

Feds find Capitol Christmas tree nearby Sweet Home

Capi Lynn Salem Statesman Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

A top-secret operation, involving the federal government, is happening in the woods near Sweet Home. The Christmas tree for the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol is being chosen from the Sweet Home Ranger District of Willamette National Forest.

A representative from the agency responsible for the care of the Capitol grounds spent three days last week with a local forester and botanist reviewing five Douglas and Noble fir candidates.

The No. 1 pick has been identified, along with a backup and a third-string option just in case the first choice is lost in a forest fire or struck by lightning.

"The next step is to make sure we can get it out of the woods," district ranger Nikki Swanson said. "We're looking logistically at how do we get the tree safely cut, safely down the hill and where the public can see it."

Accessibility by crane and semi-truck is always a factor in the selection process of the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree, which has been provided by the U.S. Forest Service every year since 1970. The last time Oregon was selected to provide the tree was in 2002 when a 70-foot Doug fir was harvested from Umpqua National Forest.

"Oregon is known around the country for its spectacular natural beauty, including its incredible national forests," said Jim Kaufmann, Director of the Capitol Grounds and Arboretum at the Architect of the Capitol. "It's a privilege to visit the Willamette National Forest to select the 2018 Capitol Christmas Tree."

Kaufmann, visiting from Washington, D.C., evaluated each of the five candidates for a variety of desired characteristics. The West Lawn tree needs to be 65 to

85 feet tall with a straight stem, uniform branching, a perfectly conical shape, natural density, and a rich green color.

"He liked all five of them but was able to narrow it down," Swanson said. "Some of them are not as full because they're next to other trees. The ones that tended to be his favorites were full all around."

The chosen tree and its location will be kept under wraps for security reasons until it's cut down in early November. Law enforcement may even be called in for guard duty as it gets closer to harvest time.

So why all the secrecy?

"Once it's selected it becomes sort of a national icon," Swanson said. "And it's part of the tradition of the process."

The tree, once harvested, will travel eastward from Oregon on a reverse path of the Oregon Trail, but not before a celebration in Sweet Home. The schedule for that and special events along the 3,000-mile journey to Washington, D.C. will be announced this fall.

In the meantime, Sweet Home Ranger District could use some help decorating the tree for the West Lawn, plus 75 smaller companion trees that it also will provide for government buildings and other public spaces at the U.S. Capitol.

The state is responsible for contributing 10,000 handmade ornaments, 3,500 for the big tree and 6,500 for the smaller trees. About 2,000 for the big tree are still needed, and there will be an ornament-making booth at the Oregon State Fair. The booth will be staffed from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 25 through Sept. 1.

And if you want to see Oregon's tree and all those Oregon ornaments in person, the Capitol Christmas Tree project has a way to make that happen.



Jim Kaufmann, visiting from Washington, D.C., and Forest Service employees survey trees.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WILLAMETTE NATIONAL FOREST

About 70 of 200 collectible glass ornaments hidden along non-wilderness trails in each of the four districts in the Willamette National Forest have yet to be found. Finders will have a chance to win a trip for two to the tree lighting ceremony in Washington, D.C.

In the next couple of weeks, the forest service plans to release a map that will get ornament hunters to within a mile of where each of the remaining ones are hidden. If some of the green glass ornaments have yet to be found by September, GPS coordinates will be released. Information will be posted on the project Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/USCapitol-ChristmasTree>.

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App

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Because you print them out directly, no more paying the \$2 shipping and handling fee for online, mailed or faxed orders.

Which leads to the dog and the homework comparison.

Even if your license is on your phone or tablet, you still have to show your e-document(s) if an Oregon State Police game-enforcement officer or Fish and Wildlife employee asks to see them in the field.

Ergo, you need to ensure the device is charged, or has an external power source, in case the game warden shows up.

I never thought that I'd hear "I accidentally grabbed my wife's (husband's, significant other's, son's, daughter's) cell, officer" as the latest version of the classic "my license is in my other pants" dodge.

You still can buy licenses and tags at agents or Fish and Wildlife offices, which will be switching to a standard computer/printer setup rather than the current dedicated terminals that print out those slick, receipt-style licenses and tags.

Remy said license agents have been notified about the switch.

"We have been hearing good things so far," he said about the feedback.

So farewell to those Tyvek protective sleeves that have been in use since 2008 and hello to using a zip-lock waterproof baggie or other sealable pouch for your documents.

The Tyvek sleeves became a necessity when the

text on licenses, tags, permits and validations turned into invisible ink, or the paper sometimes blackened to the appearance of a redacted federal indictment in the previous vinyl holders or it was laminated in plastic.

The department expects the switch to save about \$2 million annually due in large part to the elimination of the need for the special paper and dedicated terminals at license agents.

Remy said the current terminals "won't be needed, so probably will be recycled."

He said he hasn't seen a sample printout of the documents, but they probably won't be the size of a full 8 1/2 X 11 sheet of paper, so advanced origami skills or gallon-size freezer bags shouldn't be required.

Your current "Hunter/Angler ID# at the top of your license(s) and tag(s) will become your "ODFW ID" under the new ELS. Your information will be transferred to the new system if you have purchased a hunting or fishing license in 2016 or later.

I asked Remy about "the computer ate my boarding pass" problem: What if you hit "print" and the toner or ink cartridge is dead, or you forgot to load the paper tray (Moi? Sacre bleu!)

Since your license serves as a "receipt" that you bought it, there's no harm, no foul, Remy said. You get a do-over.

Tags are another matter.

Those are a one-and-done, with each carrying a unique bar code, and it is illegal to make copies. If you lose it or it gets destroyed, you need to go to a license agent or ODFW office to get a replacement with a new bar code.

The cost is \$2.

Before we get too deep in the weeds on this thing...

There is an extensive "frequently asked questions

list" online that supplies a lot of information such as tagging procedures for big game, wild turkey and fish if you are packing your information on your smart phone or tablet.

And it is updated regularly as requests for additional information come in. Go to <https://myodfw.com/articles/odfws-new-electronic-licensing-system-els>

Finally, in the interests of full disclosure, Jay Remy is not just a source but a friend and a contemporary toiler of yours truly in the Journalism master's degree program at the University of Oregon.

Henry Miller is a retired Statesman Journal outdoor columnist and outdoor writer. He can be reached via email at HenryMillerSJ@gmail.com

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