

# Local & State

## Invasive weed of the week

By Jeffrey Pettingill

### The Enemy

Poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)

### The Strategy

Poison hemlock is a biennial plant that grows up to 12 feet tall. This is the most toxic of all the plants that we have growing in the area. The plant hosts white flowers (don't mistake this plant for wild parsley or wild carrot). This plant is easy to distinguish as the stems have a purple striping up and down them that the other plants do not. The leaves are fern-like and pinnately divided and resemble Grandma's end table doilies. This plant hosts a white taproot which when viewed in cross-section resembles thick walls with hollow chambers.

### Attack

This plant inhabits the riparian areas along streams and ditches or even where there are subsurface waters near roadways. It can become very thick once the plants become established. As the plant matures it blocks out sunlight and robs the soil of valuable nutrients and water. Wildlife cannot travel



Rich Old/Contributed Photo

Poison hemlock usually grows along waterways, and can reach 12 feet in height.

through the bamboo-like stems (although they don't turn woody) and obviously few or no animals can feed on it to help control it. All parts of this plant are poisonous to livestock and humans; in fact the extract of this plant was used to execute Socrates of ancient Greece. People have been killed by the plant when they mistakenly put it in a salad.

### Defense

There is one insect, a

moth, that defoliates this plant (available from the County Weed District). Mechanically digging up the plants can be effective in the first few years of establishment. Cover your hands with latex or nitrile gloves then apply your leather gloves and get to removing. Use herbicides such as 1 ounce per acre of Escort XP or Telar XP, and on outer side of irrigation ditch banks, 3.3 ounces per acre of Opensight is best, but remember not to

get the products inside the ditch banks. Treatments in early spring are best, but these products can be used right up to a late bloom stage of the plant.

*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.*

## COUNTY

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Most recently, commissioners extended that contract, which is for about \$77,000 per year, through Aug. 31, 2021.

On Wednesday, May 19, commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols voted for a motion, pending Martin's decision about extending the Chamber of Commerce contract, to have another attorney who's also working for the county, Kim Mosier, draft a request for proposals (RFP) to help the county find a contractor to oversee the lodging tax system review.

That would include scheduling public meetings and gathering input from business owners in the visitor industry, and potentially writing additional RFPs for the visitor center as well as the other legs of the lodging tax stool, tourism marketing and economic development.

The current lodging tax ordinance, which dates to 2006, requires that the county spend 70% of the revenue for tourism marketing, and 25% for economic development.

The county has separate contracts for tourism marketing and economic

development as well as for operating the visitors center.

The county can keep up to 5% for administrative costs.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey abstained from voting on the motion Wednesday.

During a work session on May 12, the three commissioners had argued over the lodging tax issue.

Bennett and Nichols took the position that when commissioners voted on March 3 to extend the visitor center contract to Aug. 31, that the six-member work group formed, three each appointed by the county and Baker City, would solicit opinions from tourism businesses to help guide a new RFP for operating the visitor center.

But Harvey, who was one of the county's representatives on the work group, said it wasn't possible to do that and have an RFP ready before the contract extension ends Aug. 31.

Bennett, though, on Wednesday reiterated his point from May 12, that commissioners need input from businesses that depend on visitors.

"I believe that we can't build a roadmap or any guidance until we hear what everybody is thinking about out there," Bennett said. "The RFP for the

consultant, that will include listening sessions with the community and the visitor services center, engagement with the visitor services industry."

He said the idea is to build on the efforts of the six-member work group, which met several times in March and April and drafted an RFP for operating the visitors center, anticipating the need to put the RFP out in time to allow the county to receive and review proposals before Aug. 31.

"We do have a lot of work done, it's collecting our work, putting it together in a package because there's work the work group just did, there's the work the (county lodging tax committee has) done, there's the 2018 marketing plan, all of this is more a compilation," Bennett said.

During the commissioners' work session on May 12, and a meeting that evening with members of the city/county work group, there was a discussion about potentially extending the Chamber of Commerce's contract to operate the visitors center until March 2022.

Commissioners initially planned to award a new contract in February 2020. The county received two proposals, one from the Chamber and one from Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

## SCHOOLS

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The levy will raise property taxes within the district, which includes Baker City and much of Baker Valley, by about 66 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value over five years.

The district's most recent bond measure, a \$48 million proposal that would have allowed the district to build a new elementary school, was soundly defeated, with more than twice as many no votes — 4,725 — as yes votes — 2,185.

That measure was on the general election ballot in November 2018. Voter turnout was much higher in that election, with about 8,512 ballots returned (72.4% turnout) compared with 5,927 ballots returned in Tuesday's special election (47.2% turnout).

Hawkins said he was

optimistic that voters would recognize how school district officials responded to the message voters sent in rejecting the 2018 measure by proposing a much smaller bond that will be repaid in five years rather than 30.

"We did the best we could to listen and learn from the last bond, to take that and go back to the drawing board," he said. "What we came up with was a result of community member involvement."

Hawkins said he's eager for residents to see the improvements that the bond money will help to pay for.

"I'm excited for the public to see what these dollars are going to look like," he said. "We're going to make the most of this bond. I think it's a really good opportunity to gain that community trust."

In other races on Tuesday's ballot:

### Baker School Board

In the one contested race, for position 3, Jessica Dougherty received 1,819 votes to defeat Koby Myer, who had 1,747 votes.

Travis Cook was the only candidate for position 4 on the board.

### Idaho border measure

In a countywide measure, voters decided to require Baker County commissioners to meet three times per year to discuss a proposal to include 18 Oregon counties, including Baker, as part of Idaho. For the state border to actually move, however, would require the approval of both the Oregon and Idaho legislatures, and of Congress.

The measure received 3,336 yes votes and 2,469 no votes.

The measure requires commissioners "to discuss how to

promote the interests of Baker County in any negotiations regarding relocating the state borders of Idaho to include Baker County," according to the ballot title.

### Library district levy extension

By a wide margin, county voters extended the Baker County Library District's tax levy for five years. The measure passed by 3,947 votes to 1,711.

### Halfway marijuana measure

Voters in the eastern Baker County town rejected a measure that would have allowed marijuana businesses, including dispensaries, growing and processing operations, within the city limits.

A total of 119 voters opposed the measure, with 51 voting in favor.

## Five counties moving to low risk

By Mark Miller

Pamplin Media Group

Five Oregon counties — including Washington County, the state's second-most populous — will move to the most permissive risk category for the spread of COVID-19 this Friday, May 21.

Gov. Kate Brown announced Tuesday afternoon, May 18, that at least 65% of residents age 16 and older in Benton, Deschutes, Hood River, Lincoln and Washington counties have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and that those counties have also fulfilled her requirement to submit an "equity plan" to demonstrate how they'll improve vaccination rates among demographics that are lagging behind the general population. Because of that, Brown said, those five counties can move to the "lower risk" designation — clearing the way for larger gatherings and more business activities.

Washington County has been in the "high risk" category because its COVID-19 case counts have been above 100 per 100,000 residents in recent weeks. That limits indoor dining capacity to 25% at most restaurants, limits gymnasiums and other indoor recreation and fitness establishments to quarter-capacity as well, restricts stores to half-occupancy, and puts a 15% cap on the number of spectators at outdoor sporting events, among other restrictions. Residents of "high risk" counties are also asked not to gather in groups larger than eight people, or six people for indoor gatherings.

"Lower risk" significantly relaxes those limits. Indoor dining and exercise are allowed up to 50% of maximum occupancy, stores can welcome up to 75% of their normal maximum occupancy, and outdoor venues like Ron Tonkin Field in Hillsboro can fill up to half of their available seats.

Data released earlier Tuesday by the Oregon Health Authority showed Deschutes, Lincoln and Washington counties were a little short of the 65% threshold Brown set earlier this month for COVID-19 restrictions to be relaxed. But Brown said Tuesday afternoon that once the state factored in vaccine doses administered at federal facilities and vaccination events, those three counties cleared the bar.

Multnomah County is also at the 65% threshold, Oregon Health Authority data shows. But the county has not yet submitted an equity plan. Portland-based Willamette Week reported Monday, May 17, that the state's most populous county plans to wait at least one more week before it applies to move to "lower risk."

### Baker County stays at high risk through at least May 27

Although the rate of new COVID-19 cases in Baker County has dropped to its lowest level in more than three months, the county will remain at the high risk level at least through May 27, Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett said Wednesday, May 19.

That includes the most severe restrictions on business and events, since the extreme risk level is no longer an option for any counties.

In counties at high risk, restaurants and bars can have indoor dining up to 25% of capacity or 50 total people, including diners and employees.

Bennett said that although the county's number of cases over the most recent two-week measuring period — 40 cases from May 2-15 — would move the county down to the moderate risk level, the county's test positivity rate, at 8.9%, keeps the county at high risk. To drop to moderate risk the positivity rate would have to drop below 8%.

Bennett said he has asked the Oregon Health Authority why it still uses test positivity rates to determine risk levels, given that far fewer people are being tested compared with the winter and early spring. Baker County's weekly test total dropped from 236 from May 2-8, to 146 tests from May 9-15. Bennett said that as of Wednesday morning he had not received a response.

The state sets risk levels based on two weeks of data. Baker's numbers dropped substantially for the latter of the two weeks, however — from 27 cases between May 2-8, to 12 from May 9-15. For the 10-day period May 9-18, the county had 15 new cases, the fewest in a 10-day period since Feb. 4-13, when there were 13 new cases.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald

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