

Baker City Herald

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GO! Magazine
Your guide to arts, entertainment and other events happening around Northeast Oregon

IN THIS EDITION: Local • Business & AgLife • Go! magazine **\$1.50**

QUICK HITS

Good Day Wish To A Subscriber

A special good day to Herald subscriber Betty Milliman of Baker City.

Community, A3

PHILLIPS RESERVOIR
— A brisk wind that feels more like October than August is whipping up whitecaps and pushing the two lengths of fishing line into curves, but the Foersterling brothers are unperturbed. They're concentrating on the rod tips, waiting for the telltale twitch.

BRIEFING

Wyden sets online town hall to discuss River Democracy Act

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., has scheduled a live, online town hall for rural Oregonians to comment about legislation he is sponsoring, the River Democracy Act. It would designate about 4,700 miles of rivers and streams under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers system. A link to the town hall is at <https://m.facebook.com/events/2444904110829033/>

BHS football players selling gold cards

The Baker High School football team will be selling gold cards again this year. The cards are good for discounts at many local businesses. They will be available from any football player starting this weekend. Cost is \$10.

WEATHER

Today
78 / 44

Sunny

Friday
80 / 47

Partly sunny

The space below is for a postage label for issues that are mailed.

Phillips Reservoir Has Been Lower Only Once Since 1968

Receding Reservoir Nears Record Low



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

This image taken from a drone on Tuesday, Aug. 17, shows Mason Dam at lower right, and the water intake structure, center right near the shore, at Phillips Reservoir.

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
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There's a strip of moist ground in Baker County that's being exposed to the air after more than three decades under the water.

And if things keep on as they have been, a bit more land might emerge for the first time in better than half a century.

These patches form the shoreline of Phillips Reservoir, along the Powder River in Sumpter Valley, about 17 miles southwest of Baker City.

The reservoir, created by the completion of Mason Dam in 1968 and designed to store water for irrigation and flood control, has been depleted by drought to its lowest level since late October 1988.

And if the reservoir recedes slightly farther, ground will be revealed that has been covered by water since 1968, the year the dam began to impound the Powder River.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Phillips Reservoir on Tuesday, Aug. 17. The Mason Dam boat ramp, at left, is well above the water line.

George Chandler, a Baker Valley rancher and longtime board member for the Baker Valley Irrigation District, which manages the reservoir, said the fall of 1988 is the only time he's seen Phillips so low.

That's also the only other time

Chandler recalls that the intake, the concrete structure near the dam where water drains to flow through the dam and into the river below, was exposed.

See, **Reservoir** / Page A3

Water use up a little

By **SAMANTHA O'CONNOR**
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With temperatures rising last week, Baker City's water usage also increased, to a daily average of almost 4.1 million gallons.

But water demand remains lower than the nearly 5-million-gallon daily averages earlier in the summer that prompted city officials to ask residents to voluntarily restrict outdoor watering to the period 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.

And with temperatures dropping this week, water use has followed suit, dipping below 4 million gallons on Tuesday, Aug. 17 for the first time in a week.

"The cooler weather helps," said Michelle Owen, the city's public works director.

See, **Water** / Page A2

Baker gets a refreshing break

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
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Baker County's record-setting summer is taking some time off this week.

And a well-deserved inter-ruption it is.

The late June heat wave broke three consecutive daily high temperature records at the Baker City Airport.

July was the hottest month on record at the airport, with an average high of 92.3 degrees.

And with five weeks of the season left, this summer has already broken the record of 90-degree-plus days, with 44 (11 in June, 22 in July, 11 so far in August).

See, **Break** / Page A2

Fire crews have little effect from COVID-19 surge

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
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The surge in COVID-19 cases has had minimal effects on state and federal agencies' capacities to fight wildfires in and around Baker County during a summer when extreme fire danger means these local crews' efforts are vital in keeping small fires from becoming conflagrations.

With big blazes burning elsewhere in Oregon and in most other western states,

much of the nation's firefighting resources are already committed to existing fires.

As a result, local fire managers say, their standard goal of dousing fires as quickly as possible is even more pressing, because if a fire in Northeastern Oregon grows rapidly, there's no guarantee that large numbers of firefighters and aircraft would be readily available from other areas.

See, **Fire Crews** / Page A2



Dan Cothren/Contributed Photo

A nighttime fire crew works on the Black Butte fire south of Unity on Aug. 13, 2021. The fire, started by lightning on Aug. 3, has burned 21,237 acres.



TODAY
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SATURDAY — DOVE DECOYS ENHANCE THE HUNTING EXPERIENCE