

Jobs

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still nearly twice what it was before the pandemic.

When the CARES Act was passed in March 2020, laid-off employees were given a \$600 boost in their weekly unemployment benefits and the previous requirement to be actively searching for work was suspended.

The current \$300 weekly boost, which was authorized under the American Rescue Plan, runs through September.

At least 18 states including Missouri, Iowa and Alaska have said they will stop paying the boost as employers struggle to find employees. Oregon has not announced if it will do the same.

Industries in the state including restaurants and tourism that have been

slowly reopening have had difficulties in finding enough employees.

“Putting work requirements on hold for more than a half million people during the crisis was the right thing to do, because these benefits provided a critical stabilizing force for families – and our economy,” Oregon Employment Department acting director David Gerstenfeld said in a statement.

“As the pandemic begins to fade and the economy changes, we are still focusing on how we can help fuel economic recovery, and help Oregonians overcome challenges related to employment.”

One of last states to reinstate

According to the Oregon Employment Department, the job seeking requirements will be required for those receiving unemployment under the state’s regular program and one that ex-

tends benefits. The same requirements for the self-employed are still being finalized.

To receive unemployment from the state, people will have to register with iMatchSkills, a labor exchange system the state has employed since 2004.

Oregon is one of the last states to reinstate the requirement.

States such as North Dakota reinstated the work search requirement in April and others such as Idaho and Wyoming quickly followed suit.

States such as California and Washington have yet to announce when they will resume the requirement.

The Oregon Employment Department said the first notices will go out to about 35,000, though it did not say when, and those will come with deadlines for when the authorized work search must be completed.

Prior to the pandemic, those seeking benefits were required to seek employ-

ment through WorkSource. Local offices for WorkSource will reopen July 6, but the service is offering virtual appointments before that.

Kyle Freres said his company’s efforts have resulted in retaining its current employees, but it’s still struggled finding new ones, like a lot of employers.

It currently has about 60 positions open.

“I think it’s a step in the right direction,” Freres said. “There’s obviously an interest for everybody in getting people back to work. It costs the state quite a bit in administering unemployment benefits.”

“There’s jobs out there. Everybody’s hiring people. I’ve seen fast food restaurants that are running curtailed hours because they can’t find enough employees.”

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Outdoors

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travel and for recreation areas to see high levels of use. And when you add issues like the wildfire closures, it becomes a really sensitive dance.”

Wildfire closures will limit recreation across length of Western Oregon

Last year’s Labor Day Fires burned over 1 million acres in Western Oregon and there remain major limits on recreation across the state’s western half heading into summer.

The wildfire closures, meant to keep people out of potentially dangerous areas, mean large swaths of popular areas near Portland, Salem, Eugene, Roseburg and Medford will be off-limits.

“First and foremost, the closures are in place for public safety,” Willamette National Forest spokeswoman Joanie Schmidgall said. “There are a lot of hazards in a burn area, especially in the first year following a fire.”

The closures include parts of the Clackamas, Santiam, McKenzie and North Umpqua river canyons, in addition to areas in southwest Oregon. It’s the most widespread closure of public lands in state history – with the exception of the two-month shutdown of recreation during the spring of 2020.

There are also lingering closures left by last winter’s ice storm.

A new map created by the state attempts to provide a one-stop-shop for showing everything that’s open and closed.

“This will be an unusual year,” Schmidgall said. “But maybe it’s also a good opportunity to try exploring somewhere new. There are so many places even just in Willamette National Forest that people don’t often visit that will be open this summer.”

Will wildfire-impacted towns have services? Check ahead

Some of Oregon’s most beloved outdoor recreation towns were heavily impacted by the Labor Day Fires. Tourists who choose to return to those areas – whether it’s Detroit or Blue River – should be prepared for fewer services.

In Detroit, for example, there won’t be a gas station in town, there will only be one small grocery store, and a handful of food trucks.

“Folks will need to be a lot more prepared when they come up, whether it’s food or gas,” Detroit mayor Jim Trett said. “We’re asking them to use the lake, which is open, and buy supplies in town to help support our economy. We ask them to not go wandering around in people’s property or the burned areas. There is still a lot of distress and rebuilding going on.”

New permit system will toss a wrench into hiking, backpacking in Three Sisters, Jefferson wilderness areas

Even though it’s not wildfire or COVID-19 related, a new permit system coming online for 450,000 acres of Oregon’s most popular backcountry will also throw a wrench into this season.

Beginning May 28, you’ll need a special permit to camp overnight anywhere in the Mount Jefferson, Three Sisters and Mount Washington wilderness areas. In addition, you’ll need a day-use permit to hike in from 19 of the area’s most popular trailheads.

There are two ways the new system is likely to bring confusion. First, there’s a wide swath of the population that has no idea that they’ll suddenly need a special permit in places it wasn’t previously required – particularly people coming from out of state. And second, just obtaining that permit for popular hikes can be a challenge that requires navigating the website Recreation.gov and understanding that permits go on sale 7 days before a specific date.

The Forest Service is planning on having volunteers at high-use trailheads to explain the system. They’ll also have rangers patrolling trails.

But, Schmidgall said, it’s going to be a year with a major learning curve.

“We’re just asking people to be pa-



Fall Creek tumbles down from the Green Lakes Basin in the Three Sisters Wilderness. ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL



Beverly Beach State Park features a long sandy strand with views of Yaquina Head Lighthouse to the south and Otter Rock to the north, as well as an extensive trail system along Spencer Creek and yurts available for rent.

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tient and to plan as much as possible before they go,” she said. “We’re staffing the phones at our ranger stations so give us a call with any questions because the last thing we want is for people to get in the car and discover the place they’re traveling is closed by fire damage or requires a permit they didn’t know about.”

Reservations for hotels, vacation rentals disappearing quickly

Last year, as the limits on travel and outdoor recreation lifted, people headed to the Oregon Coast en force. But often, it was for spur-of-the-moment day-trips.

This year, people have had more time to plan and that’s meant a spike in the number reserving hotels, vacation rentals, cabins and yurts.

“People have more confidence in making reservations, and that’s led to a ton of places already being fully booked,” said Arica Sears, deputy director of Oregon Coast Visitors Association. “I have friends who get on the computer and just hit refresh over and over when they’re trying to get a cabin. It’s tough right now.”

Sears said that in addition to the spike in booking, people are also planning to stay longer, making vacation rentals on the Coast even harder to score.

Yurts, cabins and campsites still available, but pay attention

Havel, with Oregon’s state parks, said reservations for yurts, cabins and campsites at Oregon’s state parks started off slow as the agency limited capacity, but have been speeding up quickly. He added that new open dates would soon appear as the agency removes its “resting day” for yurts and cabins that had been in place for the pandemic.

“We’re actually just 60 percent of capacity for summer, when normally we’d be closer to 70 percent,” he said last week. “But it’s catching up very quickly.”

The good news is that Oregon’s state parks, which were understaffed last

season due to economic fallout from the pandemic, have returned to more normal staffing levels, meaning more facilities from showers to bathrooms to garbage collection should be on course.

But if you want to reserve a yurt or cabin at an Oregon state park, pay close attention to the agency’s social media channels and check the website ReserveAmerica.com often.

Shortage of hotel workers and raft guides

The nationwide trend of being unable to find workers is also impacting Oregon’s outdoors.

Collier said outfitters have had trouble hiring enough qualified raft guides to support the number of trips the influx of demand is bringing.

“We were down 30 percent last year, and we’re up 30 percent this year, and when you have that huge influx of need there just aren’t enough people to work as guides,” he said.

The same issue is impacting hotels, vacation rentals and restaurants on the Coast, said Sears.

“If you’re checking into a rental or waiting to get into your favorite restaurant, it might take longer,” she said. “I’d say coastal communities are ready, but they are worried about not having the workforce to support the huge visitation we’re expecting.”

Gaps in supply chain create a run on outdoor gear

While this year’s wonky summer in the outdoors might be felt most acutely in crowds, limited reservations and closures, even outdoor gear is having an odd summer.

Gaps in the supply chain have created a situation where it can be difficult to get the right tents, paddle or mountain bike – or the price has been greatly inflated.

Reasons for the shortages are multifaceted, including production slowdowns in Asia, a shortage of commercial truck drivers and a backup of massive container ships filled with goods wait-

ing to be offloaded at West Coast ports, the Denver Post reported.

So, if you can’t find the right part or paddle, or get sticker shock looking at the price of a children’s mountain bike, you’re not alone.

Drought could bring lower water, high wildfire danger

After one of the driest springs in recorded history, almost all of Oregon is heading into summer amid a moderate to severe drought that’s only expected to deepen.

That’s likely to mean lower water levels at popular reservoirs – such as Fern Ridge and Detroit Lake – and along with lower flows on rivers and creeks. It’s also likely to mean campfire limits get imposed earlier than normal as wildfire danger climbs higher more quickly.

Unprepared in outdoors brought spike in deaths, rescues last year

The reason all the wonkiness in Oregon’s outdoors is relevant is that it often leads to bad outcomes – mainly, death, accidents and even wildfires.

Oregon set a modern record for boating deaths in 2020, and the number of search and rescue missions and fatal accidents was also way up, officials said.

“With more people on the water, and more inexperienced people on the water, you’re going to see more accidents,” Randy Henry, boating safety program manager for the Oregon State Marine Board, said last summer. “We saw that trend not only on the water, but also on land with search and rescue missions being way up as well. There was just a lot more people that got themselves into trouble.”

Not all bad news: Oregon’s outdoors has plenty of space!

Even with all the oddities heading into Oregon’s summer of 2021, there’s plenty of reason to head outdoors. Just do it smartly.

The biggest thing is doing homework – whether a given location is open or not, requires a permit or not, and what you’ll need to travel there.

It’s also smart to look for less-visited places, or have a backup plan if you arrive at a trailhead and it’s a zoo.

“There are so many cool places that aren’t commonly known,” Collier said. “We need to do a better job of showing those.”

And, as ever, the crowds will thin out by September, especially as a more normal school year takes shape.

“If people can wait until September, we’ll have plenty of open spots on our river trips,” Collier said.

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