



Staff photo by Jade McDowell/East Oregonian

A portion of the pedestrian bridge over the Umatilla River near Umatilla High School collapsed Sunday.

Flooding damages Umatilla bridge

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla County and several of its cities have declared a state of emergency as flooding damages structures.

In Umatilla, a pedestrian bridge connecting South Hill with downtown partially collapsed sometime late Saturday night or early Sunday morning.

The bridge spans the Umatilla River about half a mile west of Umatilla High School, and many students use it to walk to school. The next closest bridge is another half mile west where Highway 730 crosses the river.

Umatilla city manager David Stockdale said on Monday that engineers had yet to make an official determination, but staff believe it is a total loss. Demolition and replacement costs will

likely be in the millions of dollars and take at least a year — probably more like three to five years, he said.

On Sunday morning a section of the bridge dipped down toward the water, which was rushing just below the bridge as spring runoff pushed the river higher than usual. A tangle of branches was caught under the break in the bridge.

Scott Coleman, city public works director, said when rivers are swollen with floodwaters, debris tend to collect against the bridge and form a natural dam, magnifying stress and pressure on the structure.

“That’s what we had going on here,” he said.

A water main runs along the bridge, carrying water to South Hill residents. Coleman said the water had been rerouted and was being delivered through a different pipe. No one lost

their water service but they may see a drop in pressure, and there would be a major problem if the backup line broke.

Umatilla Police Department posted on Facebook that anyone trying to cross the broken bridge would be subject to criminal trespass charges. Stockdale said the bridge is “unusable and unsafe.”

“Go ahead and be curious — from a distance,” he said. “If nature is taking out a structure like that, it’s definitely lethal to humans.”

The Umatilla city council planned to make an emergency declaration regarding the bridge during their meeting at 8 p.m. Tuesday evening at city hall, following a budget work session at 6 p.m.

Over the weekend the Umatilla River continued to run high elsewhere, including the rapids formed along Umatilla River Road,

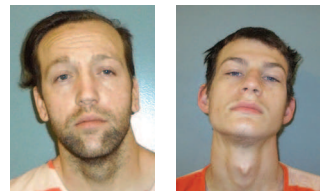
flooded fields between Echo and Pendleton and the flooding that continued to wash over Riverfront Park and the Oxbow Trail in Hermiston.

On the other side of the county, McKay Creek has flooded neighborhoods in Pendleton, Ukiah and Pilot Rock. On Friday and Saturday hundreds of volunteers filled, transported and stacked sandbags to protect homes. Willowbrook Terrace evacuated its 35 residents and several homes experienced water damage.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners officially declared an emergency on April 10, and the county’s emergency management department has been busy taking stock of the damage and meeting with officials in areas where flooding has occurred. They are being assisted by numerous local agencies and Team Rubicon, a veteran-led team of disaster volunteers.

Two suspects arrested in Navarrete slaying

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN AND
PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITERS



Shermantine Sommerville

Hermiston Police have arrested two men in a June 2018 murder.

David Edgar Sommerville, 19, of Hermiston, and Vincent Wesley David Shermantine, 29, have been charged in connection with the murder of 26-year-old Erik Navarrete, who was found on June 4 of last year with a gunshot wound to the head at a residence in the 500 block of West Hartley Avenue. Navarrete was unconscious and was flown to Kadlec Medical Center in Richland, where he was taken off life support several days later.

Sommerville has been charged with aggravated murder, felony murder, two counts of unlawful use of a weapon and robbery in the first degree. Shermantine was charged with murder, first-degree robbery, felon in possession of a firearm and unlawful use of a weapon. Both men had been in the Umatilla County Jail since late March on charges not related to the homicide.

Hermiston Police identified Sommerville as a suspect after following leads for several months. On March 26, they arrested him for resisting arrest, unlawful possession of methamphetamine, interfering with a peace officer and carrying a concealed weapon. On April 10, the Navarrete homicide case was presented to the Umatilla County Grand Jury, who charged Sommerville with murder.

According to the indictments, Sommerville and Shermantine attempted to commit robbery and, while trying to leave the scene,

Sommerville fired a gun at Navarrete, who, according to the document, was not a participant in the crime.

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said he was aware of what Sommerville was trying to steal, but was not comfortable releasing the information. He would not say whether Sommerville and Navarrete knew each other. Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said there was a “family relation” between Shermantine and Sommerville.

Sommerville is being held in the Umatilla County Jail without bail, and has a preliminary hearing on April 30. Shermantine was arraigned Friday afternoon in Hermiston and is also being held at the jail.

The court appointed two Portland-area lawyers to represent Sommerville: Benjamin Kim and Steve Lindsey. They defended Edwin Lara, 31, who in January 2018 pleaded guilty to aggravated murder for the 2016 killing of 23-year-old Kaylee Sawyer of Bend. Lara is serving a life sentence at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton.

Sommerville’s attorneys filed a request for the court to order the district attorney’s office to allow inspections of evidence and provide copies of police reports, recordings, photographs and more. Primus said his office has set a meeting with Kim and Lindsey.

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Alzheimer’s Association offers support

Emotional support and resources are available for family, friends and caregivers for people with Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia.

The Alzheimer’s Association coordinates groups that connect people that are on the same unique journey of caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease. The groups offer an opportunity to learn, share and gain emotional support from others.

“Alzheimer’s is a debilitating disease,” said Tom Moore, Hermiston support group facilitator. “One of the most difficult things for family members and caregivers to recognize is that the behaviors exhibited are coming from the disease and not from their loved one.”

There is no fee to attend. Hermiston groups include:

- Second Monday of each month from 5:30-7 p.m. at Guardian Angel Memory Care, 540 N.W. 12th St.

- Fourth Monday of each month from 5:30-7 p.m. at Good Shepherd Medical Center, 610 N.W. 11th St.

Both of Moore’s parents had dementia and his wife is now battling the disease. Moore began studying

the disease through online courses offered by organizations like the Alzheimer’s Association and Oregon Care Partners.

“I have found by attending a support group for years — and also facilitating two different support groups — that I not only learn from other’s experiences, but am able to contribute to their ability to deal with their caregiving experiences in a positive way.”

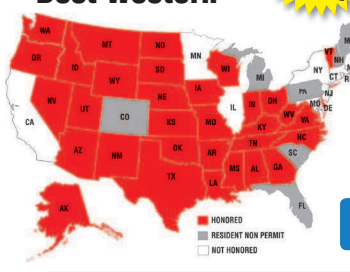
For more information about the Alzheimer’s Association support groups and other resources, call 1-800-272-3900 or visit www.alz.org/oregon.

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