



LOCAL A2
Four have filed for Baker City Council



WEST A5
Fire devastates Klamath River area



SPORTS A6
Nix ready for Ducks' QB competition

Baker City Herald

IN THIS EDITION: LOCAL • OUTDOORS & REC • SPORTS Serving Baker County since 1870 • bakercityherald.com SATURDAY, AUGUST 6, 2022 • \$1.50

QUICK HITS

Good Day Wish To A Subscriber
A special good day to Herald subscriber Ross Fritz of North Powder.

BRIEFING

Campfires limited to designated sites
Starting Friday, Aug. 5, campfires are allowed only in designated campgrounds and recreation sites on the Willowa-Whitman and Umatilla national forests.

Both forests moved to Phase B of public use restrictions due to increasing fire danger resulting from the recent hot, dry weather.

Firewood cutters with a valid permit can use chain saws from between 8 p.m. and 1 p.m. daily. It's not legal, however, to use a chain saw around a campsite.

Haines Stampede Demolition Derby Saturday

The annual Haines Stampede Demolition Derby is set for Saturday, Aug. 6 at 6 p.m. at the rodeo arena on the east side of Highway 30, just south of Haines. Spectator gates open at 4 p.m.

Admission is \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors and military members, \$5 for ages 6-12, and free for kids 5 and younger. In addition to the demolition derby (with welded and chain and bang classes), there will be youth and adult barrel racing, the Bill Taylor cow hide race, and an outhouse race.

WEATHER

Today
84/39
Mostly sunny

Sunday
91/46
Sunny

Full forecast on the back of the B section.

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

West Nile virus found in Baker County mosquitoes

Mosquitoes were trapped in Keating Valley on July 28

BY JAYSON JACOBY
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West Nile virus has been found in mosquitoes in Baker County for the first time this year. The mosquitoes were trapped July 28 in the Keating Valley about 15 miles east of Baker City, said Matt Hutchinson, manager of the Baker Valley Vector Control District. It takes about a week for test results to arrive, and Hutchinson an-

nounced the positive test on Thursday, Aug. 4. Hutchinson is responsible for controlling mosquitoes in a 200,000-acre area that includes most of Baker, Keating and Bowen valleys. The virus, which mosquitoes can spread to people, has been detected in mosquitoes in Baker County in all but two years (2018 and 2020) over the past decade. Typically the virus is confined to insects and birds. Baker County is the second Oregon county to have infected mosquitoes in 2022. Two batches of mosquitoes tested positive earlier in



Michelle Gabel/mgabel@syracuse.com-TNS
Mosquitoes can transmit West Nile virus to humans.

Malheur County. Hutchinson sends dozens of "pools" of dead mosquitoes — each pool consists of around 10 to 50 insects — to a

lab at Oregon State University where the bugs are tested for West Nile virus and other mosquito-borne diseases. So far this summer, Hutchinson said 160 pools of mosquitoes from Baker County have been tested, with only the one positive for West Nile virus. He sent 38 more pools for testing on Thursday, Aug. 4. Results usually arrive within five or six days, he said. Hutchinson said he has sent about twice as many mosquito pools for testing as he did at this time a year ago, a difference he attributes to the severe 2021 drought.

See **West Nile** / A3

"A lot of good people came to help. We're fortunate to have all these people and resources available to handle these fires."

— Jeff Phillips, who lives near where the Keating fire burned on Aug. 3



Baker County Sheriff's Office/Contributed Photo

A single-engine air tanker drops fire retardant near Keating on Wednesday, Aug. 3, 2022.

Ranchers, firefighters quickly corral lightning-sparked blaze near Keating

BY JAYSON JACOBY
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Jeff Phillips was surprised that only one fire started. The thunderstorm that passed through the northern side of the Keating Valley Wednesday afternoon, Aug. 3, spawned far more than a single lightning bolt. But only the one that struck around 5:30 p.m. just east of Gilkison Sawmill Road, less than a mile northeast of Phillips' home on a hill near the Keating School, ignited the grass that's turned to tinder during the record-breaking heat wave that started the last week of July. "It immediately took off," Phillips said of the fire that ended up burning 197 acres. "There's a lot of fuel." But there were also a lot of eyes on the smoke that rapidly rose as flames charred sagebrush and grass, including highly combustible cheatgrass. Phillips, who is a cattle rancher, said ranchers were the first to respond, with two bulldozers digging control lines soon after the fire started. Phillips said there were control lines around about two-thirds of the fire before crews from multiple agencies arrived. Chuck Lowry, a rancher who lives



Brent Meisinger/Vale District BLM/Contributed Photo

Rangeland burned during a lightning-sparked fire near Keating on Aug. 3, 2022.

along Tucker Creek, a half a mile or so west of where the fire started, said he used a tractor with a disc harrow to cut a fire break. Three bulldozers were at work almost immediately, he said, including one from the North Powder Rural Fire Protection District. Buzz Harper, chief of the Keating Rural Fire Protection District, said he watched the storm cross the valley with trepidation. He and Curt Jacobs, a local rancher,

were on different hilltops with good views across the area during the storm and kept in contact by phone. They both saw the lightning hit near Gilkison Sawmill Road, and within a minute or so, dark smoke was visible, Harper said. He said he arrived within about five minutes, and the fire had already burned an acre or two. Within eight minutes he estimated the fire at 30 acres "and running."

See **Teamwork** / A3

State withdraws fire risk map

But map has already forced local resident to buy more expensive insurance policy

BY JAYSON JACOBY
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Oregon's new map showing wildfire risk levels for every tax lot in the state has been scrapped.

The map, which was released June 30, has prompted widespread concern from property owners and state legislators.

One common concern is that owners of land that was rated as high or extreme fire risk, and that's also within the wildland-urban interface (WUI), would be required by a 2021 state law to do work, such as pruning trees, to reduce the fire risk.

That requirement isn't immediate, as the Oregon State Fire Marshal is still working on regulations for cleaning up properties.

But some property owners say the map has already led to their homeowner's insurance policy being canceled due to a high or extreme risk designation. In response to the complaints, on Thursday, Aug. 4, State Forester Cal Mukomoto announced that the wildfire risk map has been withdrawn.

State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, whose district includes Baker County, lauded the decision. Findley and Baker County's other legislator, Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, on Wednesday, Aug. 3 called for the state to pull the map, saying it "has no credibility."

The lawmakers criticized state officials for failing to solicit comments from landowners and the public before crafting the map, which was a joint effort between the Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon State University.

See **Fire Risk** / A3

Local couple launches new plant-themed cafe

BY IAN CRAWFORD
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If you're strolling down the east side of Resort Street and come to Broadway, odds are you'll find yourself pausing at the window of 2080 Resort, peering into what appears to be a thriving jungle behind a big pane of glass. Cacti and broadleaves, vines and succulents, couches, books and mugs. The prom-

ises made in the window display of Jubilee Plants and Gathering have come to fruition with the opening of the business Saturday, Aug. 6 at 10 a.m. "It's as far away as Boise that you'll find anything like this," said owner Macey Blankenship, gesturing to the cozy seating and almost uncountable leafy features of her shop space.

See **Cafe** / A3

County commissioners OK lease-purchase deal

BY SAMANTHA O'CONNOR
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Baker County commissioners on Wednesday, Aug. 3 unanimously approved a \$1.45 million lease-purchase agreement for a 70-acre property they decided to try to buy about two months ago. The land in north Baker City is currently a mint field owned by the Ward family. The property is just south

of Hughes Lane. It's bordered on the east and south by the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway, and on the west by the Baker Sports Complex. On Wednesday commissioners agreed to a deal with the legal owners, Kathy Lorene Ward and Harold Walter Crawford II, trustees of the Crawford-Ward Family Revocable Living Trust.

See **Deal** / A3



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