

DROUGHT: 'Almost every year we end up dumping a lot of water'

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County not as bad as others

He said he told the FSA, "You guys can read whatever map you want, but we're in a critical spot right now."

The higher the "D" rating, the more federal funding is available. Also, regulations can be eased, such as allowing emergency grazing on Conservation Reserve Program land that is otherwise set aside to not be used agriculturally.

Nash said he's aware Wallowa County isn't in as poor shape as some Oregon counties. He said he is aware that producers in Umatilla and Morrow counties are grazing on CRP land because of the drought conditions there.

"They were in tough shape. It was just brutal dry over there," Nash said. "We're still in better condition than almost any county in the state, but it's not good (here). The guys who are taking water out of Wallowa Lake are already on a rotation. It hasn't been warm enough early enough and then they started pulling out of the lake earlier than normal so it never had a chance to



A wheelline irrigates a field just off Eggleston Lane south of Enterprise Thursday, June 3, 2021. Irrigators are watering their fields a bit earlier than usual due to drought conditions in Wallowa County.

Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

back up."

But Dan Butterfield, president of the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District, said he's confident the lake will stand up to any drought.

"We are in what I would

consider to be a really lucky situation because we have a reservoir," he said, adding that an engineering firm the district contracts with is giving positive assurances.

"We're set to fill the

lake by July to our maximum levels," he said.

Last week the lake showed a 2-inch increase. Butterfield said it needs to fill another 5 feet to reach its maximum level.

He agreed that many

irrigators turned on the tap May 1 — the earliest allowable date — which was two to three weeks early.

"Last year we got 10 inches of rain and didn't irrigate too much," he said.

Putting water to use

Butterfield said this year the district will be putting that water to use. Farmers are both irrigating from ditches that run from the lake and from pipes installed to keep water from evaporating, making that water more efficient.

"Right now, we're using our water instead of sending it out of here muddy to the ocean," he said. "Almost every year we end up dumping a lot of water. With the fact that people have started irrigating, we may not have to dump as much."

But the commissioners remain concerned. Nash and fellow Commissioner Susan Roberts agreed there needs to be rain along with the warmer temperatures.

"It isn't the same as when you have snow and then you get rain up there to bring the snowmelt down," Roberts said.

"It's kind of double-jeopardy," Nash added. "If it warmed up and then it rained at the same time, they wouldn't be pulling out of the lake for all they're worth and it'd be accumulating in the lake. I think we're going to see this thing just keep going to where we don't get caught up."

HOMES

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"We're working on purchasing land before summer so that it can be developed and ready in two or three years to actually put kids on a construction site, as part of their capstone course in that pathway," said La Grande High School Principal Brett Baxter.

Hendrickson noted the program's inaugural year still will offer manufacturing classes, such as project-based woodworking and traditional furniture building.

While the goal of building a home in La Grande is years down the road, engaging interest in careers is a valuable factor that students can take away from the program.

"There is definitely a deficit with general con-

tractors right now nationwide," Hendrickson said. "So it does help to fill that void if there are kids that choose to go into that career choice."

Career paths

Working hands-on in the construction pathway allows students to gauge career interests, whether they plan on attending higher education or working in the field out of high school.

"There's some kids that are taking these pathways that are still planning on going to college," Hendrickson said. "They'll still have those options to learn some skills to maybe fall back on or utilize later in their life if they change careers or do something different."

For the students looking at careers out of high school, the construction pathway offers technical training and the opportu-

nity to earn industry certifications that can help toward careers in trades.

Pathway funding

Student enrollment, education credits and industry-recognized certifications dictate how the school district funds the pathway programs. The state awards schools for giving students enough credits in those pathways courses.

The more students involved in a program, then, the more funding that can go back into that same program. Additionally, the revenue from the sale of a traditional house or smaller dwelling in La Grande could be instrumental.

"We'd be able to give back to the community," Freeman said. "It ends up being something that we can sell and we can use that funding to put back in the program."



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

Island City Elementary fifth-grade teacher Darren Hendrickson leads the first cohort of the students in his class to the front of their school Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2020. Hendrickson will serve as the full-time construction teacher at La Grande High School in the fall of 2021.

COVID-19: Brown asks to lift masking and distancing protocols

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to challenge and violate that guidance, while protests against COVID-19 restrictions spread across the state. Oregon OSHA received record levels of complaints when the pandemic first began.

Following the announcement, Brown contacted OSHA and requested it lift its workplace masking and distancing requirements once the benchmark is reached and review other policies. They were most recently updated on May 4.

Oregon OSHA said June 7 it will be reviewing COVID-19 workplace regulations and determining if they should also be lifted. That includes regulations on businesses that provide employee housing, employee notifications when a workplace COVID-19 exposure has occurred, the posting of COVID-19 safety signs, and requirements that employers cover the cost of workplace-related COVID-19 testing.

Other rules that are up for review target specific types of businesses — like

wine and beer tastings at brewpubs and distilleries.

"Because it is not possible to assign a specific time for that decision, Oregon OSHA will consult with the Oregon OSHA partnership committee, the Oregon Health Authority, the two infectious Disease Rulemaking Advisory Committees, and other stakeholders," the agency's latest COVID-19 policy says. Oregon OSHA initially said the policy review would begin in July at the latest, but now plans to hold their initial meeting the week of June 14.



The Observer, File

Signs at Bella Mercantile in La Grande Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2020, advertises requirements for COVID-19 hygiene to protect shoppers, employees and the community.

WORK

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While it's understandable to task them with smaller duties at first, they will quickly lose interest as they

are interested in being part of the bigger picture.

Regardless of whether employers choose to recruit individuals from Generation Z right now, they will soon be a major part of the global workforce. Understanding their strengths

and preferences will be important for businesses to succeed.

Greg Smith is the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center, La Grande.

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