The Pickle Barrel Review

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTON MOUNTAIN DIGITAL RADIO ASSOCIATION

July 2025

Introduction

Greetings to one and all, and once again welcome to the Pickle Barrel Review! As in the previous issues, you'll find this issue filled with the latest happenings not only of the W7NEO system, and the NE-OREGON room, but System Fusion, Allstar, along with GMRS. All that said, as always, we invite others to contribute with articles, or if your club or organization is having an event such as a tailgate, swap meet, VE testing, or whatever, you can list it here as well. The only thing we ask is that your contribution be nonpolitical (unless it's a government action that directly affects Ham, or GMRS Radio), respectful of others (no personal attacks), and relatively family friendly. We realize your pretty darn proud of it, but we really don't want to hear about your new tattoo, let alone just where exactly it's located on your body. And just to be clear, we apologize, but unfortunately your brother-in-law's bachelor party still doesn't qualify as an upcoming event. So, all that said, feel free to reach in

the barrel, grab yourself a pickle, pull up a chair and have ah sit for a spell as we discuss the latest happenings in Fusion, Allstar, GMRS, and Personal Radio Communications in general. And for the record, you can rest assured that every line of the PBR is a 100% AI free zone, and will remain so (As proof just look at all the mistakes!).

A word from our sponsor

Paul's precision poultry plucking:

Paul's precision poultry plucking, where no job is too paltry! Paul proudly points out that he's been in the poultry plucking profession for plenty of years, having started out almost prior to puberty! Got a pigeon that needs plucked? No job to puny for Paul!

So, remember, pick Paul for all your poultry plucking needs, and you'll never run ah fowl!

Well, yet another weekend of the SEAPAC Hamvention has come and gone for this year, and no, I didn't win anything either. But I still had a great time, and was able to spend some genuinely quality time with some longtime friends, and enjoy some truly great conversation, and great food. Some of which

included hot dogs on the beach cooked over the warmth of a blazing bon fire. It just doesn't get any better than that!

I have no idea what these two guys (W7UPS & K7LW) are laughing at, but it must have been funny!

Living in Northeastern Oregon we don't have the luxury of enjoying "fresh" seafood like the folks that live along the coast do. So, while I was out there, I had my fair share of fish-n-chips, and enjoying it with good friends just made it all the better!

Enjoying a great meal at Norma's with a great bunch of folks! Clockwise; Deb (N7LZN), Terry (N7LZM), Lynn (K7LW), Steve (W7UPS), Mitch (KJ7JA), & Cathy (AKA "The Birthday Girl")

There was allot to see and do while at SEAPAC, along with hanging out with other nerds…er…ah, I mean "fellow Ham's! While there, the best part was that I was able to hook up with old friends, and have a few eyeball QSO's with folks that I had talked to on the air, but never actually met in person. There were also numerous opportunities to meet with some of the movers and shakers of the hobby, and talk about new technologies in Ham Radio, along with how things are evolving in general. For an old timer like me (I don't believe I'm admitting to that) seeing the new technology, and remembering back to when digital consisted of just two modes, CW and RTTY, and then seeing where it's headed nowadays, was nothing short of amazing.

And speaking of times gone by, there certainly wasn't any shortage of memorable moments slipping back in time while wandering around the swap meet tables, and checking out at all the vintage equipment for sale.

I remember operating CW on one of these back in the 70's when I was still in High School!

There were also quite a few really great presentations going on, one of which was a presentation by John Kruk, National Sales Manager for Yaesu America, covering what's new with Yaesu System Fusion. I started attending SEAPAC right about the same time period that I was first piecing together what is now the NE-OREGON WiresX room. At that time, I really had no clue as to just what I was doing. But I reasoned that after a lifetime of working in tech support, just like learning to tie your shoes, I would probably eventually figure it out. Either way, I knew it was something uniquely different, and well worth pursuing. The best part is that I'm still enjoying Fusion, and learning more about it to this very day!

My interview with John Kruk, (N9UPC), National Sales Manager, Yaesu America

I first met John a few years ago during one of the SEAPAC get togethers when he noticed the FTM-400 in my car in the hotel parking lot, commenting that I had made a good choice of radio. I had no idea just who he was at the time, but since then, John and I have been meeting up each year in Seaside Oregon, and talking radio, along with comparing our life's paths in general in Ham Radio. I

can honestly say from my own experience that John is genuinely one of the good guys, and always willing to help out with all things Fusion.

John Kruk (N9UPC), passionate about his trade, and every bit a down-to-earth guy.

As I said, I had the opportunity to attend John's presentation regarding Yaesu System Fusion, and as usual it was time well spent. Afterwards, I ask him if he had a moment to answer a few questions regarding Fusion for our newsletter (The Pickle Barrel Review). He did, and was only too happy to sit down with me and tolerate my questions. So, with that said, here is the interview with John Kruk.

ME: In the event of an internet failure, how can we configure our DR2X repeaters to still provide a meaningful service to our community?

JOHN: You can configure your IMRS (Internet-linked Multi-site Repeater System) in a hub and spoke topology. The repeaters will then function as an Intranet, MESH, etc.

ME: Where do you see the future of WiresX going?

JOHN: I don't see any real changes to WiresX, since it's been working pretty well the way it is. The current version is 1.56, but version 1.55 will still work just fine. Version 1.56 is just more compatible with the newer Fusion radios that are coming out.

ME: What about being able to interface with other digital modes such as DMR, D-Star, P-25, etc?

JOHN: Yaesu is trying get away from Brandmeister. Yaesu has been making more progress with the linking of other modes by tapping into the audio of the DR2X repeaters.

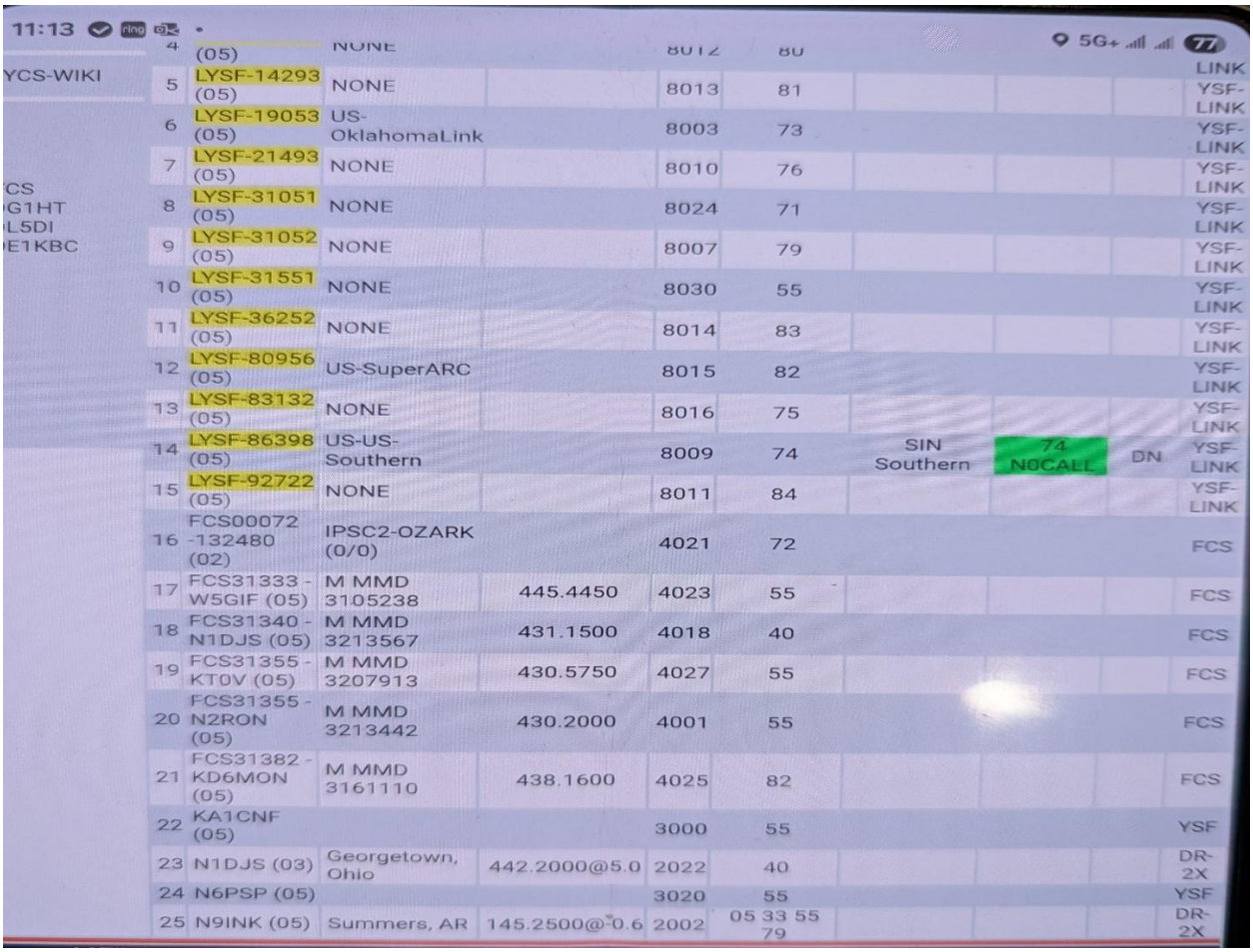
ME: Are there any future plans for the upgrading of the existing DR2X repeaters, or perhaps even a new model repeater all together?

JOHN: There are none planned for the foreseeable future. The DR2X is currently a very reliable platform, so there's no real reason to change.

ME: Are there any plans to utilize other OS's such as LINUX as a platform for WiresX'?

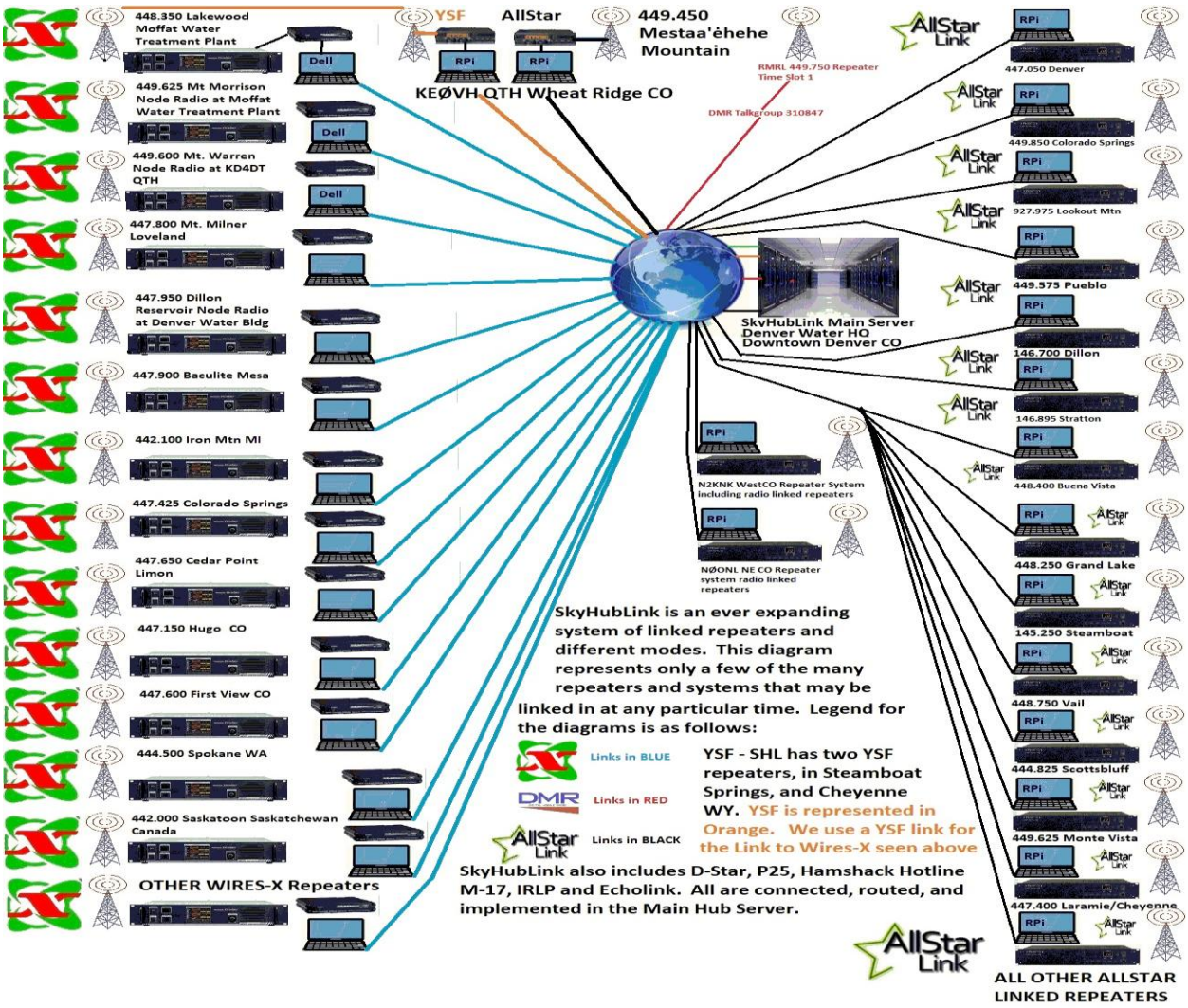
JOHN: No, there are security issues with using anything other than Microsoft Windows, and basically Yaesu doesn't want to; "Give away the keys to the farm."

John and I talked alittle more about what was involved in setting up cross mode operation of C4FM with various other analog modes such as Allstar. He shared with me an application on his phone showing his system of repeaters in Winsconsin with a mix of Fusion, DMR, and Allstar. Needless to say, I was very impressed. He presented a portion of a document showing just how to initially set up the cross mode linking using the mini–DIN on the back of the DR2X repeater. The more I listened to John's explanation, the more my mind was racing thinking about the NE-OREGON room, and the multitude of possibilities for our system in general. Hopefully, he remembers to email the entire document to me as promised.



This the linking application on John's phone for his system in WI.

I was thinking back to last summer when our NE-OREGON room was utilized by the Oregon Emergency Management folks in order to gather real time information on the wildfires burning throughout the state. The thought occurred to me how having the ability to link our Allstar network together with our Fusion system could potentially provide greater coverage during times of need, as in the case of last summer's wildfires. I presented this to the owners / control operators of the other systems currently linked into our W7NEO system and the response was overwhelmingly positive. I should clarify, that in our case this wouldn't be a full-time configuration, it would only be utilized in times of statewide emergency. Otherwise, the digital and the analog systems would remain as they are now, separate. This may change in the future, but for now this was the more acceptable solution for everyone to agree upon.



This is a depiction by Yaesu of a similar system as what John shared with me showing the cross-mode linking of Allstar (Analog) with Fusion (Digital).

All in all, SEAPAC was, as the old saying goes; "A good time had by all." It was well worth the trip to spend time with friends, have a sit down with the powers that be, as it relates to System Fusion. In doing so, pick up some fresh ideas for our own system. We in the WMDRA are always looking for ways with which to improve our system, especially in times of need. So, keep watching, and hopefully the future of our system will be seeing some upgrades in order to make it just that much better for everyone.

In the meantime, here's hoping everyone is enjoying the rest of summer, while remaining safe and cool. As for myself, and the rest of the gang within the WMDRA, we're already looking forward to NEXT year's SEAPAC!

Lynn, K7LW

The Legal Corner

This morning, I heard on the news something that caught my attention in a somewhat disturbing way. Now, I know what you're thinking; "And just which specific thing was that?" I understand just where it is that you're coming from, and I can't say as I disagree with you. But this is not the place to discuss politics, let alone world events in general.

But moving on, the item in particular that I'm referring to is the talk on some of the news channels of our president possibly invoking the War Powers Act. This, as the result of our finding ourselves suddenly in the midst of a war between Isreal and Iran. Now along with the back-and-forth currently going on within congress, there's the matter of just how all this would affect the Amateur Radio community here in the good old U S of A should it all come to pass.

First off, let's take a look at just what is involved in implementing the War Powers Act, shall we?

The war powers act itself was first introduced in 1973 as the “War Powers Resolution.” Ironically, it’s primary intent was as a federal law intended to check the U.S. president's power to commit the United States to an armed conflict without the consent of the U.S. Congress. The resolution was adopted in the form of a United States congressional joint resolution. Essentially, it’s main purpose is to provide that the president cannot send the U.S. Armed Forces into action abroad without Congresses "Statutory Authorization", or in case of "A National Emergency created by an attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces." So, to sum it up, what that all means is that this resolutions intent is to maintain accountability and prevent unauthorized actions by the executive branch without congressional approval.

Looking back through history, Ham Operators haven’t been restricted in their operation since the advent of World War II when Amateur Radio activities were halted in Europe, as well as Canada. In 1940, the U.S. government issued an order prohibiting U.S. hams from communicating with any foreign stations, and they were also restricted to only those operations above 56 MHz. But after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 Amateur Radio activity in the United States, for the most part, was pretty much brought to a screeching halt altogether. Although VHF operations on 112 MHz were all that was allowed, and even then, only by those Hams operating under the auspices of the “War Emergency Radio Service.”

Nowadays, the FCC is very clear when it comes to Emergency Communications, and lays out the specifics of who, and when Amateur Radio Operators may transmit during emergency operations, such as would be in place should the War Powers Act actually be implemented. This is all covered in section 47 CFR § 97.407 – “Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service.” In my opinion, the first paragraph of the rule pretty much makes it crystal clear, and says it all:

No station may transmit in RACES unless it is an FCC-licensed primary, club, or military recreation station and it is certified by a civil defense organization as registered with that organization. No person may be the control operator of

an amateur station transmitting in RACES unless that person holds a FCC issued amateur operator license and is certified by a civil defense organization as enrolled in that organization.

So, putting our civics lesson aside, what does this all mean for the Amateur Radio community? Basically, it means that should the War Powers Act be implemented, the possibility of all Amateur Radio here in the United States suddenly finding itself back in a similar situation as was the case during WWII is very real. With one stipulation, that being that only those stations coming under the RACES umbrella would still be able to operate, and even then, they would be restricted to emergency traffic only, as defined under Civil Defense protocols. Even more specifically, this would include only those stations and control operators enrolled with a Civil Defense Organization, i.e. Emergency Management. At this point I should mention that presently none of the W7NEO repeaters, or systems in general, along with our control operators, are certified, let alone enrolled with any civil defense organization.

So, with that said, it's my understanding, that should it come to this, "legally" we would have no other choice but to pull the plug on the entire system.

I did do some looking to see just where the General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) would fit in all this. All I could find was that the War Powers Act does not appear to directly address GMRS. So, from the sounds of it, GMRS might be brought in under the same rules as Amateur Radio, or may just be off the hook entirely, for the time being anyway.

Admittedly, this is all somewhat extreme, and most likely won't be the case. However, as you can see, it isn't entirely off the table, but it is something to think about, if only for future wars…

Lynn, K7LW

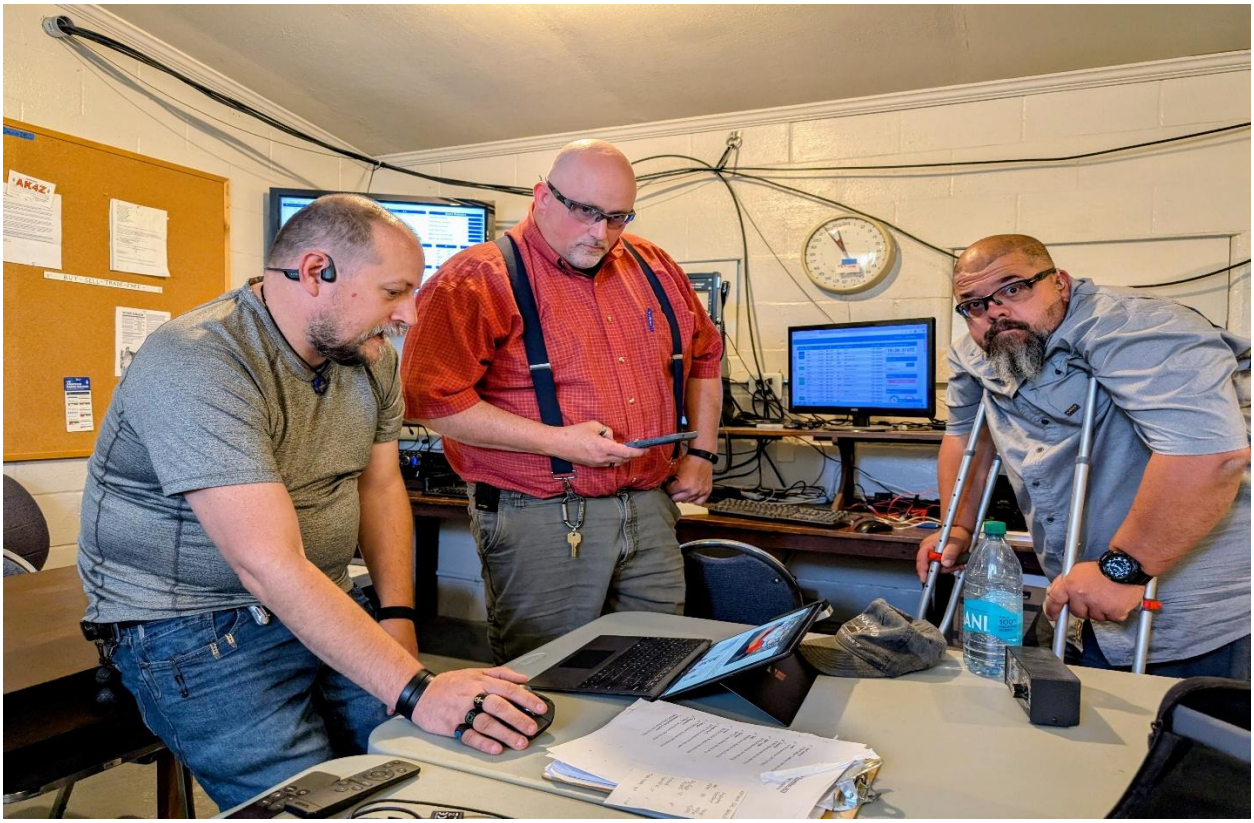
Current events

Well, it's summer once again, and time for all good Ham's to pack up the radios, the BBQ, load up the RV, and head for the hills for a weekend of playing

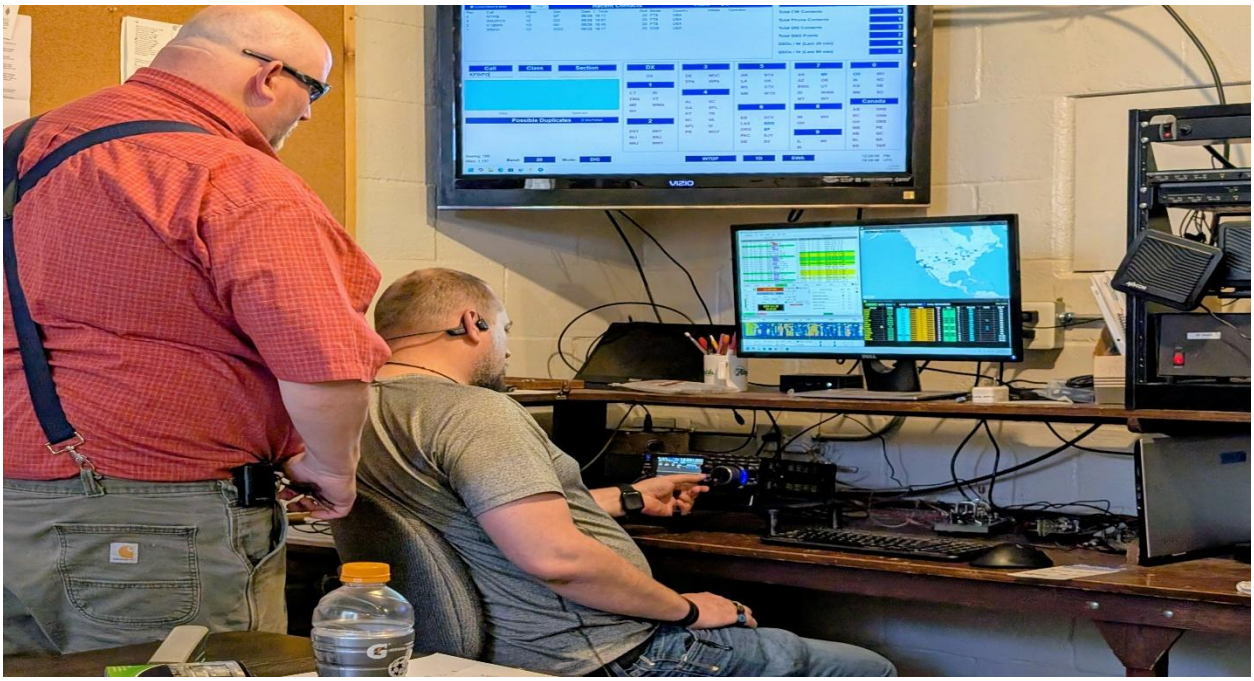
radio, along with sitting around the camp fire enjoying a good ol rag chew with fellow Hams.

I wish I would have had the time to visit all the local Field Day events taking place, but I could only cram two events in this time around. So, I choose the W7DP crew in Walla Wall WA, and the HARC (Hermiston Amateur Radio Club) group in the Blue Mountains just outside of Ukiah Oregon. And as you'll find out in this article, it was all time well spent.

My first stop, since it's the closest to my home QTH, was in Walla Walla at the W7DP clubhouse. I found a somewhat relaxed, but as expected, an exceptionally friendly group. While Scott (W5SAB) was giving a Masters Class to a couple of new Hams on FT8, I engaged in some great conversation with Mikel (KB7POT). Mikel admitted to me that their group hadn't prepared nearly as much as in Field Day's past. So, there was just the four of them. But it was still very enjoyable, and when you have good company like what was there at the W7DP clubhouse, there's no shortage of good conversation.



Scott (W5SAB), Dave (KK7UGE), and Levi (WSII814)



Scott (W5SAB) demonstrating FT8 to Dave (KK7UGE)

Mikel (KB7POT) hard at work

After leaving the Walla Walla folks, I hopped on Highway 395 and headed south towards Ukiah OR. Along the way I drove through some of the most scenic countryside North Eastern Oregon has to offer. With the smell of fresh pines, and wildflowers filling the cab of my pickup, it was just about as peaceful a drive as you could imagine.

I finally arrived at the camping area known as “Drift Fence,” just south of Ukiah Oregon, where the HARC (Hermiston Amateur Radio Club) had setup their Field Day site. I was immediately greeted by a VERY friendly group of dogs welcoming me to what had become “their” playground. That set the mood for the rest of my visit. There was allot of radio activity when I first arrived, but it died out as folks began to gather round, and visit while getting things ready for dinner (my timing was spot on for that!).

Mike (N7NKT) helping get the table ready for the feast.

Although there was a total of three operating positions, the third position wasn't setup until after I left when Rhett (N2SRX) and Whitley (KD7VX) put it on the air. From what I was told the following day, Rhett was tearing it up on 40 meters once he was up and going.

Below are the other two operating positions, which were also making their marks on HF by making North Eastern Oregon heard.

The primary HARC (AI7HO) station operating voice.

Above is the HF station of KD7VX, operating primarily on 20-, 15-, and 80-meters, racking up numerous contacts using single sideband. And below is the station of KJ7NYZ, that was operating CW on HF as well, on the bands of 10-, 15-, and 80-meters.

Anna's (KJ7NYZ) station operating CW.

As is always the case with the Hermiston group, it was exceptionally pleasant visiting with everyone. Given that most of us have all known one another for a few years, it was more like a family gathering rather than just a Ham Radio event. I especially enjoyed talking with Whitley (KD7VX) and Brenda's (KJ7HRZ) grandkids; Kira (KO4SBI), and Brendon (No Call), whom I had watched grow up over the years. It was fascinating to hear them tell me about their current careers, and listen while they talked about their future plans, and expressed their opinions on a variety of current topics. I can still remember them showing me with pride their Transformer toys as we went exploring in the woods. Now I REALLY feel old!

Dinner was nothing short of amazing. Emery (KD7YX) with his special spaghetti, and Whitley (KD7VX) working his usual magic on his home-made Bar-B-Q. Along with that there were the rest of the trimmings, which included, among many other mouthwatering delights, some sinfully delicious chocolate cake. Altogether, it made for a wonderful feast fit for royalty. Add to that some great conversation, and you just couldn't go wrong.

Although in both cases, each group expressed a noticeable drop in attendance from years past, it didn't seem to put all that much of a damper on either get together. I had heard a conversation earlier about another event involving Ham Radio, and the comment was that many of the past participants were getting along in years, making it more difficult to travel, or had passed away entirely. To me, this just further makes the argument that we need to put forth more of an effort to get the younger folks interested in the hobby if it's to survive.

All in all, I had a great time visiting with both the Walla Walla, and the Hermiston folks. Good friends, good food, great hospitality, and of course RADIO. I'm already looking forward to next summer's Field Day!

Lynn, K7LW

System Fusion

I recently ran across the following that was originally broadcast over Amateur Radio Newsline, and the thought that immediately came to mind was the events of last summer during the wildfires that swept over the Pacific Northwest. During that period, we (NE-OREGON Room) were able to avail ourselves as a valuable resource for the Oregon Emergency Management folks in Salem Oregon. In doing so, it provided us an opportunity to show the value of digital voice communications, and just what we were capable of providing through C4FM. I've always sincerely believed that there is room for both analog and digital within the Amateur Radio community, particularly when it comes to emergency communications. As an example of this we have two very capable linked systems comprised of both analog, and digital. This story is inspiring in that it shows that EMCOM organizations are beginning to realize the value of digital voice, and what it brings to the table as a valuable resource in the event of an emergency such as the wildfires of last summer, or even a Cascadia earthquake.

Lynn, K7LW

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With emergency communications embracing digital modes more and more, operators increasingly find themselves navigating the tricky landscape of system access and compatibility. Randy Sly W4XJ tells us how this played out for a group of amateurs in Indiana:

In April of this year the Dubois County Office of Emergency Management in Indiana made the decision to migrate from analog FM to C4FM digital for their 147.195 repeater during activations. The change was made to reduce noise during operation and increase the quality of copy. According to Gary Fritz, WB9LIB, operations officer for the EMA, “Our new Fusion repeater system was thoroughly tested to confirm its superior performance when using C4FM.”

When the announcement was made to the Patoka Valley Amateur Radio Club, not all the club members were enthusiastic. Since some of them did not own a Fusion compatible radio, this decision would exclude them from emergency operations with SKYWARN.

Fritz told AR Newsline that the change has brought about the desired results in message quality, as proven by recent SKYWARN activation during severe weather. “We found that by using C4FM... our units are now able to check in crystal clear from locations that were previously impossible.”

A number of local amateurs remain unconvinced regarding the move to digital. Reuben Montgomery, KA9RCM, told Newsline that his main concern is centered primarily on the lack of access to the emergency communications by hams without Fusion radios and by visitors who are passing through the area. With the variety of digital platforms, he also sees great difficulty in picking one mode to the exclusion of all others. Regarding participation, Fritz reported that the public and all amateur radio operators can continue to monitor net communications through audio streaming over Broadcastify.

Randy Sly, W4XJ

Repeater Updates

Gary Cooper (N7ZHG-SK) Black Mt Repeater antenna repair / replacement.

Since the last update we've purchased, and have received a new Arcom RC-210 repeater controller and are in the process of programming it. The intent, for the moment anyway, is to replace the current SCOM-7330 controller that's on the 146.88 machine with this one. Since having replaced the old Kenwood TKR-750 repeater with the newer, more capable NXR-710 Next Edge repeater, the unfortunate biproduct is that the controller audio level that plays the announcements has dropped considerably. Apparently from reading through numerous forums this is a common issue, and one that as of yet, there is no real fix for at this point in time. But after having talked with Ken Arck (AH6LE) from Arcom, he has assured me that this won't be an issue with his controllers. In fact, Ken is a Kenwood repeater distributor, and has sold his controllers as a package deal for years without any issues.

On another note, our group (WMDRA) held a breakfast meeting not long ago, and were able to cover allot of topics, along with putting down some great food. One of the topics we discussed concerned the GMRS repeaters. It was felt by the membership that the Weston Mt repeater wasn't being utilized in accordance with the original plan for putting it on the same channel as the Cabbage Hill GMRS repeater (Ch#18). The original plan was to effectively

extend the range by having both repeaters on the same frequency, but with different tones. After some discussion, it was decided that we will be moving the frequency of the Weston Mt GMRS repeater from channel 18, up to channel 19. Hopefully by moving the Weston Mt repeater to the new channel it might get more use, thereby becoming a more useful asset for local GMRS users in both Pendleton, and Walla Walla along with the surrounding area in general. We're also looking at improving the antenna to further improve coverage. Lastly, the uplink tone will remain the same, however the downlink tone will be changed to match the uplink tone in order for them both to match.

We've also been looking into the possibility of installing DMR repeaters on both Cabbage Hill, and Weston Mt. There seems to be enough interest in the local area for DMR in general, so this might help nudge that along. But before we move forward with that, we'll need to come up with some form of internet access on the Cabbage Hill site. I should mention that we currently have internet access at the Weston Mt site. At one time we were going to have internet installed on Cabbage Hill, but our original plan seems to have fallen through. That said, after having realized the many benefits to having internet access at the site -such as a remote weather station- we've been looking into various other avenues.

Last but not least, as the saying goes, we've been looking over ways in which to improve upon our packet network. We've been working closely with the La Grande folks, who have been absolutely wonderful to work with as always. One of the things we've been looking at is the replacement of the current TNC, which the Spout Springs Repeater Association (SSRA) folks have been graciously hosting at their Spout Springs repeater site, with a newer model which will be provided by the La Grande folks. I'm told by the La Grande folks that the new TNC will provide more features, along with increased capability in general. We'll be installing that as soon as the snow melts, and it's safe enough to access the site. We haven't decided just where to place the old TNC from Spout Springs, but were actively considering a couple of sites.

We're also looking at playing around with VARA FM. However, the La Grande folks have asked that we hold off on that until they can build up a system that will be more compatible.

That's about it for now. As always, your continued patience is greatly appreciated, as we continue working to improve the system even further.

Lynn, K7LW

Ham Radio Nostalgia

Marlon Brando (KA6BJW-SK) Hollywood Legend and Licensed Ham Radio Operator

When people think of Marlon Brando, they usually picture the iconic actor from films like The Godfather or On the Waterfront. But what many don't know is that Brando was also a licensed amateur radio operator, holding the call sign KA6BJW.

Brando's interest in ham radio went far beyond casual curiosity. He was genuinely passionate about technology and communication. For him, amateur radio wasn't just a hobby—it was a way to connect with the world on his own terms, away from the spotlight of Hollywood.

Operating from his private island in French Polynesia (FO5GJ) or from his residences in the United States, Brando often used HF bands to make long-distance contacts. He enjoyed the ability to communicate anonymously, without people knowing they were talking to a world-famous actor. This level of discreet communication was something he valued deeply, especially considering his complex relationship with fame and public attention.

Marlon Brando's Tetiaroa Beach bungalow, circa 1979, is filled with his ham radio equipment.

His call sign KA6BJW became widely known among the ham community, often referenced in magazine articles, radio journals, and interviews about his private life. Some operators even recall making contacts with him, noting his friendly but reserved on-air personality.

Beyond just making QSOs, Brando was known to have a keen interest in radio technology itself. He was fascinated by how radio waves could bridge vast distances, crossing oceans and continents. This technical curiosity aligned with his broader love for electronics, gadgets, and scientific exploration.

In a world where celebrity often means luxury and excess, Marlon Brando's involvement in amateur radio shows a different side of him—a person who valued learning, connection, and hands-on experimentation with communication technology.

On July 1, 2004, Brando died of respiratory failure from pulmonary fibrosis with congestive heart failure at the UCLA Medical Center. The cause of death was initially withheld, with his lawyer citing privacy concerns. He also suffered from diabetes and liver cancer.

For radio amateurs today, knowing that someone like Brando shared this passion is a reminder that ham radio connects people from all walks of life, regardless of fame, fortune, or background.

Lynn, K7LW

Edited from original content posted by João Grisi - PY6CJ

VE Testing

There is no VE testing going on that we're aware of, but if you check the Links section of our website, there may be information on some of our friend's websites as to where you might find a test session going on near you.

But in the meantime, if you do have a regular test session taking place, feel free to let us know, and we'll post it here in the next issue of the Pickle Barrel Review.

The End

Well, that's about it for this edition of the Pickle Barrel Review, I hope you enjoyed it. We'll continue to work to keep it informative, fun, and interesting. So, until next time, we here at the WMDRA (W7NEO) hope everyone is enjoying the warm summer weather, along with some relaxing quality time on the air. In the meantime, feel free to reach in the barrel, and grab another pickle. There's plenty to go around, along with plenty of great conversation!

73,

Weston Mountain Digital Radio Association,
W7NEO

"Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

– Nelson Mandela