

Pendleton not yet under threat as rains fill McKay Reservoir

BY PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Days of rain have pushed McKay Reservoir near Pendleton to 90% of its capacity, and local officials are keeping an eye on the situation and what it means for residents along McKay Creek.

Throughout most of Thursday, May 5, the reservoir about 6 miles south of Pendleton was 90% full and approaching 65,600 acre feet, according to online hydrologic monitoring data from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates McKay Dam. The bureau is releasing about 560 cubic feet of water per second from the reservoir into McKay Creek.

The bureau ramped up the release May 3, going from about zero to around 470 cfs, and May 4 increasing the release to around 560 cfs.

The city of Pendleton on May 5 released a statement that said while the bureau raised McKay Creek levels as the reservoir fills, there was no need for alarm.

“At this time, BOR does not predict the need to increase flow from the reservoir,” according to the city.

Meteorologist Mike Vescio

said the flow from the reservoir has a ways to go before it poses a flooding danger.

“Where we start getting into trouble is 800 cfs,” he said, and as the situation stands now, he said, the level of water in the creek is not a major concern.

“It’s something we’re going to have to watch and evaluate every day,” he said.

Low pressure systems over the area are going to bring rain off and on this week, Vescio said, and that means continued monitoring of McKay Reservoir and its release.

McKay Creek flooded in 2019, damaging homes and public property in the McKay Addition of Pendleton. Then in 2020, the Umatilla River flooded, causing even more damage.

Pendleton City Manager Robb Corbett said locals want to know more about what is happening with the reservoir and creek and there is “a heightened sense of concern because of everything we’ve been through the last few years.”

After the 2019 flood the city obtained a permit to remove sediment and debris from the creek to increase its capacity and try to avoid flooding, and conducted that work in the springs of 2020 and 2021. Cor-

bett said the permit allowed the city to remove just more than 8,000 cubic yards of material from McKay Creek.

“To put that into context,” he said, “a large dump truck is 10 (cubic) yards.”

The city has not worked on the creek this spring, but Corbett said there are plans to continue to improve the creek. He said the city is working with the local soil, water and conservation district to get approval and funding to “armor” the bank and restore the creek’s capacity from the dam to its confluence with the Umatilla River about 7 miles away.

The flood exposed the banks, Corbett explained, and high water events means more erosion and thus more sediment filling the creek and decreasing its capacity.

“So we want to armor those banks to stop that erosion,” Corbett said.

McKay Creek is choked with gravel and sediment, he said, and the city wants to restore the creek’s capacity to what it was before the flood.

To that end, Corbett said, the city is applying for a \$2.5 million grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency that would fund the engineering work to get an

estimate of what the project would look like. He said the city expects to hear back on the grant in the next six months.

Mark Mulvilhill lives near the creek in Pendleton and serves on the Lower McKay Creek Water Control District. He also was instrumental after the 2019 flood in forming a task force to take on improving the creek. He said that’s a challenge because of all the stakeholders involved.

The reservoir’s primary purpose when it was built in 1927 was to provide water to Stanfield and Westland irrigation districts. But the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation also want water for their First Foods, Mulvilhill said, and homeowners all along the creek want to be safe from high water. On top of this is the layer of federal bureaucracy for any work in the creek.

Mulvilhill said he appreciates the positions of all the parties, but to move forward they need a modern, solid comprehensive basin study the whole length of McKay Creek.

“That basin study will be the linchpin in moving use forward,” he said. “We have to have accurate data from people who are experts in this.”



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Fresh snow mantled the trees around the Anthony Lake Guard Station, on the north shore of Anthony Lake, on Sunday, May 8, 2022.

Snowpack

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But the storms of April had a profound effect.

At High Ridge, for instance, in the northern Blue Mountains near Tollgate, the water content at the start of April was 17.8 inches — 74% of average.

By month’s end the water content had risen to 21.6 inches. More notably, that figure was 177% of average.

A similar trend prevailed at some other sites:

- Moss Springs above Cove — 76% of average at the start of April, 117% at the end.
- Bald Mountain, near Moss Springs — 59% to 109%.
- Mount Howard, near Wallowa Lake — 84% to 106%.
- Aneroid Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness south of Wallowa Lake — 61% to 74%.

Jason Yencopal, Baker County emergency management director who also does snow surveys, plodded through the drifts to a meadow just east of Anthony Lake on the first day of May.

He measured 64 inches of snow — up from 49 inches at the end of March.

The water content rose during April from 19.5 inches — 61% of average — to 25.5 inches, 91% of average.

One damp month can’t end the region’s drought, to be sure.

As of May 3, all of Northeastern Oregon was in either moderate, severe or extreme drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

(The monitor uses a five-level rating system — abnormally dry, and four categories of drought, moderate, severe, extreme and exceptional.)

Most of Baker County remains in extreme drought, with a small part on the western side, and much of the Panhandle, in severe drought.

Phillips Reservoir in Sumpter Valley, which supplies irrigation water for more than 30,000 acres in Baker Valley, is holding just 12% of its capacity.

Thief Valley Reservoir, near North Powder, is full, and Unity Reservoir in southern Baker County is 92% full.

Wallowa County rancher kills wolf after attacks on cattle

BY KALE WILLIAMS
The Oregonian

ENTERPRISE — A Wallowa County rancher on Tuesday, May 3, shot and killed a wolf from a pack believed to be responsible for multiple attacks on livestock in the region, state wildlife officials said.

The rancher had been granted a permit to kill up to two wolves from the Chesnimnus Pack, which the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife determined was responsible for at least four attacks on cattle between April 25 and 30.

Under the state’s wolf regulations, wolves can be killed after they are determined to be

responsible for “chronic depredation,” or a minimum of two confirmed deaths within a nine-month period.

The death of the canid comes just weeks after the state’s annual wolf report showed anemic growth in Oregon’s wolf population in 2021. The tally represents a minimum number of wolves in the state, counting only the animals that can be verified by direct observation, trail cameras or physical evidence like tracks.

The report also highlighted a sharp rise in wolf deaths, 26 in 2021, up from 10 the previous year. Of the 26, the cause of death was unclear for four of

the animals, one was killed by other wolves and another died of what are believed to be natural causes.

The rest of the deaths, 21, were caused by humans. The Department of Fish & Wildlife killed eight wolves associated with the Lookout Mountain Pack, including two pups, after repeated attacks on livestock in Baker County.

Especially troubling to state biologists and wolf advocates was the alarming number of poaching incidents.

At least eight wolves, including the entirety of the Catherine Pack, were poisoned in Union County. That case re-

mains open, and a \$50,000 reward has been offered for information that leads to an arrest.

In February of this year, a wolf was illegally shot in Union County, according to Oregon State Police, and another was illegally killed in Baker County in March, though officials did not specify how the wolf was killed.

Rewards of \$22,000 and \$11,500 were offered in those cases, respectively.

The kill permit granted to the rancher who killed the Chesnimnus Pack wolf earlier this week allows for one more wolf to be killed before it expires May 24.

Wolves

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“The location and depth of trauma is consistent with wolf attack injuries on calves this size,” according to the report.

In the second incident, a rancher found two injured calves while working cattle gathered on a private pasture.

Both calves survived and are healing.

One calf was about three weeks old, weighing 75 pounds, and the other was about eight weeks old and weighed about 100 pounds.

Biologists examined injuries to both calves that they estimated had happened about two weeks earlier.

Biologists shaved portions of the calves’ hides. One calf

had bite scrapes up to an inch and a half long on the inside and outside back of its left rear leg, with tooth punctures measuring up to 3/16th inch wide. The other calf had bite scrapes up to an inch long on the outside of the right rear leg, and an infected wound, with multiple bite punctures, on the left rear hock.

The wounds were consistent with wolf attacks on live

calves, according to ODFW.

The agency is also investigating a report of another possible wolf attack reported on Saturday, May 7, at a property on Skinner Road at the northeast part of Keating Valley.

A calf was injured in that area about two weeks ago, but the animal survived.

A separate wolf pack, the Keating pack, uses that area, according to ODFW.

Swimmer

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Calaway, who turns 23 this year, has been competing in Special Olympics since she was in junior high.

She will leave for Florida in a few weeks and compete in three swimming events.

Bybee said her daughter has been swimming for about 10 years.

“It’s going to be a very exciting event for her,” Bybee said. “She’ll be gone quite a while.”

Calaway’s coach, Paula Moe, who is the aquatics director for the Baker County YMCA, said Calaway qualified for the Spe-

cial Olympics USA Games by finishing first in a race before the pandemic.

Then each state chooses its representatives for the USA Games.

Moe, who has coached athletes from Oregon, but not from Baker County, in the USA Games, said she is excited for Calaway to have a memorable experience in Florida.

“I was blessed and picked to coach two years, two times to go to USA Games, so I know firsthand how much they learn, how much they get to see,” Moe said.

Calaway is raising money for the Special Olympics. Those who wish to donate to help can

do so at support.soor.org/Caitlyn-Calaway.

Checks can also be made payable to “Special Olympics Oregon” with “Team Oregon: Caitlyn Calaway” in the memo line and sent to: Special Olym-

pics Oregon, 8313 SW Cirrus Drive, Beaverton, OR 97008.

In Baker County, Special Olympics athletes compete in track and field and winter sports as well as swimming, Moe said.

Spring is here for ranchers... Please watch for animals!

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Linda Goodwin Dumas
July 28, 1961 – February 9, 2022

Linda Dumas passed away Feb. 9, 2022, at Legacy Salmon Creek Medical Center in Salmon Creek, WA. She is survived by her husband of 26 years, David Dumas, her mother and father, Donna and Gerald Goodwin, and her sisters, Marie Guy and Gail Feldman and their families. She didn’t have children of her own but had seven grandchildren through David.

Linda loved growing up in Baker City and after graduating high school went on to college in La Grande and nursing school in Pendleton. She received her nursing accreditation and after working in a doctors office went to Portland and started a career in a local hospital. She worked at various hospitals in the area till her PKD prevented her from continuing to work. Linda was a very giving individual and was very sweet to everyone.

If you want to honor her, please give to the animal rescue of your choice. She loved our cats and dogs as though they were her children. She will surely be missed by many that have known her even for a short time.

A celebration of her life is being observed June 5, 2022 at the Churchill School in Baker City at 1 p.m. If you are attending, please RSVP to dhudumas@hotmail.com or 360-600-9077 so we are properly prepared. Linda’s ashes will be spread.

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