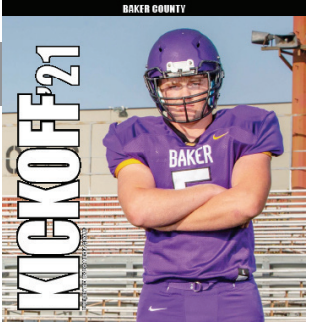


# Baker City Herald

September 2, 2021

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Gauge Bloomer

### INSIDE TODAY

Section previews the high school football season in 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 Donna Kanyid of Baker City.

##### Local, A2

ADRIAN — Kevin Purnell was fired Monday, Aug. 30 as superintendent of the Adrian School District just one week after students returned to school.

#### BRIEFING

##### County seeking volunteers for boards, committees

Baker County is seeking volunteers for the following boards/committees:

- Baker County Cultural Coalition
- Baker County Planning Commission
- Fair Board Advisory Committee
- Early Learning Regional Council
- Transportation/Traffic Safety Committee
- Baker County Mental Health Advisory Committee
- NEOEDD Budget Board
- Local Public Safety Coordinating Council

Volunteers must submit a form, which can be found at [www.baker-county.org/commissioners](http://www.baker-county.org/commissioners). More information is available by calling the commissioners' office at 541-523-8200 or by emailing Heidi Martin at [hmartin@bakercounty.org](mailto:hmartin@bakercounty.org).

#### WEATHER

##### Today

74 / 34  
Sunny



##### Friday

79 / 35  
Sunny



##### Full forecast on the back of the B section.

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

## Aerial armada cools blaze



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest/Contributed Photo

The Rock Creek fire burning in the Elkhorn Mountains on Tuesday, Aug. 31.

### Official says fire near Rock Creek Lake had potential to spread fast

By JAYSON JACOBY

[jjacoby@bakercityherald.com](mailto:jjacoby@bakercityherald.com)

An aerial armada that dumped thousands of gallons of fire retardant and water within several hours slowed a fast-moving wildfire that flared up Monday afternoon, Aug. 30 and has burned about 60 acres in one of the more inaccessible parts of the Elkhorn Mountains.

The human-caused blaze in the upper reaches of the Rock Creek canyon, about 13 air miles northwest of Baker City, started in a forest type where flames can race through in certain conditions, said Joel McCraw, fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's Whitman Ranger District.

But as of early Wednesday afternoon, Sept. 1, the fire was showing minimal growth, and ground crews had arrived to dig a fire break and set up hoses connected to pumps in Rock Creek, said Peter Fargo, public affairs officer for the Wallowa-Whitman.

More than 50 people were working on the fire, with a goal of building a line around the entire blaze within 48 hours.

"We're still not out of the woods yet, but we feel pretty good about it for sure," McCraw said on Tuesday afternoon.

Fire officials were considerably more concerned a day earlier, and in part because of the type of forest where the fire started.

Most of the trees in that part of

the Rock Creek canyon are subalpine firs, a species that has high concentrations of flammable oil in the needles, and branches that tend to start near the ground, making it easier for fire to spread from the ground to the trees' crowns.

"When it does get established in sub-alpine firs it can be a challenge to fight," McCraw said. "Very volatile."

Indeed, the fire, reported about 3 p.m. Monday by the lookout on Mount Ireland and by citizens, was torching trees and spreading through tree crowns, conditions too dangerous to have firefighters rappel from helicopters, McCraw said.

There are no roads within a mile of the fire, and the only access is by foot on the Rock Creek trail, which starts along a rough, four-wheel drive road, he said.

Given the limited access, all firefighting Monday evening and into Tuesday afternoon was from the air, McCraw said.

Two helicopters dropped water on flames, while five tankers — three multi-engine planes from Moses Lake, Washington, and a pair of single-engine planes from La Grande — spread retardant.

The air crews took advantage of natural fire barriers, McCraw said, including rock cliffs and fields of boulders and scree.

"In some areas the fire ran up into the cliffs and ran out of fuel," he said.

The Rock Creek canyon, which runs roughly north-south, is bordered on the west by cliffs, with the Elkhorn Crest trail running just on the west side of the ridgetop.

There are thickets of subalpine fir



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest/Contributed Photo

Fires burning in subalpine fir thickets along Rock Creek on Tuesday, Aug. 31.

elsewhere, interspersed with meadows along the creek. Rock Creek starts at Rock Creek Lake, one of the most scenic spots in the range, at the northern base of Rock Creek Butte, highest peak in the Elkhorns at 9,106 feet.

The fire started about 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 miles northwest of the lake, McCraw said.

The situation would have been even more dangerous had the fire started farther down the canyon, he said, because the forest is more contiguous, with fewer of the rock barriers that prevail at the head of the canyon.

The La Grande Interagency Hot Shot crew of 20 firefighters hiked into the fire on Tuesday afternoon, McCraw said.

The initial plan was to have smoke-jumpers work on the fire, but conditions were too dangerous, in part due to the terrain, to have them parachute into the fire Tuesday afternoon.

See, **Fire** / Page A3

## School workers discuss vaccine mandate

■ President of teachers union doesn't expect large number of resignations or firings

By JAYSON JACOBY

[jjacoby@bakercityherald.com](mailto:jjacoby@bakercityherald.com)

The leaders of the two unions that represent more than 200 employees in the Baker School District, including teachers, said they don't think a state-wide mandate that school employees be vaccinated against COVID-19 will result



Myers

in a large number of workers either resigning or being fired.

Teachers and other union-represented employees in the Baker School District have met with district officials regarding options for workers who choose not to be vaccinated against COVID-19 before the Oct. 18 deadline set by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, said Toni Myers, president of the Baker Education Association.

The governor's vaccine mandate for school and health care workers includes two exceptions — one for medical reasons, which requires corroboration from a doctor, and one for religious reasons, which an employee can fill out individually.

Myers, who is a teacher at Keating Elementary School, said the Baker Education Association represents the district's 111 teachers.

Rachelle Lemmon is president of the Baker Chapter 20 of the Oregon School Employees Association, the union that represents the district's 110 classified employees, which includes most workers who aren't teachers.

Myers said on Tuesday, Aug. 31 that she believes a majority of Baker teachers who are not vaccinated, and don't plan to get the shots, will opt

See, **Vaccines** / Page A3

## Ages 20-59 have largest share of county's COVID cases

By JAYSON JACOBY

[jjacoby@bakercityherald.com](mailto:jjacoby@bakercityherald.com)

Baker County residents ages 20 to 59 have accounted for a disproportionate percentage of COVID-19 cases during the pandemic, according to data from the Baker County Health Department.

The department has compiled a pie chart showing the percentage of cases, by age range, from the start of the pandemic through Aug. 22, 2021.

The county reported 1,344 cases during that period.

(The breakdown of cases by age is not available starting Aug. 23. The county had 82 cases from Aug. 23-31.)

Almost 61% of the coun-

ty's COVID-19 cases through Aug. 22 were in people ages 20 to 59.

That age range accounts for 41% of the county's population.

The largest share of cases through Aug. 22 was in residents in the age range 30 to 39. That group accounted for 17.6% of the county's COVID-19 cases.

There are about 1,950 county residents in that age range, which constitutes about 11.7% of the county's population of 16,668.

Among Baker County residents in their 30s, the vaccination rate is 31.9%. Statewide, the vaccination rate for that age group is 69%. The difference be-

tween the state and county vaccination rates — 37.1% — is the largest among age groups.

The rest of the age breakdown of COVID-19 cases in Baker County, in order of percentage:

#### Ages 50 to 59

This group, with about 2,290 residents in the county, has had 15% of the county's cases, and it makes up 13.7% of the population.

The vaccination rate for people in their 50s in Baker County is 44%. The statewide rate for that age range is 72.2%.

#### Ages 20 to 29

There are about 1,300

county residents in this age range, about 7.8% of the population. The age group accounts for 14.8% of the county's COVID-19 cases.

The vaccination rate for Baker County residents in their 20s is 33%. The statewide rate is 63.1%.

#### Ages 40 to 49

This age group, with about 1,640 county residents, constitutes about 9.9% of the county's population. It accounts for 13.2% of the county's COVID-19 cases.

Baker County's vaccination rate for people in their 40s is 42.6%. The Oregon rate is 72.1%.

See, **COVID** / Page A3

## Wolves kill calf north of Durkee

■ 600-pound calf killed late Sunday or early Monday

Baker City Herald

Wolves from the Lookout Mountain have killed another calf in eastern Baker County, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) reported on Tuesday, Aug. 31.

Wolves from that pack have killed four head of livestock and injured two others since mid July, according to

See, **Wolves** / Page A3



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SATURDAY — AN EERIE HIKE ON A FOGBOUND MOUNTAIN TRAIL