

EDITORIAL

Reversing
the surge
in COVID

The numbers are real and so are the likely effects. Real, and depressing.

Baker County's success at limiting the spread of COVID-19 was temporary.

After slashing the daily average of new cases by more than half in February compared with December, the county held on to that progress during the first three weeks of March.

But since then the virus has spread with greater rapidity that at any time since December. During December the county recorded 196 total cases, an average of 6.3 per day.

The daily average dipped to 3.4 in January and to 2.5 in February before rising a bit, to 3.1 per day, during March. The March increase was driven by cases in the final 10 days of the month.

During the 24-day period from March 22 through April 14, the county had 131 new cases, an average of 5.5 per day. The recent trend has been even worse, with 16 cases on Wednesday, April 14 and 14 the previous day. The two-day total of 30 cases is the most in any two-day period since the pandemic started.

Although the public is hamstrung somewhat by not having a lot of detail about the source of the new cases, according to the county health department the biggest culprit, as it was during previous surges, is people attending parties and other gatherings. It's hardly a stretch to say that some of the people present either aren't vaccinated or they weren't taking precautions that can reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

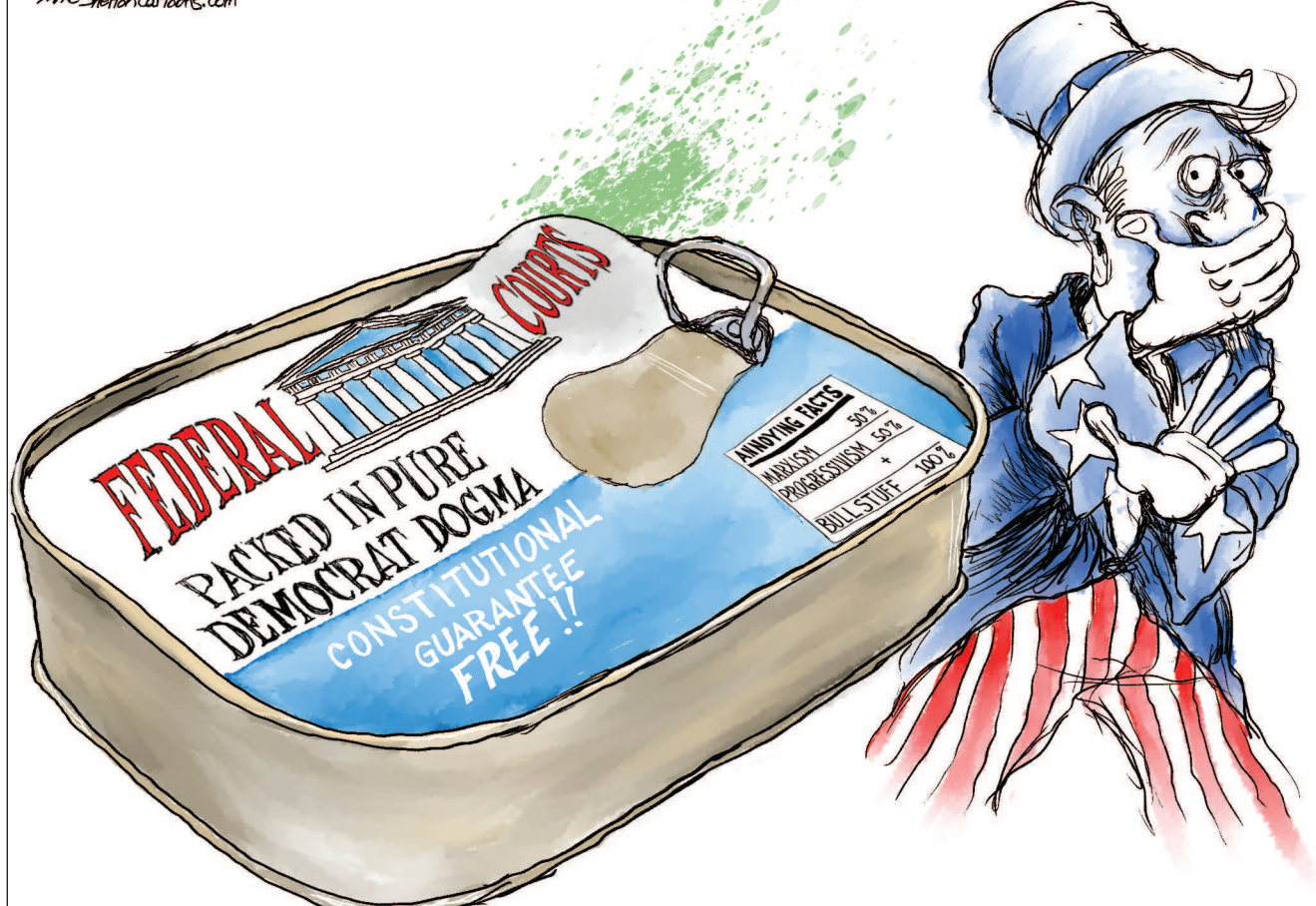
On Wednesday, April 14, a 71-year-old Baker County woman died in a Boise hospital, a week after testing positive. She was the 14th county resident to die after contracting the virus.

Besides the obvious and tragic health effects, this surge is likely to move the county back to the high risk level starting April 23. That's a cruel blow to restaurants, the Eltrym Theater and other businesses that have already suffered so much from restrictions.

We managed to hold this virus largely at bay during a time when relatively few residents were vaccinated. Surely now, with 31% partially or fully inoculated, we can do it again.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

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Congress needs to involve the
county in River Democracy Act

The River Democracy Act is not democracy at all. It is a small group of people trying to impose their will on all of Oregon.

The Law of Coordination states that the Forest Service and BLM shall coordinate with local county government in all public land natural resource plans and revisions. With this proposal, there has been no communication directly with Baker County.

32 CFR §219.1(b) states:

“(9) Coordination with the land and resource planning efforts of other federal agencies, state and local governments and Indian Tribes;

“(10) Use of systematic, interdisciplinary approach to ensure coordination and integration of planning activities for multiple use management.”

There is only approximately 30% of general forest remaining for multiple use in Baker County. The County and the citizens cannot afford any additional loss of public lands, including waterways, riparian areas, and forestlands. Any further reductions in the rightful use of public lands will constrict access and use of natural resources for the health, safety, general welfare, and economic viability of our County's citizens.

The River Democracy Act not



BILL HARVEY

only removes more waterways from multiple use, it also adds greatly to the potential of wildfires by removing another ½ mile of forest from management and fire protection along each side of designated waterways. By doing this, it creates an additional fire hazard/threat by making the riparian area 1-mile wide that can no longer be accessed for fuels control or firefighting.

Baker County's economy is strongly based on access to natural resource areas on public lands. The use of resources such as timber, grazing, mining, firewood gathering, hunting, fishing, camping, and just riding on motorized vehicles is curtailed through reduced access. Every activity provides for the local economy which is vital for the stability and sustainability of Baker County communities.

Enough is enough! We are very tired of having to defend our County from attacks from outside entities, government agencies, or private environmental groups. They all want to restrict the use of public lands, even after

taking control of more than 70% of the public land already.

When Congress wrote and passed the Law of Coordination in 1976, it was to protect the local government from being overrun by regulations and restrictions imposed against our counties' needs and economic viability.

The current attempt is another effort to bypass statutory mandates that force federal agencies to work directly with the local governments. Baker County is the local government and we have established Coordination within the County since 2001 by ordinance. By not involving Baker County with any action on public lands, the proposal is in violation of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Forest Management Act, both from 1976.

Baker County strongly encourages that this effort to remove multiple use from wide swatches of public lands be stopped, then restarted by following the Law of Coordination, working with each affected County directly.

When Coordination is used through the proper process, it works for all the citizens not just a select few.

Bill Harvey is chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners.

Worn down by the wicked winds of the spring

I decided last Sunday that my arid, ailing lawn needed a good dousing, but my enthusiasm for completing this simplest of tasks withered rapidly.

The hose was attached to the bib, the water flowing freely and with no leaks.

But I couldn't find the sprinkler.

I suppose I hadn't thought of this item since September.

But this span of time hardly seemed sufficient to explain where the sprinkler had gotten off to while I was otherwise occupied.

Perhaps to whatever purgatory my snow shovels get themselves banished to every year between April and August, leaving me to fumble around out by the shed during a November squall.

I'd like to believe inanimate, immobile objects would be more reliable, but there you go.

Eventually I tracked the sprinkler to a spot that, with hindsight, seems logical, even obvious.

It was on top of the electric meter, beside the coiled garden hose, no doubt precisely where I left it six months or so earlier.

I was treated to this unpleasant reminder about the condition of my memory — every year it comes closer to the cranial equivalent of a kitchen colander — because the grass on our place is more tan than green. This is, to be sure, not an



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atypical situation for the second week of April, what with the sometimes disagreeable climate of our mountain valley.

And yet it has hardly been a normal spring, to the extent that such a thing exists.

The season thus far is noteworthy both for what it lacks — rain — and for what it has brought to Baker County in a great gritty abundance — wind.

Scarcely any rain has fallen since February.

Instead we have been besieged by a series of dry cold fronts, the meteorological version of the unwanted houseguest who barges in, unannounced, drinks all the beer in your refrigerator and leaves bootprints on the carpet that defy even the sort of stain remover which is banned in several states due to its curious effects on laboratory mice. Some cold fronts have redeeming qualities.

They often bring rain or snow. Precipitation is a valuable commodity in any season given the desert-like climate that prevails in much of Baker County, but espe-

cially so during spring, when crops are beginning to gain a foothold in the slowly warming soil.

A cold front can also usher in a refreshingly brisk breeze that cleans the air of wildfire smoke or other annoying contaminants.

But the fronts that have been nearly metronomic over the past month or so were largely malevolent.

They've yielded at best a brief spat of rain, snow or soft hail, the proverbial diminutive drop in an already empty bucket.

What the fronts have spawned is wind.

Wind that at times seems omnipotent.

Persistent wind is the most depressing of weather phenomena, it seems to me.

People can adapt to extreme temperatures more readily, I think, in part because donning or doffing clothing can ameliorate the thermal effects.

The problem with wind is that it gusts.

It isn't predictable in the way that a hot or a cold day is. Once you've adjusted your attire to the temperature, it's usually possible to reach something approaching comfort.

But the variety of wind we've been subjected to on many days recently is a different matter.

It pummels you at all times, but then, with a frustrating irregularity, a gust will temporarily worsen the assault. It's akin to being punched lightly but consistently and then taking an uppercut every couple minutes and having no way to block the blow.

Wind is uniquely annoying.

I have stumbled indoors from my afternoon walk several times recently feeling as though I had just endured the sort of ordeal that served as entertainment for medieval lords when they tired of flogging the serfs and watching the knights joust.

My eyes squinted, the contact lenses resting about as comfortably on my corneas as 30-grit sandpaper.

My hair was contorted into strange new shapes.

I felt both disheveled and drained of energy. It was as though the gusts, by impeding my progress so that I had to lean into the wind, like a TV weather personality reporting on a tropical storm, had leached away more than the normal number of calories.

It's been a strange spring in other ways.

The parade of cold fronts, in addition to turning Baker Valley into a topographic wind tunnel, has created ideal conditions for abnormally frigid nights.

The combination of clear skies and low humidity maximizes what weather experts call “radiational cooling.” In the most simplistic sense — which is the only sense in which I can hope to understand scientific principles — both clouds and water vapor in the air (reflected in the relative humidity) act rather like blankets, holding heat near the ground. When skies are cloud-free and the air is dry, heat that the ground absorbs during the day will rise (or radiate, hence “radiational cooling”) more easily, allowing temperature near the ground to plummet.

Low temperatures at the Baker City Airport were below average on 18 of the 23 days between March 21 and April 12. That stretch included new record lows on three days and a tie on another.

None of this, needless to say, has been much help to my grass.

Like most plants it needs sunlight, warmth and water to thrive. Of that trio, only the first has been anything like abundant.

The warmth, at least, seems to have gained a bit of momentum.

And if nature continues to hoard the latter element, I can at least serve as a surrogate, presuming I don't misplace the sprinkler again.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.