

# Appeal Tribune

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2022 | SILVERTONAPPEAL.COM

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## FEMA: Wildfire survivors eligible for compensation

### Residents can have medical bills related to breathing problems reimbursed

**Bill Poehler**  
Salem Statesman Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

Wildfire survivors in the Santiam Canyon who have had breathing problems since the 2020 Labor Day wildfires are eligible to have expenses related to medical treatment for their conditions reimbursed by the federal

government, according to FEMA. FEMA spokesperson Paul Corrah said survivors have until March 31 to make a claim for medical expenses. In a recent survey of more than 100 people conducted by researchers from Oregon State University, 55% of residents reported having breathing problems more than a year after the wild-

fires compared to 27% who had breathing problems before the fires. Oregon State professor Marc Braverman, one of the authors of the study, said the burning of buildings, machinery and other materials typically releases potentially toxic chemicals in the air. "Exposure to wildfire smoke can affect people differently. It can range from no effect to long-term health is-

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Damage caused by the Beachie Creek wildfire is seen at the Gates School in Gates on Sept. 18, 2020. BRIAN HAYES/STATESMAN JOURNAL

## OREGON SMASHES ATTENDANCE RECORDS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION ONCE AGAIN



Bonnie and Robert O'Daniel relax at their campsite at Detroit Lake State Park campground. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

## Is that good or bad?

**Zach Urness** Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

It was another record-smashing year for the number of people who hiked, camped and explored Oregon's outdoors, but whether that's a good or bad thing depends on who you ask.

Oregon's state park system set records for recreation visits and camping nights in 2021 while federal land managers also saw a continued record pace everywhere from the Columbia Gorge to Central Oregon and especially at the Oregon Coast.

The result was campsites with few open spaces, trailheads with crowded parking lots and one of the highest rates of search and rescue missions in the nation. But some stressed that done right, more people outdoors can bring economic growth, particularly to rural areas, while creating a healthier population more connected to nature.

The number of people heading into Oregon's outdoors has been increasing for the past decade, largely in line with the state's growing population. But the COVID-19 pandemic supercharged demand for outdoor recreation, often beyond the capacity of well-known destinations, particularly on the Coast where visitors flocked to avoid extreme heat and wildfire smoke.



A barrier blocks access to further travel on North Fork Road into Willamette National Forest near Elkhorn. WESLEY LAPOINTE/STATESMAN JOURNAL

"We have been talking for years about how to get more people outdoors, so yes, you could definitely see this as a good thing," Oregon Parks and Recreation Department spokesman Chris Havel said. "On the other hand, you'd much rather see a gradual increase. No system reacts well to rapid change and

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## Oregon temperatures near record warmth

**Zach Urness** Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

What happened to Oregon's winter? That's the question meteorologists are contemplating as the state continues yet another stretch of historically dry weather culminating with near-record warm temperatures across Western Oregon Friday and Saturday.

Temperatures could reach 60 degrees in the Willamette Valley and 70 degrees in southern Oregon, which would be close to record levels for both regions.

"Whether we make a run at the record will depend on how long that morning fog sticks around," said Rebecca Muessle, meteorologist for the National Weather

Service in Portland. While few would complain about borderline t-shirt weather in February, the larger issue has been an unusually long period of dry weather caused by a strong high pressure ridge sitting off the West Coast that is currently diverting all the wet storms to the north.

"Think of it as a giant boulder in the middle of a river," Muessle said. "The water hits the boulder and goes up and around it. Right now we're right behind that boulder and all the water is missing us, mostly going up to British Columbia and Alaska."

High pressure ridges are not uncommon during

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## Hundreds submit testimony on OT bill for farmworkers

**Dianne Lugo**  
Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Supporters and opponents of House Bill 4002, which would establish mandatory agriculture overtime, spoke for more than three hours during a public hearing last week about the impact the bill would have on farmworkers and the fear that the bill would harm Oregon's agricultural industry.

Under HB 4002, farm owners would be required to pay farmworkers time-and-a-half for any hours worked past 40 hours a week. That 40-hour threshold would come at the end of a five-year phase-in.

To try and soften the impact on the resulting labor costs, the bill also establishes a tax credit that would be in place through 2029 for farm owners to deduct 50% of overtime pay costs in 2023 and 2024, 35% in 2025 and 2026, and 20% in 2027 and 2028.

### Two different amendments

Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, chair of the House Committee on Business and Labor, acknowledged that lawmakers are "in a real tough spot" with "relevant issues on both sides."

"Trying to figure out what to do with that is difficult," he said.

Holvey has submitted an amendment for consideration that would raise the proposed tax credits, starting at 75% of overtime wages for farms with 25 or fewer employees in the first year of the phase-in. Farms with more employees would get a 60% credit.

The original HB 4002 proposal would grant all farms a 50% credit the first year. The credits would end after six years under both proposals.

But Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany, said the amendment ignores the requests of farm owners and potential consequences.

"As drafted, this bill risks entire sectors of Oregon's agricultural economy by pricing them out of the labor market because their operations cannot adapt to a 40-hour threshold," Boshart-Davis said during Tuesday's hearing. "This means everyone who depends on farms for income will suffer and have less money in their pockets. And it is exactly why we should craft an Oregon solution that addresses the uniqueness of Oregon agriculture."

Boshart-Davis, a third-generation family farmer who grows grass seed, wheat and hazelnuts, has proposed a different amendment with three changes that she said recognize the unique traits of the agricultural industry.

Her amendment establishes a "peak labor period" and proposes flexibility in hours during those peak harvest weeks, which could not exceed 22 weeks per year. It would also increase the overtime threshold from 40 hours to 50 hours over a three-year phase-in: overtime pay after 60 hours a week in 2023, 54 hours a week in 2024 and 50 hours a week in 2025 and beyond.

The proposal also exempts livestock.

"We need this Oregon solution that reflects our unique state and the unpredictability of agriculture," she said in a statement about the proposal. "These fixes are carefully crafted to avoid unintended consequences for Oregon's farmworkers and our family farms and ranches. We invite our colleagues to join us by passing an Oregon version of agriculture overtime that supports jobs and preserves family farms."

### Farmworkers plead for support

"Farmworkers do important and often dangerous work that fuels one of Oregon's largest economic sectors," said Reyna Lopez, president of Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Oregon's farmworker union that represents nearly 7,000 farmworkers in the state.

Lopez pointed to the extended phase-in period and the addition of tax credits as examples that farmworkers and their advocates are aware of farm owner concerns. It also represents their willingness to compromise on a change farmworkers have been denied since 1938, she said.

"The overtime exclusion has monumentally negative impacts on the health, life expectancy and well-being of Oregon farmworkers. I can't explain to you in

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Vol. 141, No. 9

Serving the Silverton Area Since 1880  
A Unique Edition of the Statesman Journal

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