

County's COVID-19 case rate slows

By Jayson Jacoby
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Baker County's rate of new COVID-19 cases over the six-day period ending Thursday, Jan. 21, was the slowest in almost three months.

The county reported 12 new cases for the period Jan. 16-21. The daily totals were two, zero, three, two, four and one.

The county hasn't had a six-day period with fewer new virus cases since Oct. 18-23, when there were two positive tests.

Since then, however, the county has averaged about 32 new cases every six days. The county has tallied 465 of its 579 cases, as of Thursday, since Oct. 26.

"I'm delighted that the numbers are going down," Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett said on Friday, Jan. 22.

Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, was also pleased with the declining trend.

She said it's likely that the recent drop, from a total of 48 new cases for

the previous six-day period, Jan. 10-15, reflects the end of a surge following the holiday season, when more people attended parties or other social gatherings.

Staten said local health officials are "holding our breath" for the potential that Baker County could drop from the state's extreme-risk level, with its ban on indoor restaurant dining among other restrictions, to the high-risk category starting Jan. 29.

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CABIN

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A later examination showed that the fire started when heat spread from gaps in the mortar used to build the cinderblock chimney, which is connected to the stove via a metal pipe, he said.

The crumbling mortar, between the chimney and the cabin's log wall, would not have been visible without partially disassembling the structure, Moore said.

He said that as far as Forest Service officials can determine, the chimney is original to the cabin, which was built in 1934 by George Wilcox Peavy, then dean of the School of Forestry at Oregon State University.

The hunters immediately doused the fire in the woodstove.

Then they started hauling water from the river, which is a couple of hundred feet from the cabin, to extinguish the flames.

"It's to their credit that the cabin still stands," Moore said on Wednesday, Jan. 20.

The hunters also had a portable garden sprayer in their RV. It had a flexible hose that made it possible to spray water into areas that they couldn't have reached with buckets, Moore said.

The hunters worked the rest of the night to stop the fire, he said.

"They were quite weary" by the morning of Oct. 28, Moore said.

Due to their efforts, the damage was mainly superficial.

(Moore said he didn't have the hunters' names. Nor did Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, which manages the cabin during the rental season.)



U.S. Forest Service/Contributed Photo

Jay Moore, recreation specialist for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, said workers will clean up areas burned in the late October fire, but probably leave the blackened wood as a sort of historic artifact.

"It's been through a lot in the past. It's had a long, eventful life."

— Jay Moore, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, talking about Peavy Cabin

Moore said the flames blackened sections of the ceiling and wall, and part of a kitchen cabinet.

But there was no structural damage.

Moore said Forest Service employees used epoxy to fill a small hole, about the size of a quarter, on the outside wall. They'll make a more permanent repair, and paint the section of wall, this spring.

No one was hurt in the fire. Moore said Peavy Cabin, which has been open to rent-

ers during the summer for more than 20 years, survived the 1996 Sloans Ridge fire, which burned about 10,000 acres.

The fire burned on both sides of the North Fork valley, but firefighters saved the cabin by wrapping it with protective fabric and dousing it with fire-suppression foam.

About 15 years ago a tree fell squarely on the cabin, but without causing significant damage.

"It's been through a lot in the past," Moore said of the cabin. "It's had a long, eventful life."

He said the cabin won't require a lot of work to prepare it for the 2021 rental season, which usually starts July 1 due to lingering snow in the

Elkhorns. The cabin is at an elevation of about 5,900 feet.

Workers will need to clean up the burned areas, but Moore said the plan is to not paint or otherwise cover the blackened logs, leaving those scars, which don't weaken the cabin, as a sort of historical artifact.

The main task for the Wallowa-Whitman this spring will be replacing the woodstove with a propane heater insert, which will be installed in the fireplace, Moore said.

The cabin is so small that the propane heater will provide sufficient heat, he said.

Removing the woodstove will also create more floor space.

Cabin's restorer pleased to hear his handiwork survived

Larry Bilyeu had a particular reason to be thankful that Peavy Cabin endured yet another threat.

Bilyeu, a former Baker City resident who lives in Prineville, restored Peavy Cabin in the early 1990s while he was working for the Wallowa-Whitman. He said the chimney looked to be original.

Among other things, Bilyeu used jacks to lift the structure so he could replace rotting logs with lodgepole pine logs he obtained from a mill in Prairie City. Bilyeu, who retired from the Forest Service in 2006, said the cabin rests on a foundation of locally sourced rocks.

Bilyeu, who attended training to learn how to restore historic cabins, said Peavy was his first project.

"I enjoyed doing that," he said in a recent phone interview.

Bilyeu later restored Boundary Guard Station near Granite, as well guard stations in Idaho and Utah.

DEPUTY

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The sheriff told commissioners that he has negotiated agreements with multiple sources, both public and private, that pay the bulk of the cost for the department's patrol division — about \$530,000 annually — and keep the county's financial obligation comparatively low.

Idaho Power Company contributes \$185,000 annually to support two deputies, the city of Huntington pays the county \$74,000 for one deputy who works in and around that city, the BLM pays \$86,000 annually, and the Oregon State Marine Board contributes \$63,000. The county also receives \$40,000 per year from the state's ATV registration funds.

But Ash told commissioners that the sheriff's office needs to have five full-time patrol deputies, and one who works one-quarter time, to fulfill all those contracts and

avoid the county having to forego some of the contributions.

Right now, though, the sheriff's office has 4.25 full-time equivalent positions in the patrol division.

The void was created when Deputy Tracy Howard, who had been working part-time as a marine deputy, patrolling local reservoirs such as Brownlee and Phillips, retired, Ash said.

"With the current status of our patrol division, I will be unable to fulfill the contract hours for BLM, ATV and Marine (Board), without adding additional personnel," the sheriff wrote in a memo to commissioners. "With the increase in tourism in Baker County, it is important to have these contracts in place so patrol deputy presence can be maintained in the outlying areas and on public lands. If I am unable to fill a position and can't meet metrics outlined by our agreements and grants, I will be forced

to return or renegotiate the agreement for less money which will also reduce the amount of hours patrolled in the respective areas."

Ash noted that he has reached an agreement with the BLM to increase the federal agency's payment to the county from \$8,000 per year in 2015 to the current \$86,000. That money pays for a full-time deputy who spends much time patrolling public lands, which comprise about half of Baker County's 2 million acres.

Ash plans to hire a full-time deputy, with the county needing to spend only about \$7,300 for the position. BLM, Marine Board and U.S. Forest Service grants will pay the rest of the annual cost for that position, which totals about \$92,000.

In other business Wednesday:

• Commissioners rescheduled their work session to discuss proposed amendments to the Baker County

Zoning Ordinance to Jan. 27 at 9 a.m. at the Courthouse. They also rescheduled a public hearing on that topic to Feb. 3.

• Jason Yencopal, the county's emergency management director, discussed the revised multijurisdictional natural hazard mitigation plan, which is updated every five years.

Yencopal said the main difference with the new plan is that it is limited to Baker County, while the previous plan included three other adjoining counties.

• Commissioners approved an agreement with Dr. Eric Lamb to serve as the county's medical examiner. Dr. James Davis, who had served as medical examiner for more than 18 years, has stepped down from that position.

The contract with Lamb pays him \$450 per month for the period Jan. 1, 2021, through Dec. 31, 2022.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Jan. 31 deadline to apply for Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative scholarships

The deadline to apply for one of Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's academic scholarships is Jan. 31.

Scholarships are available to high school students, returning college students and adults entering educational and technical programs.

Academic scholarships are for \$5,000 each. Four will be allocated to the OTEC-EOU Rural Scholarship Program, a partnership between OTEC and Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. Incoming EOU freshmen will have the opportunity to have their entire four years of tuition and fees paid for, if they commit to attend and graduate from Eastern Oregon University.

The other academic scholarships are for graduating high school students, returning college students or adults looking to begin college. Applications and specific criteria for all the OTEC scholarships are available at otec.coop/scholarships.

Kaeli Flanagan named to provost's honor roll at Whitworth University

SPOKANE, Wash. — Kaeli Flanagan of Baker City is among the undergraduate students to earn provost's honor roll status for the fall 2020 semester at Whitworth University. To be eligible, students must maintain a GPA of at least 3.75.

No-cost COVID-19 testing clinic scheduled for Jan. 27 at Halfway

HALFWAY — Baker County is hosting a free drive-thru COVID-19 testing clinic on Wednesday, Jan. 27, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Halfway Lions Club. Pre-registration is encouraged but not required. To pre-register, which will shorten the wait time, go to www.doineedacovid19test.com

Virtual meeting planned Jan. 27 to discuss transportation improvements

Baker City has scheduled a virtual public meeting for Jan. 27 to discuss possible transportation improvements to sections of 10th Street, Hughes Lane and Cedar Street.

The virtual meeting will run from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. To join the meeting, use the link on the city's website, www.bakercity.com/2289/NBTP

City officials are looking at potential improvements designed to improve driving, walking and biking on sections of four streets:

- 10th Street from Hughes Lane to Broadway Street
- Cedar Street from Hughes Lane to Campbell Street
- Hughes Lane from 10th Street to Cedar Street
- Pocahontas Road from 10th Street to 17th Street/Chico Street

"This area has seen an increase in people walking and biking, and the plan will seek to improve facilities, safety and connections for these users. The plan will also address traffic safety and flow and freight mobility," according to a project overview from the city.

Baker County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council meeting Jan. 27

The Baker County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council will meet on Wednesday, Jan. 27, at 7 a.m. The meeting will take place virtually on the Zoom platform. Those interested in attending can contact Ashley McClay at 541-523-6415 or amcclay@bakercounty.org for the website link, meeting ID, and password.

New At The Library

Patrons can reserve materials in advance online or by calling 541-523-6419. Drive-in hours at 2400 Resort St. are Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m.

FICTION

- "The Little Clam," Iris Martin Cohen
- "Lady Clementine," Marie Benedict
- "Sinclair Sisters," series Mona Hodgson
- "A Cruel Deception," Charles Todd
- "Stormsong," C. L. Polk

NONFICTION

- "Frogs Play Cellos," Laura DiSiena
- "Blades of Freedom," Nathan Hale
- "Fortniters," Jason Rich
- "100 Screen Free Ways to Beat Boredom," Kris Hirschmann
- "Sweet Dreams, Sarah," Vivian Kirkfield

DVDS

- "Brad Paisley: Life Amplified World Tour" (Documentary / Concert Film)
- "Escape from Pretoria" (Drama)
- "Navy SEALs v. Demons" (Action)
- "Hit & Run: (Comedy)
- "Yellowstone: Season 3" (TV Series)

NEWS OF RECORD

POLICE LOG

Baker City Police

Arrests, citations

SECOND-DEGREE CRIMINAL TRESPASS and THIRD-DEGREE THEFT (Baker County Circuit Court warrant): Jamie Joseph Weiss, 55, of Baker City, 8:59 a.m. Thursday, in the 3700 block of 10th Street; cited and released. Weiss is accused of trespassing at The Dollar Tree at 2300 Resort St. on Dec. 24, 2020, and taking hot sauce from the business, court documents state.

Baker County Sheriff's Office

Arrests, citations

CONTEMPT OF COURT (Baker County warrant): Adrienna Dione Morris, 23, of Baker City, 2:09 p.m. Wednesday, at the Courthouse; cited and released.

Providing quality and compassion to all his patients.

Dr Sanders specializes in all aspects of the foot and ankle. Anything from foot & ankle pain to diabetic foot care & limb salvage, injuries, surgery, skin or toe nail conditions, sports medicine, he covers it all!



SANDERS PODIATRY

Brian Sanders, DPM
Accepting most insurances

2830 10th St Baker City, Oregon
Baker City office hours:

Mon-Thurs 8am-5pm

Clinic hours: Tuesday 8am-5pm

Thursday 8am-12pm

Clinic offices in Ontario (every other monday)

John Day (every other monday)

La Grande (every Wednesday)

541-524-0122

Baker County Veteran Services

Until further notice Veterans will not be seen in person. If you need assistance, call Rick's work number 541-523-8223 and he will call you back to help you over the phone. This is a measure that is being implemented to minimize the spread of COVID-19.