

Appeal Tribune

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2021 | SILVERTONAPPEAL.COM

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New report shows scope of homeless youth

Dianne Lugo
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

There are over 8,000 youth and young adults in need of safe and affordable housing in Oregon, according to a new report released by the Oregon Department of Human Services.

The report projects a deficit of thousands of units for an ideal housing system in the state.

More than \$154 million is needed to bridge the identified housing and service gaps statewide. To house and assist the nearly 2,000 youth experiencing homelessness in the Mid-Valley and

North Coast region alone, the report estimates a need of \$20 million.

Authors expect the completed assessment to inform and guide lawmakers in future appropriations decisions.

Ongoing crisis

The project to analyze and estimate the need and pipeline for housing and services for the thousands of youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness across Oregon came after the introduction of HB4039 during 2020's legislative session.

At the time, ODHS reported the state third in terms of the highest rate of un-

sheltered, unaccompanied youth homelessness in the nation – a grim statistic representing ongoing efforts to combat youth and chronic homelessness.

The bill would have allocated \$2.5 million from the general fund to the Department of Human Services (DHS) for services specifically geared to support unaccompanied homeless youth. The proposed bill also would have dedicated a portion of the funding for a statewide assessment of the continuum of housing and service needs for youth experiencing homelessness.

The bill failed to pass during the 2020 session, but ODHS moved forward with completing a statewide assessment.



A new report from ODHS projects \$20 million is needed to support housing and similar “front porch” interventions in the Mid-Valley for thousands of youth experiencing homelessness.

CONNOR RADNOVICH / STATESMAN JOURNAL

“Youth homelessness has been historically underfunded and due to the very nature of the visuals of youth experiencing homelessness it is much more

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Getting back to Shellburg Falls

Shellburg Falls spills out at the recreation area in the Santiam State Forest in late October. Officials say work to restore the area will continue into next summer.

BRIAN HAYES/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Oregon Department of Forestry taking public comment on its plan to reopen the ‘gem of the Santiam State Forest’ after last year’s fires

Eddy Binford-Ross Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Shellburg Falls looks a little different these days, more than a year after the Beachie Creek Fire roared through the forest around the popular waterfall east of Salem.

The towering green trees that once surrounded the 100-foot waterfall are almost entirely blackened and broken, while a new layer of green ferns and tree seedlings are sprouting up through the understory.

State officials released plans last week to reopen what they call the “gem of the Santiam State Forest,” but hikers still won’t be allowed in until next autumn, at the earliest.

The Oregon Department of Forestry just opened a 30-day public comment period on a plan that includes removing some “hazard trees” while restoring trails and roads. They plan to do some commercial logging while most of the area will be left to regenerate naturally, officials said. Comments can be emailed to:



Burnt and healthy trees line a trail near Shellburg Falls recreation area near Stayton.

odf.sfcomments@oregon.gov

“It’s the most visited area in the Santiam State Forest,” said Jason Cox, ODF Public Affairs Officer.

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New rules for drones coming for summer

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Love or hate them, drones in Oregon’s outdoors are here to stay.

But for the first time, Oregon officials plan to craft rules that govern where unmanned aircraft can fly with new rules expected to be in place by next summer.

A recently-formed rules committee will consider where drone pilots can take off and land at state parks and the Oregon Coast, taking into account the aircraft’s impact on wildlife and personal privacy as the number of drones continues to rise.

“Our hope is to get our recommendations ready for approval by February or April so they can be in place for the 2022 summer season,” Chris Havel, spokesman for

the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, told the Statesman Journal in June.

The committee considering the new rules includes drone pilots and advocates, park users, and aviation officials, a news release said. A full list of members can be found at the bottom of this story.

The committee’s first meeting is scheduled to meet virtually Nov. 10. The public can register to watch the meeting at: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_37-0a0iSTDaDu00iUb7_1g. No public comment will be taken at the first meeting, but a comment period will follow the release of the proposed rules. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission would finalize the rules.

The rules would apply only to the Oregon Coast and

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Mid-Valley man helped save lives in Afghanistan

Nasirullah Safi, who served as an interpreter, hopes for US citizenship

Capi Lynn Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Nasirullah Safi is awaiting a call for his naturalization interview, the last major hurdle to becoming a U.S. citizen.

He came here on a Special Immigrant Visa in 2016 after serving more than seven years as an interpreter and cultural adviser to American military forces in Afghanistan, experiencing first-hand some of the bloodiest battles of the war.

He served alongside soldiers who earned medals and made the ultimate sacrifice. He was caught up in the same ambushes and firefights, the target of the same rocket-propelled grenades and improvised explosive devices.

As far as many of those American soldiers are concerned, he’s a veteran just like them and should be thanked today for his honorable service.

“Having somebody work as an interpreter more than five years, I would equate that to 20 years in our military,” said Pat Flanagan, an Army platoon sergeant who worked with Safi. “That’s a long time dealing with the dangers.”

In addition to being in the line of fire, Safi received almost daily threats from the Taliban while working with U.S. military units at a small combat outpost in Kunar Province near the Pakistan border. Interpreters were considered traitors and infidels by the Taliban.

Like thousands of others during the 20-year war in Afghanistan, he risked his life to be the eyes and ears for American troops who couldn’t understand the diverse dialects of the people or the complex culture of the country.

Some of the officers he served with later went to battle on his behalf to help him get to the United States. One even hooked him up with a place to stay with his family.

“He thanks me all the time for what I did for him over here,” said Kevin Devine, another platoon sergeant Safi worked with. “I told him it means more to me what he did for us than what I’ve ever done for him. He prevented me from filling body bags.”

Safi now lives and works in the Mid-Valley. He recently published a book titled “Get the Terp Up Here! War as an Interpreter to U.S. Forces in Afghanistan.” A common theme through many of the pages is the friendships he forged with American soldiers.

“I just became one of them,” he said. “The bond that we created is something I’ll never forget the rest of my life.”

Growing up in Afghanistan

Safi was born and raised in a small village in eastern Afghanistan. His parents were poor, raising eight children in a two-room house made of stones and mud.

They went barefoot and didn’t have proper clothes for the winter. There were days they had no food and others but little to share.

Part of the book is about his childhood and how growing up in a war-torn country under the Taliban regime made getting an education difficult. Many schools were closed, and his family couldn’t afford tuition or uniforms at others.

But Safi always had a desire to learn. He dreamed of one day becoming a doctor to help his mother who suffered from chronic illness.

His father inspired him to learn English, even though in religious school he was taught it was “the devil language.” His father could read and write the basics and always stressed the importance of foreign languages.

“The more language you learn, the more friends you make,” his father always insisted.

The only person Safi knew who could speak, read and write English was a nearby farmer, but the man refused to teach him because it would be too dangerous. Anyone caught speaking the language could be

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Vol. 140, No. 48

Serving the Silverton Area Since 1880
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