

Huckleberry festival a smash hit

By Alex Wittwer

The Observer

NORTH POWDER — The annual Huckleberry Festival in North Powder saw its biggest crowd in years on Saturday, July 31.

Hundreds of residents and visitors flocked to the small town on the edge of Union County where the streets were filled with music, vendors and kids eating shaved ice. The Hot-Rod Show-n-Shine car show also had its largest turnout, according to event organizer Bryan Karolski.

“We really went all out this year,” he said. “We put stuff out on social media, and we also advertised with probably 1,000 flyers. This is five times bigger than it was three years ago.”

Karolski ran the both the car show and festival from Huckleberry Headquarters on Second and E streets. He also sold confections made with huckleberries that he had hauled in.

In the moments he wasn’t juggling the responsibilities of running the show — including acting as the announcer and



Alex Wittwer/The Observer/La Grande Observer

Festival Grand Marshals Dotty and Myron Miles stand for the national anthem during the Huckleberry Festival in North Powder on Saturday, July 31, 2021.

tracking down the festival’s Grand Marshals Dotty and Myron Miles — he was doting on

his newborn baby girl, Sabrina May-Jean Karolski, who was only a few days old.

The car show featured about two dozen classic rides lined up along E Street. Karolski looked through the vehicles with the eye of an enthusiast, noting the original engine still bolted inside one of the classic pickup trucks.

Among the standouts were Ken Schuh’s all-black Chevrolet Corvette C1 with red interior and Ken Meeker’s 1966 blue Dodge Coronet.

Meeker is unable to walk but that didn’t stop the hobbyist from driving his soft-top convertible to the show.

“When you’re in my condition, you got to find a hobby,” he said.

Just before noon, the crowds filled every free space available along Second Street for the parade. Kids and families sheltered in the shade beneath Powder Club, while a few others held aloft umbrellas to deflect the sun’s rays.

“It’s looking good,” Karolski said in passing.

Dotty Miles, from the back of a horse-drawn carriage, sang along to the national anthem

as it boomed out over a loudspeaker.

As the parade continued, candy was tossed out and kids scrambled to grab their prizes. Not soon after, fire trucks began spraying water through the street allowing residents and attendees a chance to cool off in the sweltering sun.

“Hose ‘em down, boys,” Karolski said over the loudspeaker, as children as well as adults darted in and out of the spray.

After the parade came to an end, the attendees took off to watch the popular mud volleyball event near the train tracks. Teams took turns waddling through mud attempting to score against each other, and some of the contestants dramatically dove for the ball only to get a face full of mud.

Back at Huckleberry Headquarters, Karolski attended to his family, his huckleberries and his festival. Though the crowds started to thin as the afternoon faded, Karolski knew he had put on one of the best Huckleberry Festivals in the town’s history.

RAIN

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City Airport was 13%. So even though the temperature was 100 degrees, the dewpoint was just 40 — a difference of 60 degrees.

But that evening the monsoon moisture started to arrive, ushered in by southerly winds.

At 4 p.m. on Saturday, July 31, the relative humidity was 30%, the temperature was 89 and the dewpoint was 54 — a difference of 35 degrees, compared with 60 degrees just 24 hours earlier.

The dampest air, though, was still to come.

By 1 a.m. on Sunday, Aug. 1, the relative humidity at the airport had climbed to 90%. The difference between air temperature (67) and dewpoint (64) was just three degrees. With the air so nearly saturated, and thunderstorms forming in the unstable atmosphere, rain was inevitable.

For the first half of the day, the humidity at the airport ranged from 90% to 100%.

The dewpoint peaked at 67 degrees early Sunday afternoon, which is “amazingly” high for Baker City, said Jay Breidenbach, warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Boise.

Breidenbach said the 70-degree dewpoint mea-

sured at the Boise Airport late Saturday was close to the all-time record there.

Even during Sunday afternoon, when the clouds dissipated somewhat, the humidity at the Baker City Airport never dropped below 64%. The widest gap between temperature and dewpoint was 13 degrees (at 6 p.m. and 7 p.m., when the temperature was 76 and the dewpoint 63).

Besides more than doubling the summer rainfall at the airport, August’s damp debut helped to temporarily curb the wildfire danger and reduce Baker City’s water usage, which has been high enough to prompt the city to ask residents to limit outdoor watering.

Wildfire danger

Although forests and rangelands remain dry and the fire danger is extreme, the widespread weekend rains temporarily reduced the danger.

One measurement that fire managers follow closely is the Energy Release Component (ERC), which measures the amount of energy a fire would release. This is an approximation of how quickly a fire would spread, and how difficult it would be to control.

Northeastern Oregon is divided into six zones, based on climate, forest type and other factors, with a daily ERC calculated by computer for each zone.

Since late June, the ERCs have been running well above average for all zones, and on many days setting all-time record highs.

On Friday, July 30, the ERC ranged from 61 to 69, and on Saturday the figures spanned from 60 to 70.

But on Sunday, due to the rain and much higher humidities, the ERCs dipped to a range of 34 to 52. The forecast range for Monday, Aug. 2 was 30 to 46.

Although he’s grateful for the rain, Steve Meyer, the wildland fire supervisor at the Oregon Department of Forestry’s Baker City office, emphasized that the benefits of the rain will be brief, with warmer, drier weather forecast this week.

“It really helps us out short term,” Meyer said on Monday morning, Aug. 2. “It gives us a little bit of relief. We’ll take anything we can get.”

But Meyer said that with temperatures rising and humidity dropping this week, the ERC numbers “are going to climb right back up real close to where they were.”

Joel McCraw, fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest’s Whitman Ranger District, agreed with Meyer. “It was great to get that shot of moisture that we desperately needed,” McCraw said. “But the fuels are still dry, and we have

the whole month of August yet to go.”

Meyer said one positive aspect of the weekend weather is that lightning strikes were relatively infrequent in Baker County, with much of the lightning being cloud-to-cloud.

The Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center in La Grande reported only one lightning-sparked fire, a blaze that firefighters quickly stopped on Sunday morning, at one-tenth of an acre, in the Mehlhorn Butte area about six miles north of Halfway.

A few other fires were reported, including in the Elkhorn Peak area northwest of Baker City, but crews didn’t find any evidence of the blazes.

Meyer said he expects that some “holdover” fires will show up this week. Lightning-sparked fires sometimes smolder for days, or even weeks, before producing enough smoke to be seen. Holdover fires are more common after rain, which tends to suppress the fire temporarily.

Baker City water use

The wettest, coolest weekend of the summer had the expected — and much anticipated — effect on the city’s water use, said Michelle Owen, public works director.

After averaging 4.8 million gallons per day during July, the city’s use dipped to 3.19 million gallons on

Sunday, Aug. 1. That was the lowest daily use since May.

Residents and businesses used 129.9 million gallons during June, a 45% increase over the same month in 2020.

That prompted city officials on June 28 to enact the first phase of the city’s four-phase water curtailment ordinance. Under the first phase, the city asks residents to voluntarily reduce the water use.

When water use remained high, averaging nearly 5 million gallons per day, on July 12 the city went to phase 2. Although still voluntarily, the request from the city was more specific, asking residents to water lawns and gardens only between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., when evaporation rates are lower and less water is needed.

At the time, Owen said she wants to avoid having to move to phase 3, which bans all outdoor use of city water. The city has never had to impose that restriction, but Owen said that if it is necessary, the city would enforce the ban and potentially issue fines of up to \$500 to violators.

With the significant drop in water use on Sunday, Owen said the city didn’t need to pump water from its well to supplement its main source, the springs and streams in the 10,000-acre watershed on the east slopes of the Elkhorn

More Coverage

Wet Weekend

Although Aug. 1 was the rainiest day at the Baker City Airport in more than two months, showers and storms were relatively stingy there during the weekend compared with some other sites in Baker County.

Rainfall totals, from Saturday, July 31 through Sunday, Aug. 1, at other measuring sites:

- Yellow Pine campground (along Highway 26 northwest of Unity): 1.11 inches
- Morgan Mountain (north of Interstate 84 near Huntington): 0.73
- Oregon Trail Interpretive Center: 0.60
- Sparta Butte (north of Richland): 0.39

Mountains west of town.

On Sunday the city used water from the watershed and from Goodrich Lake, which, along with the well, is the city’s supplementary supply.

“I would like to think the trend would continue, but with more hot weather coming I believe that is just wishful thinking,” Owen wrote in an email to the Herald on Monday morning.

The weekend rain wasn’t heavy enough in the watershed to temporarily cloud any streams with silt, which sometimes happens after thunderstorms, Owen said. That meant the city didn’t have to stop using any of the watershed sources, which made it possible to temporarily cease pumping from the well.

LAWSUIT

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That 1866 statute is commonly known as RS 2477. Other counties have cited the statute to show a route is legally open to the public. The key to proving a claim under RS 2477 is that the route in question was being used before the property it crosses was reserved for another purpose, a common example being that the land was transferred from public to private ownership.

The county’s lawsuit also argues that four other roads have, dating to at least 1908, crossed Longgood’s property and that each of those routes should be legally open to the public.

Those routes, unlike the Connor Creek Road, are not developed, but the public doesn’t have access to them because Longgood’s property is fenced.

County commissioners have discussed during previous meetings the possibility of reopening one of those routes as an alternative public access across Longgood’s property, one that would rejoin the Connor Creek Road after it leaves Longgood’s parcel.

Hudson filed a response to the county’s amended lawsuit on July 1, 2020.

Hudson argues that the basis of the county’s argument is flawed because the Connor Creek Road, in its current alignment, was not built until after the prop-

erty that Longgood now owns was transferred from public to private ownership.

As a result, Hudson contends, the county’s RS 2477 claim is invalid.

In a July 2018 letter to Sullivan, the county’s attorney, Hudson included multiple historic maps, the earliest from an 1882 survey, none of which shows that a road existed on the route of the current Connor Creek Road through Longgood’s property prior to the property being transferred from public to private ownership.

That transfer happened between 1912 and 1923, according to deed records that Hudson included with his letter.

Hudson contends that the earliest record of a road that follows, at least in places, the route of the current gated section of the Connor Creek Road is a 1938 federal survey — one done at least 15 years after the property Longgood now owns became private, thus negating a later public route claim under RS 2477.

Although the people who owned the property before Longgood bought it allowed public access on that section of the Connor Creek Road, by doing so they did not forfeit their legal right to close the road across their property, Hudson wrote in his response in 2020.

Hudson also wrote in his letter to Sullivan that in

1978 the Bureau of Land Management negotiated an easement to use the Connor Creek Road to allow logging on public land in the area. That easement “expressly acknowledged that the road was private and might be locked by the owner,” Hudson wrote.

Hudson also contends that the county, prior to passing the Connor Creek Road resolution in 2002, failed to notify the previous owners of Longgood’s property that commissioners were considering declaring the entire road as public under RS 2477, including the section that runs through that property.

Instead, Hudson notes, the original purpose of commissioners’ 2002 actions

was to ensure public access at the eastern end of the Connor Creek Road, where it was temporarily blocked by a gate at the privately owned mine parcel.

The county failed to notify the owners of the property Longgood now owns that the 2002 resolution was not limited to the section of the Connor Creek Road passing through the mine property, but in fact encompassed the entire road, including the section, several miles from the mine, that crosses the Longgood parcel.

Hudson also writes that the county has not surveyed the section of the Connor Creek Road that crosses Longgood’s property.

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