'This is an epic event'

Lyle Pitley with Schuyler & Sons Inc. takes the cable wraps off a load of fire salvage timber at the Seneca Sawmill Co. in Eugene. CHRIS PIETSCH/THE REGISTER-GUARD

Lumber by the numbers

$700

Price for 1,000 square feet of plywood, down from $2,100 in the summer of 2021

$24

Current cost for a 4-by-8 sheet of plywood, down from $48 last summer

$24,000

Average increase in the cost of a new home between April 2020 and March 2022

$1,260

Price per 1,000 board feet for lumber as of Thursday, up 280% from the same time last year

With rebuilding underway in Oregon fire zones, price of lumber reaches new highs

Bill Poehler and Adam Duvernay
Salem Statesman Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

There's no shortage of logs on the highways leaving fire-ravaged parts of Oregon like the Santiam Canyon and the McKenzie River Valley, but residents looking to rebuild will pay top dollar to see them return as lumber.

A low supply of and high demand for lumber has brought prices to record highs in recent weeks with expectations that they will continue to rise. The market swing comes as debris from the 2020 Labor Day wildfires is being cleared away and survivors are planning their rebuilds.

About 700 homes were lost in Santiam Canyon cities like Mill City, Detroit, Lyons and Gates. More than 400 homes in the McKenzie River Valley burned during that fire, sparked in a Labor Day windstorm before spreading over 173,000 acres. It was just one of the large wildfires to sweep across Oregon that altogether burned an estimated 1 million acres.

Rob Freres, president of Freres Engineered Wood, said raw wood prices have gone up by a third since the beginning of the pandemic. That is despite an influx of burned wood to mills.

Logs are stacked in the log scaling yard at Freres Enineered Wood in Lyons on June 9. BRIAN HAYES/SALEM STATESMAN JOURNAL

Opponents challenge permit for controversial mega-chicken ranch

Tracy Loew
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Opponents of a newly permitted mega chicken ranch between Jefferson and Scio, set to be the state's largest such facility, are asking the state to reconsider its approval.

On Thursday, Center for Food Safety and a coalition of farmers, ranchers, local residents and public interest groups filed a petition for reconsideration with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Agriculture.

They're asking the state to either revoke the permit for J-S Ranch, a contract grower for Foster Farms, or strengthen its requirements.

The operation, owned by Eric Simon of Brownsville, will raise 580,000 broiler chickens at a time, six times per year, in 11 barns.

"Three and a half million Foster Farms chickens will threaten our waterways, foul our wells, and harm existing farms and ranches in our agriculture community," said Kendra Kimbirauskas, a Scio farmer and one of the organizers of Farmers Against Foster Farms.

"The permit ODA issued does not adequately pro-

tect our water and wells from the inevitable pollution from this mega poultry operation," Kimbirauskas said. "Instead, ODA must protect our community, farms, and water from this incursion of massive Foster Farms chicken operations."

ODA will review the petition in consultation with the Oregon Department of Justice and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, ODA communications director Andrea Cantu-Schomus said.

J-S Ranch, at 37225 Jefferson-Scio Drive, is one of three large chicken facilities being planned in the area, drawing concern from neighbors.

A Scio resident has applied for a permit for a similar facility between Scio and Lyons along Thomas Creek. And a third is being planned on Porter Road, about a mile from Stayton.

ODA approved the permit for J-S Ranch on May 26. It won't be effective until Simon meets additional conditions, including obtaining a DEQ construction stormwater permit and a Linn County road access permit.

Opponents are asking the agencies to stay, or pause, issuing that final order until a determination is made on their petition for reconsideration.

Oregon's child care desert

Local families end up paying the price

Whitney Woodworth
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The child care crisis has left Aja Holland and her family reeling.

The Salem mother of two discovered after her daughter was born that it was impossible to find immediate child care for infants.

Because Holland makes more money than her husband, she went back to work while he requested more time off until they could find a daycare. He was fired from his job at Cherriots three days later.

"When his work sent someone to our house to give him the termination letter, he answered the door while holding our 2-month-old," Holland said.

They finally found a childcare opening in May but then were hit with two more challenges: her husband being out of work and her older child being unable to go back to full-time daycare due to staffing shortages.

"I think everyone knows that bringing a new child into the world can be a pretty stressful time for families and unexpectedly losing your job just makes it that much more stressful," Holland said. "But I think we're pretty lucky that we can afford to keep the kids in daycare while he looks for a new job because, for most families, that wouldn't even be a possibility."

Research shows Holland's family is not alone in their struggle.

A perfect storm of labor shortages, the pandemic and an already suffering industry has left both child care providers and families needing care in upheaval.

Families face often insurmountable hurdles of long waiting lists, unaffordable costs and frequent closures while providers struggle to remain in an industry that often pays minimum wage and sees high turnover.

Heat rule meant to protect Oregon workers takes effect

Shannon Sollitt
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new set of rules meant to protect outdoor workers from extreme heat by requiring employers to provide mandatory breaks, shade, cold water and training when the heat index reaches 80 degrees Fahrenheit took effect Wednesday.

If the heat index gets above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, additional safety measures kick in.

Oregon OSHA, the state's worker safety agency, adopted the rule last month. It was modeled after emergency rules implemented last summer in the wake of a deadly heat wave. Sebastian Francisco Perez, 38, collapsed while working at a nursery in St. Paul and died June 26, 2021, when temperatures exceeded 100 degrees. More than 100 people died statewide during the heat dome.

OSHA officials have said Oregon's rules are the most protective in the United States.

Some farmers who hire agricultural workers are afraid that protection will come at a cost. But for others, the new rules are a bare minimum.

"I don't feel like we've been given the information or support necessary to understand or comply with these rules," said Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of government affairs for the Oregon Farm Bureau. "There's a lot [OSHA] could do to protect workers from excessive heat that wasn't this prescriptive."

Cooper said Farm Bureau members agree extra heat protections are necessary, but some worry about the burden of enforcement and training.

Under the new rule, farmers are required to train their employees about heat illness and prevention before they can work in environments that might expose them to extreme heat.

"It's a lot to ask people to acclimate, to learn within a month, especially without trained HR professionals," she said.

In March, a coalition of labor unions and advocates asked OSHA for even stronger protections against heat and smoke.

Daniel Quiñones, an outreach worker for migrant and seasonal farmworkers, shares information about OSHA rules and heat illness prevention at Sandy Ridge Berry Farms in Brooks in August 2021. ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

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