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Cohorts, masks and social distancing at school

Grant County schools are back on track for opening their doors but are prepared if COVID-19 cases rise

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County students coming back to school buildings this fall will experience an unorthodox year due to COVID-19, but school administrators and staff are committed to providing a safe space for education while adhering to state guidelines.

The Oregon Department of Education announced on Aug. 11 new metric guidelines for schools in smaller populated areas, which will tentatively allow schools in Grant County to open their doors.

Grant School District 3 Superintendent Bret Uptmor said they are opening onsite at Humbolt Elementary, Seneca Elementary and Grant Union Junior-Senior High School. Some of the biggest changes students will notice immediately on campus are the requirements for masks, the distance required between students, the emphasis on proper



Casey Hallgarth



Bret Uptmor

"THERE'S GOING TO BE SOME DIFFERENCES, BUT THE GOOD THING IS THE KIDS GET TO COME BACK TO SCHOOL AND SEE THEIR FRIENDS ... AND GET A PROPER EDUCATION."

—Casey Hallgarth, Prairie City School superintendent

hygiene and the need for cohorts, or assigned groups.

Uptmor said students are required to wear masks, which will be available at each school building for students who do not have their own.

"From the standpoint of the district, we will have masks available for those that aren't able to come with a mask. We will have those on site at each school," Uptmor said.

When kids enter school buildings, they will need to use hand sanitizer provided by the school or wash their hands.

"I think that's a scary thing for some parents, which is using too much hand sanitizer," Uptmor said. "We don't have to use hand sanitizer. We can use soap and water."

Students arriving and departing from school will also be done in cohorts of up to 50.

"At the high school, they're planning on arriving with certain groups of students arriving at one door spread out and being able to monitor the students arriving and giving them direction to the right place so we maintain our cohorts," Uptmor said. "At Hum-

bolt they were looking at doing something similar, different entrances for different groups."

While the cohort plan is currently being reworked, the goal is to have students enter and exit buildings in a staggered way, which will help create and maintain the 6 feet distance between students.

"You can't just release 200 kids and expect them to be 6 feet apart," Uptmor said. "We've got a lot of practicing to do with our students to meet

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Grant County Court drafts letter in support of rolling back logging rule

Comment period open on proposal to eliminate Eastside Screens

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Court voted to send a letter to the U.S. Forest Service in support of rolling back its prohibition against cutting down trees larger than 21 inches in diameter as the agency opens up a 30-day comment period on a proposal to remove the provision known as the Eastside Screens.

The 25-year-old provision prevents the logging of trees that exceed 21 inches in diameter at breast height in six national forests in Eastern Oregon and Washington, including the Malheur National Forest. It was adopted, at the time, as a temporary set of rules to protect streams, rivers and other wildlife habitat.

The 21-inch rule is now being reconsidered as overcrowding trees pose risks to wildlife habitat, according to a press release from the Forest Service.

Shane Jefferies, forest supervisor with the Ochoco National Forest, said in a press release that priorities have shifted in the 25 years since the 21-inch rule was put in place.

"Adjusting the 21-inch rule limitation to reflect the learning over the 25 years would help streamline restoration of forests in Eastern Oregon and make it easier to create landscapes that withstand and recover more quickly from wildfire, drought and other disturbances," he said.

The proposed revision would make the rule into a guideline instead of the mandate that land managers and loggers must follow.

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THE PARADE MUST GO ON

Grant County residents rally through John Day for Grant County Fair parade

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Horses, candy being tossed, a person standing high on stilts, children cooling down spectators with water and more entertained the audience during this year's Grant County Fair parade.

Participants of the parade gathered at Grant Union High school where they were organized into different categories for the parade on Aug. 15. Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer led the parade as the United States flag flew on the right side of his vehicle and his lights flashed.

Grant County Fair grand marshal John Aasness soon followed in his float that tossed candy to the audience. Throughout the parade, participants provided many items to spectators such as plastic Frisbees, pamphlets and a chance to get soaked with water.

NEXTWEEK

See full fair results and more coverage in next week's edition.

Grant County Fair and Rodeo Queen Kelsei Kiser and Princess Katelyn Barker waved and smiled at the spectators.

Many organizations in the county, campaigns for elected positions, representatives from other rodeos and a wide variety of off road vehicles had the chance to enjoy a parade that other counties in the state had to cancel on due to COVID-19.

Majestic Grove, 16, the Hells Canyon Junior Rodeo Queen, was excited at the chance to participate in a parade with her horse Tough. She was also excited because this was her first parade on horseback, and this was also a first-time experience for Tough as well.

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The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Representatives from many organizations in Grant County gathered together to celebrate the annual Grant County Fair parade.

Livestock auction brings in \$25,000 more than last year

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Fairgrounds sat eerily silent during the fair this year, as the amusement park rides, food vendors, demolition derby and headline concert act long associated with the traditional expo were conspicuously absent amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The few activities the fair board and staff were able to salvage — the youth livestock auction, team branding and dog trials — did what the longest-running fair has always done: It brought the community together.

"The fair has always brought everyone together," Grant County Fair Manager Mindy Winegar said.

Winegar, who, along with the fair board,

volunteers, and local officials, vowed to hold something for the community and especially 4-H and FFA youth, said the fair is one of the few social events that do not divide the residents along political or any other socio-economic lines.

That sentiment, ahead of the team branding competition, was captured by the event's emcee: "Today, for the next couple of hours, we are going to forget about everything else going on in the world."

Fair board member Courtney Montague, in her second year, said as a kid growing up in Union County, she looked forward to the county fair



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Tim and Laura Brown of Treavan Boer Goats bid on an animal Saturday.

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The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

A Grant County Fair parade participant walks on stilts.

