treatment plant and reservoir on the hill near Reservoir Road, is about 800 feet deep. Owen said the new well will tap the same aquifer. The city likely will tap the new well during two periods. The first is in spring when rapid snowmelt can sometimes temporarily cause streams in the watershed to silt up, Owen said. That doesn't happen every year, she said. The second time-frame when the new well will be especially beneficial is in mid to late summer, when the volume of the watershed's springs and streams diminishes just as the city's thirst peaks. The city definitely would have relied on the new well this summer had it been finished, Owen said. With daily water use averaging more than 4 million gallons per day during August, the city had to supplement the watershed with water from its existing well and from its lone reservoir, Goodrich, high in the Elkhorns. Owen said water use declined during September, to less than 4 million gallons per day.

"Usage is trending down but not as quickly as I would like," she said. The weather, as always, is a factor. With dry and unseasonably warm weather forecast to continue through the weekend, Owen said water demand is likely to remain higher than usual for the first week of October. Owen said she hopes the new well will consistently produce 1,500 gallons per minute — about 2.16 million gallons per day. Like the existing well, the new one will have the potential to serve as a sort of underground reservoir. More than a decade ago Baker City became the first Oregon city to receive a state permit for what's known as aquifer storage and recovery (ASR). That permit allows the city to divert up to 200 million gallons of water per year from the watershed into its existing well, in effect using the aquifer as a storage facility. The city then taps the well to supplement the watershed and Goodrich Reservoir during summers — including 2020 — when water use is high. Owen said the new well will have ASR capability as well. ASR has made the existing well more productive. Prior to the ASR permit, when the city used the well for long periods the water tended to have amounts of iron and manganese which, though they didn't violate federal drinking water standards, could stain clothes.

LAWSUIT

Continued from Page 1A
Martin has requested a jury trial. Mark Snider, Saint Alphonsus spokesman in Boise, declined to comment on pending litigation. The Herald called Sandefur's office but did not receive a comment. The lawsuit states that because of the defendants' negligence, Avery, who was 6 when she was hurt in a fall on May 5, 2018, is disabled by limited use of her right arm. According to the complaint, Chrissy Martin took her daughter to the emergency department where it was determined that Avery had fractured her right elbow. She was referred to Sandefur for orthopedic care. Avery's arm was placed in a cast and her care was followed by Crowder. The lawsuit notes that Crowder is not a physician and further claims that she "does not have the skill, training, or experience to

perform surgical reduction of fractures." The lawsuit alleges that surgery was "the only appropriate management" for her daughter's serious arm injury. "Nonoperative management would predictably, and in fact did, result in clinical deformation, loss of function, and disability," the complaint states. Martin further alleges that Sandefur was negligent in not recognizing Crowder's "inappropriate management" of her daughter's injury and should have intervened. Sandefur also is accused of failing to discuss options with Chrissy Martin that could have restored her daughter's use of her arm. When her daughter's condition failed to improve, Martin sought treatment for Avery from Dr. Jason Robison, a pediatric orthopedic surgeon in Boise. According to the complaint, Robison "concluded that the care provided by the Defendants was negligent" and operated on Avery's fractured right elbow.

Martin seeks \$2.7 million in noneconomic damages against the defendants for her daughter's "pain, suffering, anxiety, emotional distress, scarring, hospitalization, surgical intervention, disfigurement, loss of self-esteem and permanent limitation of motion, together with interference of all aspects of her daily life." The lawsuit also seeks \$2.5 million in economic damages for what Martin claims is her daughter's sustained "loss of future earning capacity and inability to compete in the labor market" as a result of the defendants' alleged negligence. She also seeks \$35,000 in current medical expenses, which she says are continuing, and has included "all reasonable and necessary medical expenses paid by her" in her claim. Martin is represented by the Portland law firm of Huegli Fraser. The complaint was filed Monday in Baker County Circuit Court. Judge Matt Shirtcliff has recused himself from the case because of a conflict.

'It's got to stop': Rancher reports mutilated cow near Ukiah

By Alex Castle
East Oregonian

UKIAH — Fee Stubblefield was just doing the rounds on Sept. 12, checking in on his cattle near Dixie Ranch Road outside of Ukiah, when he saw something sitting in the thicket. He approached, peering closer as his eyes made out the dead body of a cow lying on its side in the dirt. "At the moment, I didn't think anything of it," Stubblefield said. "But then when I looked closer, you know, it didn't look right."

The skin around the cow's mouth was sliced away, and its tongue, glands and sex organs had been cleanly removed. A piece of the cow's ear was cut off and placed on its neck. "It's a very unusual cut," Stubblefield said. "There was no blood."

He found no footprints or tracks as evidence of someone traveling through the area. Stubblefield first thought it might be the work of wolves, so he called authorities to get some answers. According to Stubblefield, Oregon State Police responded to the scene Sept. 12 and confirmed it as a mutilation kill. The state trooper with knowledge of the case could not be reached for comment. "We got lucky because we found the cow within a couple days of when it had been killed, so it really yielded some good photos and hopefully some good evidence," he said. "What's more disturbing is now that we've identified this as a mutilation kill, we've actually discovered we had two other ones."

Stubblefield raises cattle as part of a small ranching operation between Pendleton and Ukiah. He said these other two potential mutilations occurred within the last six months.



Ben Lonergan / EO Media Group
Darwin Hodges, the cowboss for CRC Cattle, unloads his horse Friday at the Dixie Ranch just outside Ukiah. Hodges was among those who identified a mutilated cow Sept. 12 at the Dixie Ranch.

One was a cow of his own that was found in an "extremely remote location unconnected to this site," while the other finding belonged to another rancher. That cow was found on Stubblefield's property. Neither were found as timely as the one discovered on Sept. 12, he said, but the Oregon State Police were informed of them and an investigation is underway. The scene Stubblefield stumbled onto shares disturbing similarities with thousands of other cattle and livestock in the Western United States that have been mutilated and left with little to no evidence of a suspect or motive. In each instance, cattle are usually found with their tongues and genitals carefully removed without signs of a struggle. In the 1970s, hundreds of these reports spurred a FBI inquiry into the phenomenon that was largely unsuccessful, which the agency chalked up to a lack of

jurisdiction where the cattle were found. In July and August of 2019, the report of five bulls mutilated on the Silvies Valley Ranch in Harney County grabbed headlines across Oregon, and another mutilation was later reported at the border of Lake and Deschutes County in September that year. According to a report from the Capital Press, a cow was found mutilated earlier this year near Fossil in Wheeler County on July 23. The carcass was found upright with its legs tucked underneath it, and authorities located a partial boot print about 100 yards away from the scene. "There's a lot of concern about this, and there needs to be," Stubblefield said. Theories around cattle mutilations and their culprits have ranged from UFOs and aliens to government conspiracies and satanic cults, which Stubblefield isn't subscribing to. "I'm a believer that this is a

little more practical and this is criminal behavior," he said. With that in mind,

"What's more disturbing is now that we've identified this as a mutilation kill, we've actually discovered we had two other ones."
— Fee Stubblefield, Umatilla County cattle rancher

Stubblefield is asking all ranchers and residents in the area to be on the lookout for additional mutilations or suspicious activity. "If anybody finds one of these unusual ones, they need to stay away from it — don't even come close to it — and call Oregon State Police immediately," he said. "Any evidence that can be preserved is going to help solve this seemingly unsolvable case." For now, the carcass of Stubblefield's mutilated cow remains in the same spot he found it. Though none were in place prior to the discovery of the dead cow, trail cams are now staged in the area to monitor it.

According to Stubblefield, that footage has revealed another disconcerting detail: predators and scavengers are avoiding and refusing to eat the carcass. Coyotes have approached the area but keep their distance, he said, and birds will land on the body briefly before flying away. Stubblefield read the reports and heard the stories of other Oregon ranchers finding mutilated cattle before, but now he's hoping the death of his own will finally provide some answers to the decades-long mystery. "This is too much," he said. "It's got to stop."

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