

OBITUARIES

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Emmett Soden

Formerly of Baker County, 1936-2021

Washington, and Teresa (Wade) King of Coulee City, Washington; honorary son, Darrell Schadler of Moses Lake; his stepsister, Susan Taxter of Spokane Valley, Washington; his stepbrother, Ron (Roni) Schuh of Kettle Falls, Washington; his sister-in-law, Dorothy Walker of Ephrata; his brother-in-law, Keith (Rhonda) Walker, and sister-in-law, Vicky Walker, all of Moses Lake; his grandchildren, Samantha Walters, Logan Silva, Ashley Silva, Tyrell (Brianna) Silva, Vaughn Walters, Jennifer (Bob) Schneider, Sarah King, Kaitlin (Tanner) Hernandez; and many great-grandchildren, and children he took under his wing.

Emmett was preceded in death his his parents; his sister, Marie; his stepfather, Lawrence Schuh; his mother-in-law, Marie Halverson, and father-in-law, Raymond (Alice) Walker.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in memory of Emmett to the Heart Association, MS Society or by becoming an NRA member.

State to consider changes to archery elk hunting

Many units could switch from general to controlled hunting in 2022

By Jayson Jacoby

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The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission is slated to decide Friday, Aug. 6 whether to change elk archery hunting seasons to controlled hunts for most areas in Northeastern Oregon starting in 2022.

Most archery seasons in the region now are general hunts, meaning there's no limit on the number of tags sold.

In controlled hunts, by contrast, hunters have to apply for a limited number of tags, and a computer doles them out.

Rifle hunts are controlled hunts, but archery seasons have mainly retained the general season status since 1979. Seven units in the Blue Mountains already have controlled archery seasons for elk.

The Commission decided last year to change buck deer archery hunting from a general season to a controlled season in Eastern Oregon starting in 2021. But commissioners postponed a decision on elk hunting.

ODFW officials have cited multiple reasons for proposing the shift from general to controlled archery seasons.

One is the increasing number of archery hunters over the past few decades. ODFW said the number of archers hunting elk in Eastern Oregon rose from about 12,300 in 1995 to about 18,500 in 2019.

And due in part to improvements in technology, which allow hunters to make longer kill shots, archery hunters have higher success rates.

But because the archery seasons have remained general seasons, with no limits on how many tags are sold, ODFW's lone tool to limit hunting to protect deer and elk herds has been to cut the number of tags for rifle hunts, which are controlled hunts with limited tags awarded through the lottery system.

In choosing which units to propose the change from a general to a controlled archery season, ODFW officials considered the current elk populations in those units, as well as hunter density and hunter displacement, which are based on a public survey of hunters done in 2020.

Units where the bull ratio — the number of bulls per cows — have not met the state's goals in three out of five years are proposed to change from general to controlled archery hunts in 2022.

ODFW also looked at units where a high percentage of branch-antlered bulls are killed during the general archery season, leaving relatively fewer of those mature bulls available during the rifle seasons in the fall.

Under the proposal commissioners will consider Aug. 6, a total of 13 units and three subunits would move from the current general season to a controlled hunt.

Units that would move to controlled hunting in 2022 include:

- Snake River
- Starkey

- Ukiah
- Heppner
- Desolation
- Northside
- Murderers Creek
- North Sumpter
- Ochoco
- Silvies

The Lookout Mountain and South Sumpter units would remain general seasons for elk archery hunters.

Five units in and around the Eagle Cap Wilderness would be combined to create an Eagle Cap Zone controlled hunt.

Those units are:

- Minam
- Imnaha
- Pine Creek
- Keating
- Catherine Creek

Tag allocations for the Eagle Cap Zone hunt would be based on "available harvestable surplus" and on the hunter distribution during the current general archery season for those five units.

ODFW is also proposing a second hunt for the Eagle Cap Zone, limited to traditional archery equipment.

Community enjoys a night out in the park

By Samantha O'Conner

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2020 was a difficult year for everyone and resulted in many local events being canceled.

Happily, this year the Community Night Out was able to take place and had a larger turnout than most had expected Tuesday evening, Aug. 3 in Geiser-Pollman Park.

With live music by Barefoot and Bonafide at the Powder River Pavilion, and many booths from local organizations, people were able to mingle for a fun evening, although heavy rain interrupted the latter part of the event.

"It's great to have Community Night Out," said Ginger Savage, executive director at Crossroads Carnegie Art Center. "It looks like it's been a pretty good crowd, looks like everybody's having a good time. It's not as big as normal years but it looks like lots of fun."

Among the booth vendors, JoLynn Moore and Marilyn Spicer with the Baker City Elks Lodge Trailer, which encourages youth to stay away from drugs, were excited to see everyone out and having fun.

"This is my first time with community night here in Baker and I just love it," Moore said.

"It's about my third time, I brought the drug trailer here when we had this before and I really missed it," Spicer said. "It was like the whole community just had a day-long depression, you know? It's really exciting to see everyone. A much better turn out than I expected."

Casey Neske with the Baker City Fire Department experienced her first Community Night Out.

"It's actually kind of interesting to walk around, see all the different people out and see what was going on," Neske said. "Very informational and a good turnout. Especially the kids, there's a lot of kids. They seem to be enjoying it too."

Dailon Sherman, sports and activities director for the Baker County YMCA, said she enjoyed the event.

"I think it's great," Sherman said. "I think it's really good for the community to get out and meet people and socialize and see what all we've got going on and what all we offer. It's kind of crazy but the kids are having fun and that's what it's all about."



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

Residents gathered at Geiser-Pollman Park on Tuesday evening, Aug. 3, for Community Night Out.

State investigating COVID outbreak tied to Pendleton Whisky Music Fest

Oregon Health Authority has linked 64 cases to the July 10 event

By Bryce Dole

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Oregon Health Authority is investigating a COVID-19 outbreak stemming from the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest.

The state so far has reported 64 COVID-19 cases tied to the music event in Pendleton on July 10. Forty-one of those cases were Umatilla County residents, according to Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara. Cases have so far been identified in Umatilla, Morrow, Union and Wallowa counties, as well as Washington state.

"This outbreak is the first one of its size and scope to be traced to an outdoor entertainment event since the lifting of statewide COVID-19 prevention measures at the end of June," the state said Friday, July 30.

The reported cases almost certainly are an undercount,

Fiumara said, adding that more than 25% of people with presumed cases do not cooperate with contact tracers. The total also does not include people who did not attend the concert but were infected by people coming to town.

Cases already were rising in Umatilla County before the 12,000-person event — a surge health officials attributed to the state lifting virtually all pandemic restrictions at the end of June, just as the delta variant was reaching Oregon. But county health data shows a "big jump" in cases between four to six days after the concert, Fiumara said.

"While I am by no means saying all of these cases are tied to Whisky Fest," Fiumara said. "It does seem like that concert taking place kind of jump started some additional spread in the area."

Cases rise after concert

The county now is experiencing one of the largest COVID-19 surges in Oregon, with 412 cases reported last week alone. That's more than 8% of the state's total case

count last week, according to state data.

The county's case rate is by far the highest in Oregon. Hospitals in Pendleton and Hermiston reported an uptick in COVID-19 hospitalizations last week.

Two Umatilla County residents who recently tested positive for COVID-19 died last week, raising the death toll to 94, according to the state.

The concert, however, did not appear to break any rules. The state lifted virtually all pandemic restrictions less than two weeks before, and although health officials voiced alarm about the delta variant and cases rising in Umatilla County, no officials publicly recommended stopping the event. It likely was the largest event Eastern Oregon has seen since the pandemic began.

"It's a very unfortunate situation," said event co-manager Doug Corey. "Hopefully everybody will improve and get well. It would be an interesting number to know how many were vaccinated and not vaccinated."

Corey noted he consulted

with county and city officials prior to the festival and obtained all necessary permits. He said he believes the event followed all pandemic guidelines from the state and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Event organizers also capped ticket sales at 12,000 people to downsize, he added.

Fiumara said he appreciated the reduction, adding "there could have been more than 20,000" people.

Corey said he has been in close contact with state health officials now that the investigation is underway. State, county and tribal officials are working together to identify other cases from attendees, the state said.

Concerns for upcoming events

The outbreak and the ensuing investigation does not bode well for upcoming events in Umatilla County, including the Umatilla County Fair and the Pendleton Round-Up, Fiumara said.

The fair, scheduled Aug. 11-14, typically draws thousands of people. Fiumara said he expects cases to rise

because of the fair, but he would not formally recommend against the event being held because of the backlash that would ensue.

"I think if you're trying to reduce cases, I think cancelling fair would be a way to do that," Fiumara said. "And I think it would be an effective way to prevent additional spread. That being said, I'm not sure all the fallout from cancelling it would be worthwhile. I think there would be a lot of pushback."

State and county health officials agree the best way to ensure outbreaks don't result from large summer events is by getting more people vaccinated against COVID-19.

"Outbreaks like these will continue to occur if vaccination rates don't increase,"

said Rudy Owens, a spokesperson for OHA.

Less than 40% of Umatilla County residents are vaccinated against the virus, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Fiumara said Gov. Kate Brown's office reached out to the county last week, asking how officials planned to curb the county's skyrocketing infection rates. He noted the last time Brown's office made that move was a week before the state shut down Umatilla County.

"The state is watching things very closely," he said.

Umatilla County has reported 9,586 COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began, according to county health data.

