

# Local & State

## Invasive weed of the week

By Jeffrey Pettingill

### The Enemy

Kochia (Bassia scoparia)

### The Strategy

This annual weed can grow from one to six feet tall. This native plant of Asia has become one of the worst weeds in our development and agricultural communities. Kochia can be found anywhere from the smallest gardens, to alleys, to gravel and asphalted road shoulders, and even affects all agricultural fields. This plant is very green, with slightly hairy leaves (especially when young) with one main stem with off shoots that taper to the top and produces a very small cream flower. Later in the summer it is a major contributor to allergies.

### Attack

This plant competes for sunlight and nutrients for all desirable vegetation. It produces over 10,000 seeds per plant and can germinate all summer long. An even bigger problem is when this plant dries up later in the summer it becomes huge fire hazard and becomes a tumbleweed the following year. It germinates from seed with each rainstorm through-



Kochia is an aggressive annual weed that can invade many types of sites.

out the summer. It contains toxins that can be hazardous to horses and cattle and becomes a major distracter along roadsides.

### Defense

Getting an early start on controlling this weed is key to limiting its damage. Once this plant becomes knee-high it is very tough to control. Since this plant is an annual it can be controlled by mechanical means (shovel, disking,

plowing, etc). Mowing is very ineffective because the plant will simply grow back within a week. There are numerous herbicides that can be used, especially Dicamba (Banvel, Vanquish, or Clarity), and Floroxypyr (Vista or Starane). 2,4-D has little effect on this plant. I must caution you in that this plant has biotypes that are resistant to many herbicides, even the ones listed above. Rotation of classes of herbicides is very

important to manage the weed. Persistent revegetation will help. As always call your local Weed Authority for more details.

*Jeffrey Pettingill is the weed control supervisor for Baker County. He encourages people with noxious weed questions to call him at 541-523-0618 or 541-519-0204. He also encourages people to like the Baker County Weed District's Facebook page.*

## Pendleton Bike Week canceled again

By Antonio Sierra  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — For the second year in a row, Pendleton Bike Week is canceled.

The organizers behind the motorcycle rally made the announcement on the event's website.

"Due to COVID-19 and the mandated restrictions the official word has come down and unfortunately, as most anticipated, Pendleton Bike Week 2021 ... and the Summer Chute Out III flat track race have been postponed until (the) third week of July 2022," the website states.

In an interview, bike week owner Stuart Rice said the reasoning behind the decision was simple.

"Too many restrictions, not enough freedoms," he said.

Rice said he was among the event organizers that met with Gov. Kate Brown's office recently, but he said the staffers they spoke to seemed more concerned with another wave of COVID-19 that could hit the state in the coming months. He said some of the concepts that were discussed, like a 50% cap on audiences, wouldn't be feasible for something like the bike week concert.

Founded in 2015, Pendleton Bike Week, along with Pend-



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

A biker roars onto the tarmac at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport during the 2019 "Ride with the Raiders" event that was part of Pendleton Bike Week.

leton Whisky Music Fest, was among a slate of new events that were supposed to help drive tourism in Pendleton in the months leading up to the Round-Up.

A multi-day event that featured multiple rides, a classic rock concert, a vendor area and more, Pendleton Bike Week had some success in its early years. As interest in bike week began to flag, Rice, the owner of the Midway Bar & Grill in

Hermiston, took over the event with the idea of revamping it. Among his ideas was moving the hub of the rally from the Pendleton Convention Center to the Round-Up Grounds and making the event more affordable.

As it stands now, Pendleton tourism season offers a checkered calendar.

Some events, like the Jackalope Jamboree and the Pendleton Cattle Barons, are

already committed to reviving their events.

Whisky Fest still has its July 10 concert date on the schedule, but organizers are still waiting for more certainty from the governor's office before they can feel confident in that date.

And Pendleton's ultimate event, the Round-Up, is projecting confidence in holding a full event in September, although the details of how they will operate are still under wraps.

## COVID

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The man, who had underlying medical conditions, tested positive on March 24. He died at his home, according to the OHA.

This was the county's first COVID-19-related death since March 11, when an 81-year-old man died three days after testing positive.

"We're really saddened to receive this report," Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, said in a press release. "All of us here at the

Health Department send our condolences to his family and friends."

Baker County's recent surge in new COVID-19 cases has slowed over the past five days, with 14 reported from April 4-8. There were 36 new cases during the previous five-day period, and 79 from March 21-April 3.

This winter, that total would have moved the county from the lowest of the state's four risk levels to the highest, and imposed the tightest restrictions on businesses. But in mid-March the state added a two-week "caution period" for counties in some cases,

which keeps them at the current risk level for two weeks.

Baker County will remain at the lowest risk level through at least April 22. Its risk level starting April 23 will be based on case numbers and the positivity rate from April 4-17.

"The caution period is saving us from having to go backwards, and our best shot at avoiding a jump at the end of April is for everyone to do what they can to keep everyone else healthy and get our cases numbers down again," said Mark Bennett, Baker County commissioner.

## SCHOOL

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Since July 2020, a total of 14 Baker School District employees, including three substitute teachers, have tested positive.

Nine Baker School District students have tested positive for COVID-19 since the school year started in early September, although initially all students attended classes online rather than

in-person. The most recent student case, a middle school student, was reported Feb. 5, and there have been just two student cases since Dec. 9.

Students from grades pre-kindergarten through sixth grade returned to in-person classes on a full four-day schedule on Oct. 14.

Middle school and high school students returned to in-person classes one day per week on Nov. 9, and their schedule

expanded to two days on Jan. 25.

Baker School District Superintendent Mark Witty said earlier this week that middle school and high school students will attend in-person classes four days per week starting Monday, April 12.

He met on Wednesday, April 7 with Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, and she endorsed the district's plan for a full in-person schedule for older students.

## State fixes vaccine reporting problem

By Jayson Jacoby  
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The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) has fixed an error in its system for reporting county-level COVID-19 vaccination numbers, and the correction had a big effect on Baker County, whose inflated numbers prompted the agency to look at the situation in late March.

On March 31 the OHA removed county data from its website, after an official acknowledged that numbers for Baker County, which had been shown for more than a week as having by far the highest rate of vaccinations, were likely overstated by about 50%. The agency had been reporting that about 62% of the county's 16,800 residents had been either partially or fully vaccinated.

On Friday afternoon, April 9, the OHA resumed including county vaccination statistics on its website, govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19.

The corrected website showed that 4,850 Baker County residents had received were either partially (1,511) or fully (3,339) vaccinated.

That's almost 29% of the county's population.

The county ranks slightly below average among Oregon's 36 counties in the rate of vaccinations, measured as the number per 10,000 residents.

Baker County's vaccination (partial and full) rate of 2,883 per 10,000 residents ranks 21st out of 36 counties. Other Baker County statistics:

- 6,582 doses of Moderna vaccine administered, along with 780 doses of Pfizer and 396 of Johnson & Johnson.
- Number of residents age 80 and older who are partially or fully vaccinated is 696, about 68% of that population group in the county.
- Ages 75 to 79 — a total of 505 people partially or fully vaccinated, almost 58% of that age group.
- Ages 70 to 74 — a total of 778 out of 1,264 residents partially or fully vaccination, almost 62%.
- Ages 65 to 69 — a total of 768 out of 1,548 residents partially or fully vaccinated, almost 50%.

Totals for other age groups: 60 to 64 years (524); 50 to 59 (633); 40 to 49 (398); 30 to 39 (345); 20 to 29 (175); 19 or younger (28).

## WOLF

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Also, during a wolf census flight this winter, ODFW biologists saw a gray wolf with the Cornucopia pack with colors similar to those of the wolf hit on the highway, Ratliff said.

Based on previous GPS signals, that pack has crossed Highway 86 in that area, he said.

The Cornucopia pack's breeding male and female produced their first litter, consisting of three pups, in 2019, and another litter in the spring of 2020.

At the end of 2020 the pack consisted of seven wolves, Ratliff said.

Someone shot and killed the Cornucopia pack's breeding male in late September 2020 in the Skull Creek area of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, about one mile east of Eagle Forks Campground.

Oregon State Police investigated the case but no suspects have been arrested.

Based on this winter's aerial survey, the Cornucopia pack doesn't have a new breeding male, Ratliff said.

If another male had

taken over that role, the two breeding wolves would have been running very close together, and that wasn't the case, he said.

It's possible, however, that the pack's breeding female did mate, and if that happened the female will move soon into a den to have her pups, Ratliff said.

Biologists will be able to determine that she's gone to a den based on data from her tracking collar, which emits radio signals rather than GPS signals.

Recently the Cornucopia pack has been in the area near Highway 86, mostly private land used for cattle grazing, Ratliff said. He said that "gives me concern" because the wolves could be close to cattle. Ratliff said he has alerted ranchers in the area to the wolves' presence.

Data from the collared wolves in the pack in 2019 showed that they roamed a 162-square-mile area ranging from the southern part of the Eagle Cap Wilderness near Cornucopia (hence the pack's name) to the northern parts of the Pine and Eagle valleys.

About 92% of the location points were on public land, according to ODFW.

## SUMPTER

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Sumpter City Recorder ReNae Cameron said organizers have made some changes to comply with COVID-19 precautions.

"Masks will be required, of course the social distancing, (and) we're going to have the booths spaced out a little more separate," Cameron said. "And then we'll also have hand sanitizer at all of the booths."

Cameron expects a similar number of vendors as in past years.

That includes an estimated 75 vendors on the city property at the Sumpter fairgrounds. She didn't have an estimated number of vendors along Mill Street through downtown Sumpter.

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