



EO Media Group

Emergency room personnel hustle to care for patients at St. Charles Bend in August.

St. Charles gears up for surge

By SUZANNE ROIG
The Bulletin

BEND — St. Charles Health System is preparing for yet another surge in COVID-19 cases, as snow and cold weather force people indoors.

The number of COVID-19 cases is expected to rise, according to recent forecasting models. On Tuesday, Dec. 28, the Oregon Health Authority reported 182 cases of COVID-19 in Deschutes County and one death. Statewide, 1,900 new cases were reported.

“We’re deep into this pandemic and we’re anticipating another surge from the omicron (variant) and its spread throughout the country,” said Dr. Jeff Absalon, St. Charles Health System chief physician executive. “We are anticipating that we will have an increase of patients in our hospitals. The big challenge remains staffing.”

St. Charles Bend, the one hospital in the region that cares for COVID-19 patients, is experiencing a plateau of patients at the moment, but the next seven to 10 days could see an increase. The question is how steeply that will rise and how long it will last, said Michael Johnson, St. Charles Health System senior data scientist.

The challenge for St. Charles, which operates four hospitals in Central Oregon, is the hospital system has 911 open positions at the moment. About 250 people are in the process of being hired, leaving the hospital with 661 positions unfilled.

The hospital does have the help of about 140 traveling nurses that the state funded and distributed to St. Charles, but a contingent of Oregon National Guard personnel recently ended an assignment to help with non-patient work that lasted several months, Absalon said.

“Every day we work to source additional caregivers to join our staff,” Absalon said. “The positions are across the continuum of care.”

How bad it will get, depends on how many children get vaccinated, adults receive their booster shots and the transmission of the variant, which is highly contagious, Johnson said. Only two variables can be con-

trolled by the public: behavior and the booster rate, he said.

“I think we’re doing pretty well behavior wise, compared to other places,” Johnson said. “The one thing that makes a huge difference is how the peak will go, and that’s affected by our booster rate. If we can double the number of booster shots between now and the second week of January, we can significantly bring down that curve on the order of 20 to 30 patients a day.”

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has said the booster shot provides a high degree of protection from the variant. The CDC also recommends that everyone 18 and older get the booster shot to protect against COVID-19 and the variants that are circulating.

During past surges, particularly this past summer when the delta variant was circulating in the community, the hospital was forced to delay surgeries that required an overnight stay. In the wake of the waning case counts since the peak this summer, St. Charles has been racing to ease the backlog of nonemergency surgeries it had postponed due to a lack of staff and beds. The hospital had been delaying these kind of surgeries since the start of the pandemic, Absalon said.

St. Charles serves as the regional hospital for eight counties. According to the state’s health data website, 35% of its intensive care unit beds and 22% of its nonintensive care beds were available. At times during the peak of the last surge this summer, there were one or two intensive care beds available.

Abasalon urged community members to get a vaccination, if they haven’t yet, or get a booster shot. The Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center, 3800 SE Airport Way in Redmond will hold a drive-thru clinic starting Jan. 4 from noon to 7 p.m. daily. It closed Dec. 23. Information about additional clinics can be found on the Deschutes County Health Services website.

“It’s incredibly difficult to estimate it right now,” Johnson said. “There are indicators that are concerning: Case rates are going up, positivity rates are going up and that’s confirming what we expected.”

County allots federal COVID relief dollars

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Court distributed more than \$150,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funding during the court’s regular session on Dec. 22 but still has more than twice that much left to spend.

ARPA is a federal stimulus program designed to speed economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The court approved a \$7,000 allocation for the 911 dispatch center.

County Judge Scott Myers told

COUNTY ARPA ALLOCATIONS

Airport	\$ 3,033.00
Fairgrounds	\$ 12,919.88
Broadband	\$ 96,000.00
Sheriff’s Dept	\$ 29,898.00
911	\$ 7,000.00
Remaining	\$ (389,025.46)

the court that the county’s legal counsel recommended the allocation to the dispatch center, and it

met the U.S. Treasury Department’s guidance.

Meanwhile, according to a spreadsheet that details ARPA allocations, the \$96,000 the county approved to bring high-speed internet access to the courthouse from Humbolt Elementary School is pending documentation for costs from the county’s broadband coalition.

According to the spreadsheet, the county’s remaining balance is \$389,025.46. As of Dec. 22, the court has allocated \$161,274.16 as the county’s public health entity.

Cattle, calves rescued from deep NE Oregon snows

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

IMNAHA — Rescue efforts are still underway to save dozens of cattle stranded in up to 7 feet of snow on a Northeastern Oregon grazing allotment.

The cattle — many of which had young calves — were mired in deep snow on U.S. Forest Service land in the Upper Imnaha area, Wallowa County Sheriff Joel Fish confirmed on Friday, Dec. 31.

Fish said the sheriff’s office is investigating and “assisting with the retrieval of the cattle on the Forest Service grazing permits on the Marr Flat C&H Allotment. We have had deputies on snowmobiles assisting.”

Numerous volunteers were helping in the rescue efforts, according to Todd Nash, chair of the Wallowa County Commission, and

volunteers with the Wallowa County Humane Society.

Social media alert

One of the first widespread alerts came in a Facebook post by Craig Stockdale, who was one of the first to discover the cattle on the 200 Road south of Salt Creek.

“I just came upon them snowmobiling,” Stockdale said Jan. 1.

He said his social media post mobilized rescuers — both those out finding the cattle and those with facilities to care for the rescued livestock.

On Dec. 29, Kathy Gisler Reynolds, a volunteer with the Humane Society, also shared a post of the cattle. Photos posted on Facebook showed a cow up to its neck in snow and unable to move.

“I was alerted to it yesterday by the ranchers who have been out there trying to save

them,” Reynolds said Dec. 30.

“Some were too weak to even move,” she said of the cattle, adding that although rescuers were able to retrieve calves, some of the adult cows had to be euthanized.

Stockdale and Anna Butterfield, who with her husband, Mark, ranches northeast of Joseph, confirmed the cattle are on the Bob Dean Oregon Ranch managed by B.J. Warnock. Dean lives out of town and Warnock was unavailable for comment Jan. 1.

County involved

Nash — who is a rancher and president of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association — said Dec. 30 information on the situation was limited.

“The things we do know is that this was a Forest Service permit for the Upper Big Sheep Creek and the Upper Imnaha. It takes in a large area

— 72,000 acres — known as the Marr Flat Grazing Allotment. They had a viable permit to go on sometime in the spring. They were supposed to have all cattle removed, according to the Forest Service permit,” Nash said.

“There is a rescue effort being made right now to try and rescue as many as possible. We’ve committed county resources to it. There’ve been a number of people who have volunteered or have contributed time,” he said. “There have been helicopters that have flown feed into some that were extremely isolated, and the rescue continues. Those are the basic facts that I do know.”

Compounding the heavy snowfall that came all at once, rain and heavy snow brought down trees across a lot of the access roads in the area, Nash added.

OSU research forest plans advance

By SIERRA DAWN
McCLAIN
Capital Press

CORVALLIS — Oregon State University, after hosting a recent public budget meeting, is a step closer to potentially managing a 91,000-acre research forest in Oregon’s southern coastal range, spanning Coos and Douglas counties.

The budget is another milestone in the years-long effort to transform the Elliott State Forest into a publicly owned state research forest.

The research vision is also becoming clearer. Last December, Oregon’s State Land Board voted for OSU to further explore how the forest might be used as a research hub. A year later, OSU has a clearer outline for what kinds of research will take place in the forest.

The research forest, experts say, could benefit OSU researchers and students, foresters, small woodland owners and scientists worldwide.

“This is a very rare opportunity to start a research forest of this size,” said Kathleen “Katy” Kavanaugh, associate

dean for research in OSU’s College of Forestry. “This would be one of the largest research forests in the world.”

Research would include experiments on the role riparian areas play in the recovery of endangered species, exploration of potential new timber harvest systems and the study of steep forest terrains, including geological hazards.

Thomas DeLuca, dean of forestry at OSU, said experimental plots — different sections of forest organized by watershed — will be managed differently. When a natural fire occurs in the region, researchers will then study which treatments were most fire-resilient.

Shannon Murray, Elliott State Research Forest director, said the project proposal includes construction of research and laboratory spaces, offices, classrooms and living quarters for researchers living in the forest on a temporary or long-term basis.

“It’s exciting thinking about the future of research there,” said Murray.

But the project still has a long way to go. 2024 is the proposed research start date,

but several pieces of the puzzle must snap into place before that can happen.

The biggest piece is ownership.

Initially, the plan was for OSU to both own and manage the forest, but earlier this fall OSU backed out of its plan to take ownership, saying the financial risk was too high.

The forest is supposed to be financially supported primarily by timber harvests.

According to OSU’s models and data from Mason, Bruce & Girard, a consulting firm, harvests are expected to start at a maximum of 1,300 acres per year for the first five years, later dropping as low as 500 acres per year after most major thinning is completed.

Although OSU officials predict profitable timber harvests, there are too many uncertainties, including potential logging limitations because the Elliott provides prime habitat for federally protected species. OSU has decided not to shoulder the risks.

The committee advising OSU and the Department of State Lands about the forest is now exploring an alternative plan: having OSU manage the forest

but another entity own it.

One possible option is establishing a stand-alone entity, such as a public corporation or independent public agency, to own the forest. This would require legislation. Development of a formal legislative concept for the 2022 legislative session is underway.

WHAT’S HAPPENING

Saturday, Jan. 8

Christine Drazan

• 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck, 423 W. Main St., John Day

State Rep. Christine Drazan of Canby, one of more than a dozen candidates seeking the Republican nomination for governor in this year’s election, will meet with local residents and talk about her bid for higher office.



Wednesday, Jan. 12

Bud Pierce

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m., main conference room, Grant County Regional Airport, 72000 Airport Road, John Day

Dr. Bud Pierce, a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor, will meet with area residents to discuss their ideas for Oregon’s future. Pierce, a Salem physician, was the GOP nominee for governor in 2016. Anyone interested in attending is asked to RSVP via email to info@budpierce.org.

Do you have a community event in Grant County you’d like to publicize? Email information to editor@bmeagle.com. The deadline is noon Friday for publication the following Wednesday.

SPORTS SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, JAN. 7

Prairie City Basketball @ Four Rivers, 6, 7:30 p.m. (MST)
Grant Union Basketball @ Enterprise 6, 7:30 p.m.
Grant Union Wrestling @ Joseph Invite, noon

SATURDAY, JAN. 8

Grant Union Basketball @ Heppner, 4, 5:30 p.m.
Prairie City Basketball @ Jordan Valley, noon, 1:30 p.m.

TUESDAY, JAN. 11

Prairie City Basketball @ Long Creek/Ukiah 5 p.m.

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THANK YOU

I want to thank my church family and all my friends for the cards, telephone calls and donations. Especially Terry & Billy Jo George for their year-round help. Only in Grant County can we get such help and compassion. I also want to thank my son Dan & Karla for being my rock through their own grief. The death of my son Tom has been made easier because of you all.

Thank you again,
Rosalie Averett
Dan & Karla Averett

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