

MOUNT EMILY RECREATION AREA

Winter doesn’t stop work to reduce fire risk near La Grande

By Dick Mason
The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Snow is proving to be a friend and foe this winter for Jesse Reed, of Union, as he helps reduce the odds of a catastrophic wildfire someday striking the Grande Ronde Valley.

Reed is the co-owner of ReedCo Forestry, a company Union County contracted with to help build one of two major firebreaks in the Mount Emily Recreation Area north of La Grande. The firebreak Reed’s company is creating is about 6 miles long on MERA’s Mainline Trail, which runs north-south starting from the recreation site’s parking lot off of Fox Hill Road.

ReedCo is creating the firebreaks through a tree thinning process that involves the use of heavy equipment. Winter is the best time to do this work because much of the area is on rocky terrain, which is hard on equipment, such as blades. The snow and ice now in MERA are covering the rocks, providing a buffer for the equipment, Reed said.

Wintry conditions also are a plus because they keep



Dick Mason/The (La Grande) Observer

Jesse Reed, co-owner of ReedCo Forestry, examines logs on Feb. 2 along the Mainline Trail in the Mount Emily Recreation Area near La Grande.

the ground solid, preventing heavy equipment from creating ruts.

Too much snow, though, can be a complicating factor.

“Sometimes I have to plow the road with a dozer,” Reed said.

Those working with Reed on the firebreak project include Ed Frazer and Dan McKenzie, of ReedCo Forestry, and Russ Smith, of Hagedorn Logging, a subcontractor.

The second firebreak will be along Forest Service Road 3120. Gary Wright, of

of Forestry spokesperson.

Once completed, the trunks of all trees in the firebreaks will be at least 10 feet apart and their crowns 25 feet apart.

The distances make it much less likely for a fire to spread from tree to tree.

Union County Emergency Manager J.B. Brock said building the firebreaks now will save firefighters the time and expense of creating them in the midst of a major fire. And the work is less hazardous and less expensive now, requiring a limited amount of heavy machinery because the contractors have several months to do the work.

Union County Parks Coordinator Sean Chambers said he is delighted with the project to make the firebreaks this winter.

“Instead of being reactive, we are being proactive,” Chambers said.

He said the project should wrap up by early spring. Some cleanup work, though, will occur in the fall, including burning slash piles, when there is less fire danger.

4 fully vaccinated people test positive

By Sara Cline
Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — Four people in Oregon, who have been fully vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine, have tested positive for the coronavirus the health authority reported Friday, Feb. 12.

Oregon is among the first states nationwide to report “breakthrough cases” — people who test positive for coronavirus at least 14 days after receiving their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“(This is) not to be unexpected in a vaccine that while phenomenal, with 95% percent effectiveness, still means 5% may still be infected,” Patrick Allen,

the director of the health authority, said Friday.

Officials say that two “breakthrough cases” are in Yamhill County and the other two are located in Lane County. The four people had mild or no symptoms. Officials say that studies show that the vaccine may help reduce the severity of the illness.

“What all this means is that we can expect to see more breakthrough cases,” Dean Sidelinger, the health authority’s state health officer. “Getting as many Oregonians as possible vaccinated remains a critical objective to ending the pandemic.”

Sidelinger said that he anticipates

as people continue to be vaccinated, more states will report “breakthrough cases.”

Health experts are monitoring the cases and genome sequencing is underway, with results expected this week.

In addition, the health authority announced on Friday that the number of people receiving the COVID-19 vaccine in Oregon and the amount of doses being shipped to the state have increased.

Currently, 10% of Oregon’s population have received at least a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Health officials announced Friday that Oregon’s weekly allocation of first doses is increasing, from 75,000 to 82,000.

Senate acquits Trump in historic impeachment trial

By Lisa Mascaro, Eric Tucker and Mary Clare Jalonick
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump was acquitted Saturday of inciting the horrific attack on the U.S. Capitol, concluding a historic impeachment trial that spared him the first-ever conviction of a current or former U.S. president but exposed the fragility of America’s democratic traditions and left a divided nation to come to terms with the violence sparked by his defeated presidency.

Barely a month since the deadly Jan. 6 riot that stunned the world, the Senate convened for a rare weekend session to deliver its verdict, voting while armed National Guard troops continued to stand their posts outside the iconic building.

The quick trial, the nation’s first of a former president, showed in raw and emotional detail how perilously

close the invaders had come to destroying the nation’s deep tradition of a peaceful transfer of presidential power after Trump had refused to concede the election. Rallying outside the White House, he unleashed a mob of supporters to “fight like hell” for him at the Capitol just as Congress was certifying Democrat Joe Biden’s victory. As hundreds stormed the building, some in tactical gear engaging in bloody combat with police, lawmakers fled for their lives. Five people died.

The verdict, on a vote of 57-43, is all but certain to influence not only the former president’s political future but that of the senators sworn to deliver impartial justice as jurors. Seven Republicans joined all Democrats to convict, but it was far from the two-thirds threshold required.

Trump, unrepentant, welcomed his second impeachment acquittal

and said his movement “has only just begun.” He slammed the trial as “yet another phase of the greatest witch hunt in the history of our Country.”

Though he was acquitted of the sole charge of incitement of insurrection, it was easily the largest number of senators to ever vote to find a president of their own party guilty of an impeachment count of high crimes and misdemeanors.

Voting to find Trump guilty were GOP Sens. Richard Burr of North Carolina, Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Ben Sasse of Nebraska and Patrick Toomey of Pennsylvania.

Even after voting to acquit, the Republican leader Mitch McConnell condemned the former president as “practically and morally responsible” for the insurrection. McConnell contended Trump could not be

convicted because he was gone from the White House.

In a statement issued several hours after the verdict, Biden highlighted the bipartisan nature of the vote to convict as well as McConnell’s strong criticism of Trump. In keeping with his stated desire to see the country overcome its divisions, Biden said everyone, especially the nation’s leaders, have a duty “to defend the truth and to defeat the lies.”

“That is how we end this uncivil war and heal the very soul of our nation. That is the task ahead. And it’s a task we must undertake together,” Biden said.

The trial had been momentarily thrown into confusion when senators Saturday suddenly wanted to consider potential witnesses, particularly concerning Trump’s actions as the mob rioted. Prolonged proceedings could have been

especially damaging for Biden’s new presidency, significantly delaying his emerging legislative agenda.

The nearly weeklong trial has delivered a grim and graphic narrative of the riot and its consequences in ways that senators, most of whom fled for their own safety that day, acknowledge they are still coming to grips with.

House prosecutors have argued that Trump was the “inciter in chief” stoking a months-long campaign with an orchestrated pattern of violent rhetoric and false claims they called the “big lie” that unleashed the mob. The five people who died included a rioter who was shot and a police officer.

Trump’s lawyers countered that Trump’s words were not intended to incite the violence and that impeachment is nothing but a “witch hunt” designed to prevent him from serving in office again.

ACCESS

Continued from Page 1A

“It wears on all of us and we have to step back and remind ourselves, yeah this is a lot, it’s a lot to carry, it’s a lot for all of us to carry, but you don’t have to carry it alone,” Walsh said.

New Directions, which moved into its new office at 13th and K streets last summer, has a walk-in clinic available for people who don’t have an appointment on weekdays.

“With the world that we live in, the world that we work in in terms of mental health, the reason we’re doing the walk-in clinic is because we find that people, when they have a crisis or when they are in need of services, the best program delivery is in that moment, not having to schedule them out six weeks or so,” Walsh said. “We want to be able to serve people right in that moment when they need it. People are able to use the

walk in clinic as many times as they want.

“If you are experiencing anxiety or depression or needing someone to talk to, we are here,” Walsh said. “We want to be here available for everybody.”

New Directions also operates a 24-hour crisis hotline and a mobile crisis team that can be reached at 541-519-7126.

“We are also working with the Oregon Health Authority through a FEMA grant,”

Walsh said, referring to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “FEMA is in the business of natural disasters and COVID is being treated as a national disaster, so we have a new team of what we call crisis counselors on an outreach team that are also available to meet with individuals or groups.”

New Directions can provide a counseling team to help employees at a larger employer, Walsh said.

“Whatever the community wants, we will do our best to be there for them,” she said. “The whole role is to link them up to the resources they need.”

New Directions has also increased its use of online meetings to reduce face-to-face counseling.

“We still do face-to-face but if people feel safer, they can have a tele-health appointment with us for their appointment,” Walsh said. The agency also has an

online link for Alcoholics Anonymous resources

“During COVID, people were not allowed to meet in their AA groups, so there is a link there,” Walsh said.

“Across the board there is increased need. And I think that’s the beauty of being able to deliver services in different forms. To be able to meet the client where they’re at. And when I say that, I mean not just physically but emotionally as well.”

“We just want closure for them. They deserve answers.”

— Baker City Police Det. Shannon Regan, talking about Linda Peterson’s relatives

MISSING

Continued from Page 1A

Police hope to add more to the current \$5,000 reward total.

“Our goal is to get \$10,000 to \$15,000,” said Shannon Regan, Baker City Police detective, who is leading the local investigation.

“We’re still very actively investigating,” Regan said. “We are working with a small group of investigators on the west side who are helping us put things together within the case.”

Regan said police have developed people “of strong interest” and investigators have strong reason to believe that foul play was involved in Peterson’s disappearance.

Police hope that a larger reward might bring someone forward who perhaps has held back information up to this point.

Because the case is an ongoing, active criminal investigation, Regan declined to release other details.

She did say that joining the Crime Stoppers of Oregon is a strategy that police hope will provide more access to those who might want to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation or being branded a snitch in the community. It also might help encourage those who are just reluctant to get involved, she said.

People who are interested in receiving a reward in exchange for information, however, are required to give their name, Regan said.

“We have received hundreds of leads and we’ve been following up on them,” she said. “Linda was known by many, many, many people.”

“We follow up on every lead until we exhaust it,” Regan said. “There are still

plenty of people coming forward.”

Regan said she has been in regular contact with Linda’s family as the investigation has continued.

“We just want closure for them,” she said. “They deserve answers.”

Although Peterson has suffered with mental health issues over the years, many local residents thought very highly of her, Regan said.

“Most people I talk to say she would give you the shirt off her back,” Regan said. “While she had mental health issues, she was a very kind, compassionate person.”

Peterson was last seen wearing blue jeans, a gray hooded sweatshirt and black-and-white tennis shoes.

The 5-foot-1 Peterson had been living at an apartment at 2450 Broadway St. when she disappeared. Posters distributed when she first went missing described her with brown hair and brown eyes with tattoos on her buttocks and left ankle and a scar on her right wrist.

She was known to travel on foot throughout the community.

Tips regarding Peterson’s whereabouts may be submitted to the Crime Stoppers of Oregon at <http://crimestoppersoforegon.com/>

Click on the “cases” tab across the top and then scroll down and click on missing persons. Peterson is the second person down from the top among the list of missing people.

To provide information to Baker City Police, call 541-524-2014, to leave a message for Regan. She also is available by email at sregan@bakercity.com or through Messenger on the Baker City Police Facebook page.

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