

# FOREST

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Baker County has a lengthy history of having an active local chapter of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association (OSWA). The statewide organization lobbies in the Oregon Legislature on behalf of its members and also offers advice for private forest owners about how to manage their properties.

Putney said the Baker County chapter, which added Grant County members when the latter county's chapter dissolved in 2011, gradually cut back on its activities around 2018, when his predecessor, Bob Parker, retired.

Putney said he convened a meeting of the local chapter in early 2020, just before the pandemic started.

This was not the best time to try to restart the group.

Or any group, come to that.

But more recently the effort to reconstitute the chapter has gained traction, something Putney attributes largely to Debi Lorence.

Lorence and her husband,

Walt, moved in January 2021 from Washington County, where they raised Christmas trees and were active in the Small Woodlands Association chapter there for about five years, to Halfway.

Debi Lorence is the president for the new Northeast Oregon chapter, which met most recently on Thursday, Sept. 2.

Although the Lorences' 17-acre property in Pine Valley near Halfway didn't have a single tree when they moved in, Debi said they have planted a couple thousand seedlings, including ponderosa pines and tamaracks, on two acres. The remainder of the property is growing alfalfa.

Debi Lorence said she was eager to become involved with a local group of tree owners, and potentially pass on some of the knowledge she had gained through her participation in Washington County's Small Woodlands Association chapter.

"It helped me as a young tree grower to understand everything I was getting into," she said.

When she learned that the local chapter had mostly

gone dormant, Lorence said she talked with residents who had been involved with the chapter about the prospects of reviving the group.

"I just wanted to get it going again," she said with a rueful chuckle. "And now I'm the president."

Putney said this is an excellent time to encourage forest owners to join the local chapter. He emphasized the adjective "small" in small woodlands.

"Even if you own an acre of trees," he said.

Lorence amplifies on Putney's point.

"You don't have to own a forest," she said. "Even if you have a tree on your property and you like it and would like to protect it, OSWA will help."

With wildfires becoming an increasingly widespread threat to forests across the West, both private and public, Putney said it's natural that woodland owners would be interested in learning how they can protect their trees.

"Managing for reducing wildfire risk is always a major motivation for small woodland owners," Putney said. "Having a place where woodland

owners can get together and talk about the challenges is beneficial."

Although expanding the local chapter's footprint to include Union and Wallowa counties will create some logistical challenges in scheduling meetings — it's a pretty long drive from, say, Enterprise to John Day — Putney said the chapter, as in the past, will also strive to schedule field trips and other outdoor events where members can gain practical knowledge.

Strolling through somebody's stand of ponderosa pines, for instance, is inherently more useful than sitting at a table and talking about those trees.

The Defrees Ranch in Sumpter Valley, about 20 miles southwest of Baker City, is likely to be a destination for a field trip.

Dean Defrees, whose family has been involved in the Baker County chapter of the Small Woodlands Association for many years, said he's excited about Lorence and Putney working to revive, and expand, the chapter.

"I think it's a very good deal," said Defrees, whose



Ed Merriman/Baker City Herald, File

Lyle Defrees on his family's forested property in Sumpter Valley, about 20 miles southwest of Baker City.

family was named the Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year for 2016 by the American Tree Farm System, out of 74,000 entries. "It's good to get things put back together and rolling again."

Defrees encourages all private forest owners to consider joining the chapter.

Lorence said field trips and similar events are integral to the mission of the Small Woodlands Association.

"It's a hands-on organization," she said. "It's not supposed to be about a bunch of meetings. It's supposed to be about participating and learn-

ing from each other. We want people who have been doing this a long time to share that knowledge."

Lorence also hopes to spread the word in local schools about the association's work.

"With the drought showing no signs of ending, the need is greater than ever for knowledge, and for getting the message out about how important trees are," she said.

More information about the Small Woodlands Association is available by emailing Lorence at [debilorence@gmail.com](mailto:debilorence@gmail.com), or by phone at 541-604-1151.



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest/Contributed Photo

The Rock Creek fire burning on Aug. 31. The blaze, which started Aug. 30, hasn't grown in the past week.

# FIRE

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Fire bosses were concerned because the fire was initially torching trees and spreading from crown to crown on the warm, windy afternoon. The

blaze burned mostly in sub-alpine fir trees, a species that burns easily.

By the afternoon of Sept. 1, though, the fire was showing minimal growth, and that situation has prevailed since, Fargo said.

The Forest Service is

investigating the cause of the fire, but it is listed as human-caused on the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center's fire statistics report.

The Rock Creek fire is by far the biggest blaze this summer on the Wallowa-Whitman's Burnt-Powder

Fire Zone, which includes the southern part of the forest.

There have been 17 fires on the Burnt-Powder zone — 13 started by lightning and four human-caused. The lightning fires have burned a total of 4.5 acres, and the human-caused fires 63.7 acres.

# LAWSUIT

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Before and during the Council's Aug. 24 meeting, a group of residents gathered outside City Hall to protest the vaccine and mask mandates.

Mayor Kerry McQuisten said the vaccine requirement, which applies to the city's firefighter/paramedics, could result in employees resigning, leaving the fire department without critical staff.

Affected employees must either be fully vaccinated by Oct. 18, or receive an exception on either medical or religious grounds.

able on the city's website, [www.bakercity.com](http://www.bakercity.com).

Two people have applied as of Wednesday morning, Sept. 8.

"If any one of the council members wants any of these applicants to go up for a vote, then they can do that at their next meeting, which is next Tuesday," Cannon said. "Otherwise, we'll continue to just receive applications and provide them to council."

## City Council vacancy

Cannon said the city continues to advertise the vacancy on the seven-member Council created by Lynette Perry's resignation last month.

Applications are avail-

**City staff change**

In his weekly report, Cannon wrote that he has hired Stacy Spriet, who previously worked in the city's public works department, to replace Robin Nudd as human resources manager.

Cannon wrote that he "owes a debt of gratitude" to Dawn Kitzmiller, who runs the city's building department and served as interim human resources manager for seven weeks.

# BROWN

Continued from A1

the majority of those inside were not wearing masks.

The rules are also in place for the Pendleton Round-Up, which begins Sept. 11 in Umatilla County. Brown said she hoped fair organizers would follow state rules and venues that violated the rule could face state sanctions.

She said she hoped attendees will wear masks and be aware of social distancing and other ways to prevent getting or spreading the virus.

"Let 'er buck," Brown said, using the Round-Up's signature saying.

Brown has attended the Round-Up in prior years and even rode a horse in the parade. She did not go to the state fair and will not be in Pendleton next week out of concern for "public spread" of the virus.

Major public health forecasts indicated for the first time last week that the top of the spike may have been reached.

The growth in infections may have peaked as early as Aug. 25 in Oregon, according to the widely followed

COVID-19 monitoring and forecasting of The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington.

The Oregon Health & Science University forecast last week that hospitalizations for COVID-19 was expected to peak at an estimated 1,208 patients on Monday. The latest state report, from Sept. 2, showed 1,172 COVID-19 patients in hospitals.

"We're in a dire state, but I am seeing some signs that this is going to level out in the next week," said Dr. Peter Graven, the lead forecaster, in a statement accompanying the Sept. 2 report.

The OHSU model showed that with current mask usage and other safeguards, cases would drop back to pre-surge levels of under 200 hospitalizations by the last two weeks in October.

If the trendline continued, the number of hospitalizations statewide could be under a dozen by mid-December.

The next OHSU forecast is due Thursday, Sept. 9.

The World Health Organization said last week that the delta variant wave worldwide had started to fall, with the United States

somewhat behind Europe and other regions.

The trends won't be known for sure until additional reports over the next week show the drop continuing.

Sidelinger said an increase in voluntary mask-wearing and other efforts to slow transmission of COVID-19 could shorten the timeline for getting to a lower level.

On the flip side, if people drop safeguards too early, it could push the recovery into November and closer to impacting the winter holidays.

The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, with the possibility of new variants

as long as large numbers of people worldwide remain unvaccinated.

Once it infects someone, the virus can mutate within its host, and release a variant of the original infection.

"This is a crisis that is largely being driven by people who have not yet been vaccinated," said Sidelinger.

As of Tuesday, there have been 221.5 million cases and over 4.58 million deaths worldwide, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

Just over 5.37 million people worldwide are expected to die of COVID-19 by Dec. 1, according to a the

Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

The United States last week passed 40 million reported cases and deaths are at 649,271, according to Johns Hopkins. IHMA projects 751,417 deaths by Dec. 1.

As of Tuesday, the Oregon Health Authority reported 3,326 deaths from COVID-19 during the pandemic. IHME projects 4,619 deaths in Oregon by Dec. 1.

Johns Hopkins said its survey of state and local health agencies showed that 44,558 vaccine doses were administered nationwide Monday. Over 176 million

people are fully vaccinated, about 51 % of the U.S. population.

The New York Times reported Tuesday that the current spike has peaked in the United States. The average daily new cases of 131,135 is down 12% from from two weeks ago. The analysis showed that Oregon had dropped 33% over the same period.

The Oregon Department of Education suggests families should check their school's website or the state's "Ready Schools, Safe Learners" website at <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/readyschools/Pages/default.aspx>.

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