

Search and Rescue teams from Baker, other counties hone skills

■ About 60 volunteers participated in training June 24-27 in Wallowa County

East Oregonian

ENTERPRISE — Search and Rescue team members from Wallowa, Union, Baker and Umatilla counties honed their skills in the Salt Creek Summit area of Wallowa County.

About 60 SAR volunteers and instructors from the four counties participated June 24-27 in the multi-day training, which was hosted by Wallowa County Search and Rescue volunteers.

“Our numbers were down a little from what we expected, but it’s a little late in the season,” Paige Sully, the event coordinator for Wallowa County SAR, said. “But all in all I think it was great.”

Training included swift-water rescue, tactical fast tracking, advanced incident command, hasty-team and K-9 land searches, rescuing injured hikers from remote locations and coordination with Civil Air Patrol aircraft.

“It was a very good training,” said Jim Akenson, who serves as a WCSAR incident commander and participated in the incident command training. “It was fundamental and advanced all rolled into one. As an incident commander, it’s good to see more and more people coming on who can take leadership roles. Everybody I observed did really well.”

June 26 was devoted to classes, most with hands-on field experience.

Tactical tracking, taught by Clifford Pease and Leon Kershaw, proved one of the more popular classes. Both men track suspects and escaped prisoners for the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office and other law enforcement agencies. Their “fast tracking” techniques have allowed them to follow and apprehend escaped convicts more than 40 miles in three days.

“It’s important to pay attention to the small things that people leave along their path,



Ellen Morris Bishop/Contributed Photo

Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office tracker Cliff Pease points out the details of track interpretation Saturday, June 26, 2021, in the Salt Creek Summit area of Wallowa County to search and rescue volunteers in a tracking class.



Ellen Morris Bishop/Contributed Photo

Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office tracker Leon Kershaw, center, shows search and rescue volunteers Miles McFall, left, and Heather Howard how to interpret a “flag” or track Saturday, June 26, 2021, in the Salt Creek Summit area of Wallowa County.

including actual tracks as well as bent twigs, scuffs and other (sign),” Pease said. “It’s often possible to determine a general path and send a team ahead along that line to pick up (tracks) farther ahead and close the time-distance gap. You can find the lost person quicker that way.”

The trackers also worked with Wallowa County’s

two tracking K-9 teams — Heather Howard and her dog Gracie, and Edward “Vern” Vernarsky and his dog Trooper.

“I really thought the tracking class was great,” said Holly Akenson, Wallowa County Search and Rescue K-9 team leader. “There were a lot of really good on-the-ground things.”

Swiftwater rescue training, led by a team of instructors from Wallowa County, took place in the pond near Salt Creek Summit. Volunteers fine-tuned skills that included accurately throwing rescue ropes.

Search and rescue hasty, medical and K-9 teams coordinated by incident command and SAR members from multiple counties spread out in a mock search and rescue exercise June 27 in the Salt Creek Summit area. Civil Air Patrol brought in two aircraft — one from Boise and another from Redmond — to aid in searching for several “lost hikers,” some of whom were “injured.” The search and rescue efforts all were successful within the three hours allotted for the exercise.

“Learning to work with and practicing with our neighboring counties for mutual aide just makes us more ready when we have a big search and we all need to work together,” Akenson said. “This way we all know each other, we’ve worked together, and I think that’s really beneficial.”

OREGON BRIEFING

Brown declares state of emergency due to severe wildfire threat

SALEM (AP) — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has declared a state of emergency because of the imminent threat of wildfires across the state.

Brown said Wednesday, June 30, that much of the state is in high or extreme fire danger with red flag warnings in effect, KOIN reported.

In the past week, a historic heatwave rolled through the Pacific Northwest, bringing high temperatures and worsening already dry conditions. There is no rain in the extended forecast.

Nineteen Oregon counties are already in declared drought emergencies.

“Oregon is still recovering from the devastation of last year’s wildfires, which resulted in nine Oregonians losing their lives and thousands more losing their homes,” Brown said. “I issued this emergency declaration to ensure every resource is made available for firefighting efforts and to the crews striving to protect our state.”

She said with fire seasons increasingly starting earlier and lasting longer, it is up to everyone to do their part to prevent human-caused wildfires and be prepared for fires if they occur.

The emergency declaration authorizes the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal to use personnel, equipment and facilities from other state agencies for wildfire emergencies.

It also allows agencies to temporarily suspend any rules that impair the response to wildfires and to request assistance from other states.

This declaration comes as a fire south of The Dalles near Dufur has grown to about 10,000 acres, according to officials.

Low-income seniors file suit against property management company

TIGARD (AP) — A group of low-income Oregon seniors is suing their out-of-state property management company, alleging the company deliberately misled them by renting apartments that would soon jump in price.

The class-action suit was filed in Multnomah County Circuit Court Tuesday, June 29 against Denver-based Mission Rock Residential, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported. The company manages Woodspring Apartments, a federally subsidized building in Tigard.

This January, residents of Woodspring were told that the owner would soon bring the building’s 172 units to market-rate rent.

The suit argues that when San Francisco real estate firm Hamilton Zanze bought the property five years ago, the property managers knew of the plan to raise rent. The lawsuit alleges the property management company intentionally withheld that information and continued to market the units to people as a retirement option.

Michael Fuller, the lead attorney for the plaintiffs, says a judge should consider this a form of false advertising and deem it an “unlawful trade practice.”

The suit names one plaintiff: Cheyenne, who began leasing an apartment in Woodspring in July 2020. According to the suit, Cheyenne, whose last name is not given in the legal documents, rented the apartment with the expectation that she would be able to stay for decades.

Fuller said he’s asking a judge to issue an injunction ordering the property manager to maintain apartment rents at a rate that is affordable for older people on a fixed income.

HEAT

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Among the dead was a farm laborer who collapsed Saturday, June 26 and was found by fellow workers at a nursery in rural St. Paul, Oregon. The workers had been moving irrigation lines, said Aaron Corvin, spokesman for the state’s worker safety agency, Oregon Occupational Safety and Health, or Oregon OSHA.

Oregon OSHA, whose database listed the death as heat-related, is investigating labor contractor Andres Pablo Lucas and Ernst Nursery and Farms, which did not respond to a request for comment. Pablo Lucas declined to comment Thursday.

Farm worker Pedro Lucas said the man who died was his uncle, Sebastian Francisco Perez, from

Ixcun, Guatemala. He had turned 38 the day before he died.

Lucas, who is cousins with the labor contractor, was summoned to the scene. But by the time he arrived, his uncle was unconscious and dying. An ambulance crew tried to revive him but failed. Lucas said Perez was used to working in the heat and that the family is awaiting an autopsy report.

Reyna Lopez, executive director of a northwest farmworkers’ union, known by its Spanish-language initials, PCUN, called the death “shameful” and faulted both Oregon OSHA for not adopting emergency rules ahead of the heat wave, and the nursery.

Corvin said Oregon OSHA is “exploring adopting emergency requirements, and we continue to engage in discussions with labor

and employer stakeholders.”

He added that employers are obligated to provide ample water, shade, additional breaks and training about heat hazards.

An executive order issued in March 2020 by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown would formalize protecting workers from heat, but it is coming too late for the dead farmworker. Brown’s order focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and also tells the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon OSHA to jointly propose standards to protect workers from excessive heat and wildfire smoke.

They had until June 30 to submit the proposals, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, the two agencies requested the deadline be pushed back to September.

In Bend, Oregon, a scenic town

next to the snowy Cascade Range, the bodies of two men were found Sunday on a road where dozens of homeless people stay in trailers and tents.

Volunteer Luke Richter said he stepped into the trailer where one of the men, Alonzo “Lonnie” Boardman, was found.

“It was very obviously too late. It was basically a microwave in there,” Richter told Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Cooling stations had been set up at the campsite on Saturday, with water, sports drinks and ice available.

Weather experts say the number of heat waves are only likely to rise in the Pacific Northwest, a region normally known for cool, rainy weather, with a few hot, sunny days mixed in, and where many people

don’t have air conditioning.

“I think the community has to be realistic that we are going to be having this as a more usual occurrence and not a one-off, and that we need to be preparing as a community,” said Dr. Steven Mitchell of Seattle’s Harborview Medical Center, which treated an unprecedented number of severe heat-related cases.

This week’s heat wave was caused by what meteorologists described as a dome of high pressure over the Northwest and worsened by human-caused climate change, which is making such extreme weather events more likely and more intense.

Seattle, Portland and many other cities broke all-time heat records, with temperatures in some places reaching above 115 degrees Fahrenheit.



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