

OUR VIEW

# COVID-19 precautions are worth the hassle

Seeing recent growth in COVID-19 infections, we compliment people who have managed to stay the course. It is not easy, but those of us who have held true to pandemic protocols are helping to fight back wave after wave of infection.

Last week, we reported on a "sixth wave of COVID-19 infections as the world marked the two-year anniversary of the pandemic on Dec. 31." We quoted the Oregon Health Authority on new cases, deaths and hospitalizations. Oregon had then reached 5,655 deaths and 421,263 infections. Hospitalizations were up, too, fueled by omicron, an infectious new variant.

It is sad to see our numbers have not improved since last week. According to the Oregon Health Authority the state has grown in infections — 478,203, as of Monday, Jan. 10. OHA also informed us that

total deaths grew to 5,779.

The OHA reported 16,738 cases and 188 deaths in Umatilla County, and 2,207 cases and 26 deaths in Morrow County.

These numbers hit hard, as each one represents a neighbor and a loved one.

Leading experts have given us their best advice for containing the illness, and these suggestions have remained the same for a long time now. Mask, vaccinate and keep distance, they said; experts continue to say these things.

Around town, many people still are taking the suggestions of our best scientists and top healthcare workers. At restaurants, many servers are masked. In grocery store checkout lines, many people stand 6 feet away from the people ahead of them. And so on.

These actions are a hassle, for certain. Masks are uncomfortable, and

social distancing seems anti-social. Still, if it saves even a single life, it seems worth it. Our experts tell us that our actions save many lives, so it is right to continue — not because they are authorities, but because they are knowledgeable and they are likely correct.

So, too, many of us vaccinate. In Hermiston, COVID-19 vaccines are available at Family Health Associates, Good Shepherd Health Care System, Hermiston Family Medicine, Mirasol Family Health Center, Rite Aid, Safeway and Walmart, according to Umatilla County Public Health. In addition, there are clinics that have popped up in many workplaces and schools throughout our region.

People still are getting their vaccinations. We know this is true, because we have seen them do it, and we applaud them for it. Many of the holdouts have struggled with this

decision, and they are especially worthy of praise. After all, it is not easy to give up on a strongly held belief after it is held so firmly for so long.

At this point, it is getting hard to believe the pandemic will ever be over. Now two years from the date that we first heard of the coronavirus and COVID-19, it feels like many ages ago. It can, then, be tempting to give up on any hope of an end, and perhaps let the virus win. Some people have even advocated letting the coronavirus "wash over us" and take the people who are most at risk so that the rest of us can live normal lives.

For those of us who continue to follow the experts and heed their warnings, however, we suffer the discomfort willingly. We seek the end of the pandemic, and we want to stand with as many people as possible at the end of this dark tunnel. We cannot give up now.

THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

## A sense of place in the Blue Mountains

There is a place along the upper Grande Ronde River that has a hold on my heart.

As a kid, I would camp there with my grandfather, him teaching me to build a fire, split kindling, play gin rummy, flip pancakes ("belly gaskets" he would call them) and fish for trout. Imagine the patience it must take to teach a 10-year-old how to cast a fly.

I was a city kid, raised in Portland and Corvallis, but every summer I would spend several weeks with my grandparents in Northeastern Oregon.

I see now that these experiences and places led me to make life choices that have always brought me back to the Blue Mountains. My education, summer jobs and career moves kept returning me to this place that feels like home.

In an incredible stroke of luck, one of my first Forest Service jobs was as a fire prevention technician, patrolling an area that included the upper Grande Ronde. A campground had been developed where grandpa used to park his trailer, the lodgepole pine forest had been ravaged by pine beetles, and eventually the river was no longer stocked with native hatchery trout, but I still felt a great attachment to this landscape.

Each day I visited with campers, fishers and woodcutters and shared with them stories of my summers in the same spot, pointing out good fishing holes, access roads and spring sources — and of course, spreading the fire prevention message.

Social scientists have a term for this special feeling I have for the upper Grande Ronde. It is called "sense of place" and refers to the characteristics of a place that make it special or unique or that create in people a sense of attachment and

belonging. My childhood experiences created for me a primal landscape, and it is common for exposure to natural landscapes to influence our preferences later in life. That certainly held true for me.

Have you ever driven by a house where you lived as a kid and felt a rush of memories, sights and sounds? That's sense of place.

Do you choose to camp in the same location every hunting season, perhaps your grandparents' hunting campsite, even when the hunting success doesn't live up to the memories of your youth? That tug is your sense of place, and it's important.

During my career I was sometimes frustrated by my agencies' inability to close roads, even when the roads were reducing the value of wildlife habitat or damaging soil and water quality. It seemed like every two-track road in the forest led to someone's traditional family hunting camp.

Some elements of the sense of place are cultural, referring to the attachment of a people or culture to an environment or homeland. I don't compare my own feelings of sense of place with the connections that Native people have to their ancestral lands, as my connection only runs one or two generations deep and doesn't include the land providing for the needs of my ancestors — nor was it ever taken from them.

But I do respect that Native people have a long and spiritual connection to the land, and I appreciate the significance of their work to restore the capacity of the land and waters to provide for them. It must be a powerful emotional experience to see salmon return to a stream that one's ancestors used to fish, or to pick huckleberries in areas known through family

oral history.

We spend plenty of time in inauthentic locations, places that could be put anywhere.

Strip malls, fast food restaurants, large box stores and downtown areas that have been converted to tourist traps or heavy commercial use all lose their ability to connect to people with a sense of place.

Gertrude Stein visited the site where her childhood home and farm once stood, and upon seeing that the land had been converted to housing developments, summarized her feelings by saying "there is no there there." This certainly is the antithesis of the sense of place; I sense in her writing a mourning for the loss of part of her own identity.

To be sure, the upper Grande Ronde is not the only place that evokes strong feelings for me. There is a lake in the Wallows I call "spread your ashes worthy" because of its sheer beauty. Hayward Field in Eugene is a place that holds special memories for me as a track and field athlete, coach and spectator.

Even the sidewalk in front of the Great Pacific has a special place in my heart because of the many summer Friday evenings I have spent there with good friends.

As an adult, I have visited and fished the upper Grande Ronde with my own family. The day is coming soon when I will be able to take my grandchildren to the same place, and I look forward to setting up a camp, cooking belly gaskets, building a campfire, playing in the river, and helping them catch trout on a fly.

I suspect these experiences will bring a tear or two to my eye; such is the power of sense of place.

*Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.*



Bill Aney

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Friends, neighbors there when you need them

Last week's storms snowed us in here on Butler Grade. The first day was an adventure, but by the second day we were becoming concerned for our safety.

Thanks to Kirk Terjeson we were able to get to the main road by way of driving through our field. However, it was clear that that was a route not to be relied on.

For years, Tom Fellows at the Umatilla County Public Works Department has always been accessible by phone, and this time was no different. When he assured us that they would get to us as soon as possible, we knew we could rely on that. Sure enough, Brian Zimmerman showed up with his grader/plow in the evening and then returned the next morning, working until he provided us with access to the rest of the world.

All three of these people were there when we needed them and we can't thank them enough. They truly are what you hope for in neighbors and government support.

**Frank and Nancy Duff Helix**

### A couple of facts about proposed B2H line

The Boardman to Hemingway project power line, proposed by Idaho Power, is nothing but a strong arming of the 700 private landowners as the power line would cut through farms, ranches, forest lands, Ladd Wildlife Marsh, Morgan Lake and in front of the Oregon Trail Center.

It should be noted this project will be 100% on private property in Umatilla County. Idaho Power also wants to build new roads and remove anything in its path while destroying the land, wildlife habitat and water resources on the same private properties. Many of these roads they desire to build or rebuild are outside the desired route of the power line its self.

Idaho Power claims to be wanting to work with the 700 private landowners, all the while threatening the same landowners if Idaho Power is not allowed to enter the private prop-

erty, prior to being issued the certificate to build by the state of Oregon, by taking the owners to court.

A couple of facts need to be pointed out.

First, Idaho Power does not have the authority needed to build the power line at this time, and it can still be denied the right to build. There is currently a couple of contested cases in the courts, and Oregon will not issue the required certificates until they have been settled, which means most likely those cases will go to the Supreme Court. Again with no certificate, Idaho Power has no authority to build the line.

Second, the fact is that Idaho Power is demanding access to the 700 private properties to do surveying and studies that they had already done in 2011.

The governments in Umatilla and Morrow counties don't seem to care about their residents but more about promised tax dollars from this badly planned project. This for-profit private corporation has some county, city and state agencies on its side as it means dollars to them and the landowners be damned. Union and Baker counties are both opposed to the line being built.

I have asked before, why zig-zag across private lands as opposed to a straight line between Boardman and Idaho? The main reason, although denied by B2H, is to avoid all forms of government land and the stricter requirements it would have to meet. It is estimated that if the line was built in a straight line from Boardman to Hemingway, Idaho, it would cut the 293 mile proposed route by approximately 50 miles, but to avoid public and tribal lands, a zigzag route across private property was selected by Idaho Power.

I understand that if it doesn't cross people's land, they say what do we care? Why they should care is if at anytime this project goes broke, or drops the ball on any of their pie in the sky promises, you, the taxpayers, will be on the hook to cover the costs.

Again I ask people to contact your county, city and state officials and stop this theft of private property and the rights of the owners.

**John Harvey Stanfield**

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