

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Let's have a fun, and safe, holiday

We have much to celebrate this weekend besides the obvious, which is our nation's 245 years of independence. The pandemic is waning. Mask mandates and limits on restaurant capacity ended on Wednesday, June 30. Cool water beckons as a record-setting heat wave persists.

But danger lurks during this period of celebrations, family gatherings and other fun.

Fire.

The potential for fires to spread rapidly is well above average for the first week of July.

(The fire danger is not, however, at record levels. In most years the danger peaks during August or early September.)

This is hardly surprising, considering Northeastern Oregon is in the midst of one of its more severe heat waves — the most severe, in some places.

We have no control over the force that starts most wildfires in our region — lightning.

Accidents can also spark blazes. The fire that burned about 100 acres in Keating Valley on Tuesday, June 29, was ignited by farm equipment.

Farmers, obviously, have to work their land.

But most other human-caused fires are in no way inevitable.

The most obvious concern during this weekend in particular is fireworks. They are certainly capable of sparking a fire. But it requires no great effort to be safe with fireworks, should you choose to use some. Light them only in places with nothing combustible nearby. Estimate how far the sparks will go — and then double that distance, or more. And no matter how safe the spot might seem, have water at hand.

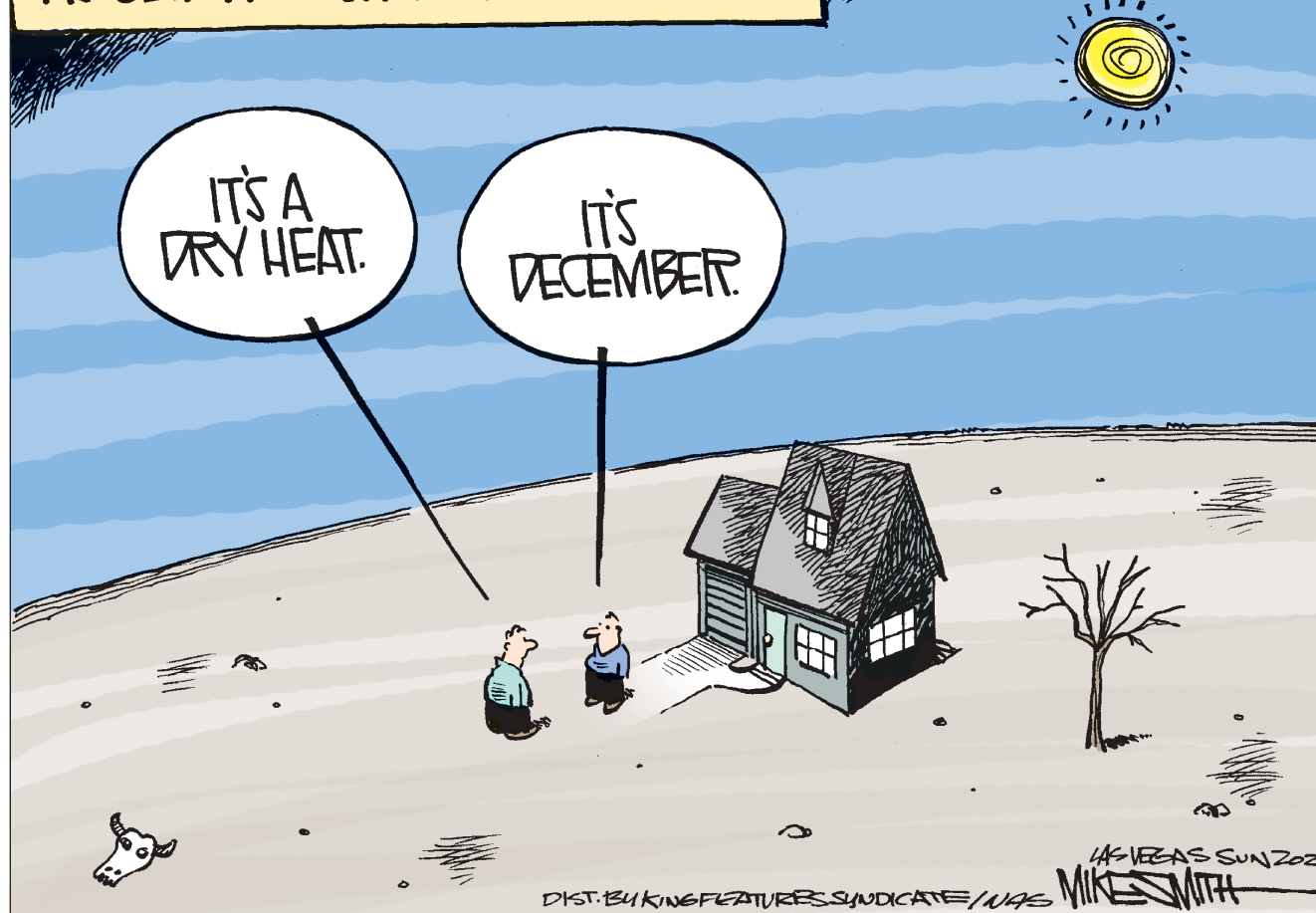
Fireworks are banned year-round on national forests, Bureau of Land Management land and other public property in the forests and rangelands.

The other precautions are familiar, but they can't be repeated too often. Snub cigarettes properly. Don't drive or park vehicles in areas with tall, dry grass. Be careful with any activity that could possibly produce even a single spark — even hammering a nail.

Yes, the fire danger is considerable. But tinder-dry sagebrush and desiccated pine trees don't spontaneously combust. We can enjoy the holiday and do so safely.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

## AS CLIMATE CHANGE CONTINUES



## New Go! Magazine on the way

Starting in July, EO Media Group is launching Go! Magazine, a weekly arts and entertainment publication designed to do exactly what it says — get readers to “go” out and experience all of what Eastern Oregon has to offer. For readers in Union, Baker, Umatilla and Morrow counties, Go! will be in your Thursday newspaper. For readers in Wallowa and Grant counties, you will receive the magazine every Wednesday.

Go! is designed to be a solid platform to connect our readers in more diverse — and I hope, interesting — ways. The magazine gives you plenty of options to know what is going on where and in what town, with a calendar of event dates and times for a host of weekly entertainment venues throughout the region. The accompanying website, goeasternoregon.com, will offer a mobile-friendly digital version of the magazine and calendar to take with you as you explore Eastern Oregon again. After more than a year of staying home, we are all ready to take to the roads and start celebrating at festivals, rodeos, concerts and events throughout the region.

After trying to find ways to work more efficiently and working on joint projects such as Northeast Oregon Artisans and AgriBusiness, the six papers that make up EO Media Group's eastside publications are launching Go! Magazine as another shared venture for our readers.



**ANDREW CUTLER**

La Grande and Baker City readers are more than familiar with the product, since it has been a staple of those papers for more than a decade.

Our six papers — The Observer, Baker City Herald, East Oregonian, Wallowa County Chieftain, Blue Mountain Eagle, and Hermiston Herald — are combining resources to expand the reach of the magazine.

Ultimately, what we do — all we do — is centered on our readers. We are a news product, sure, but all six newspapers also provide a vehicle for readers to know what is going on in the towns that dot our great region of Oregon.

That kind of reach is something we take some pride in. Eastern Oregon is a big chunk of real estate. But we have managed to provide a comprehensive news package at our newspapers on a consistent basis for a long time. While we are proud of that, we are most proud of the fact that we can furnish our readers with complete coverage in a remote part of our great state.

Finding a way to work more efficiently by designing and then executing joint programs between our newspapers is a way to “work smarter” and the payoff — which is what really matters — is that our readers will gain

a wealth of new information.

Our six papers provide unprecedented reach across our region and the addition of Go! will ensure that our readers continue to receive the benefit of our combined newspaper team strength.

I am especially pleased that we will be able to give you, the reader, more resources to make decisions and to go and see places and events that are part of our common heritage.

While it is great that we are expanding the product to new areas of the region, none of it would mean anything if we didn't have someone to be a “champion” for the product, someone to see it through from beginning to end week after week. For us, that someone is Lisa Britton, who is based at the Baker City Herald and can be reached by phone (541-406-5274) or by email (lbritton@bakercityherald.com). If you have an event that you'd like to let readers know about, she is the person to contact. We need information at least a week in advance of publication, so the sooner you can submit an event, the better. We welcome news about concerts, art shows, festivals, community events, museum exhibits and more.

*Andrew Cutler is the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the content of the Baker City Herald and five more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.*

# Early June snow already feels like nostalgia

I love the mountains but I don't trust them.

It wasn't always so.

I am by nature credulous. Gullible, even.

But after a series of incidents that had me slogging along a trail in a storm, my socks saturated with icy water, my face so numb I could issue guttural grunts but not form actual words, I wised up.

The mountains can be treacherous any time.

But late spring is the season, it seems to me, when the mountains are most likely to get up to their brand of meteorological mischief.

The trick tends to be especially convincing in years when summer heat arrives early, as it did this year.

The heat wave during the first week of June — it already seems nostalgic given what we've endured the past week — prompted me both to wrestle one of our two window air-conditioners out of the shed, and to switch my at-home wardrobe to shorts and T-shirts.

I'll doggedly stick with that basic outfit through September, no matter the occasional summer cold front or cloudburst.

(I am equally consistent with my wardrobe of sweatpants and a fleece jacket from fall through mid-spring,



**JAYSON JACOBY**

even if I occasionally get a trifle sweaty during a January thaw or one of those strange March days when the sun bears down with a ferocity reminiscent of August.)

When we decided on Sunday, June 6, to drive up to Anthony Lakes and see if Black Lake was still icebound, I wasn't persuaded by the balmy temperature in my yard.

In the waning days of spring the difference in weather between Baker Valley and the elevated topography of the Elkhorns can be roughly equivalent to the difference between the tropics and the arctic.

I dressed as I would for a snowshoe hike.

Except for the snowshoes, which we left behind. I reasoned that the chilly night — the automated weather station near the top of the ski area's chairlift recorded a low of 25 — would have frozen the lingering snowdrifts sufficiently that our boots would crunch on the crust rather than plunge into the soggy, grainy snow beneath.

(Notwithstanding mosquitoes, a category of annoyance with no real competitor, slushy spring snow exhausts my patience more rapidly than any other backcountry obstacle. After a few episodes of sinking up to my crotch and then trying to extricate a boot from the icy clutches, I pine for any type of trail condition, whether dust or mud.)

When we got to the Elkhorn Crest trailhead the car thermometer was showing 39 degrees, and tendrils of fog were whipping across the notch that cleaves the summit of Gunsight Mountain and gives the granitic peak its name.

Snow covered the trail for most of the first quarter mile or so but the drifts, as I hoped, were firm.

The low ground was sodden, pools of meltwater ankle deep in places. It was a picturesque scene, the epitome of an alpine spring, but I was plagued by thoughts of mosquito larvae, which must number in the millions in those temporary ponds.

We were fortunately a few weeks too early to have to deal with those pests.

Black Lake was ice-free. Last June when we hiked here, just two days later in the month, the only open water was a fringe along

the north shore where the ice had pulled back.

Snow started to fall while we were there at the lake, a gentle shower but incongruous given what we had been through recently in the lowlands.

Three days earlier I was mowing my lawn in 90-degree heat, but this memory seemed as flimsy as a nightmare in the clear light of morning.

We made a loop, returning to the trailhead by way of Anthony Lake. As we walked the trail on the lake's east shore the desultory shower of tiny ice pellets matured into a squall of fat flakes, propelled across the lake by a freshening wind. Only the bare patches on the ski runs, and the stationary chairlift, betrayed the season, ruining the illusion that it was midwinter rather than the cusp of the summer solstice.

We trudged back to the car. I started the engine and, for possibly the last time until autumn, I twisted the temperature control into the red until it stopped.

Thunder rumbled in the night and I fumbled on the bedside table for my glasses.

I wasn't sure if the hollow sound, like distant artillery fire, had awakened me, or whether I was merely between dreams in a moment of semi-consciousness that coincided with the thunder.

My initial thought — it felt more like a compulsion, actually — was to tap my phone and summon the Doppler radar, which like so much else in our digital age, is incapable of sleep.

This simple act, the work of a few seconds, would show me not only the precise location of the storm that spawned the thunder, but also the direction it was moving.

I resisted the urge.

This is an increasingly rare thing these days — to leave closed the electronic window to the digital world of information.

Instead I slid open the analog, but absolutely tangible, window on the west side of our bedroom a couple more inches, the better to hear the thunder, and to gauge for myself, as I lay there in the dark, whether the vagaries of nature might bring the storm my way, and with it the aroma of summer rain, a scent that no app can duplicate.

*Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.*