

Audit: OSP should change metric on staffing needs

Analysts say a simple ratio of troopers to residents isn't good enough

By **JULIA SHUMWAY**
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — Oregon State Police should use workload, not the state's population, to decide how many troopers it needs, state auditors said in a report released Friday, Jan. 14.

The 33-page report from the Secretary of State's Audits Division notes that OSP staffing declined for decades beginning in 1980, when a voter-approved tax measure shifted the department's funding source



The Observer, File

Oregon State Police in June 2017 survey the terrain along Interstate 84 during the search for two teenagers who escaped from the Camp Riverbend Youth Transitional Facility outside La Grande. Oregon State Police should use workload, not the state's population, to decide how many troopers it needs, state auditors said in a report released Friday, Jan. 14, 2022.

from gas taxes to the general fund.

The agency received \$578 million in the 2021-23

budget. Unlike state troopers in other states who solely patrol highways, OSP also investigates crimes,

monitors casinos, operates forensic labs and enforces fish and game laws.

"While it is unclear how many troopers OSP actually needs, it does not appear OSP currently has enough to accomplish all of its broad and varied duties in a safe and timely manner," the report said. "Additionally, increased trooper presence on state highways and interstates may reduce accidents and fatalities."

In 1980, the agency had 665 sworn officers, compared to 459 today, according to the report. Oregon's population growth in the intervening years meant that the ratio of officers to Oregonians went from one officer per 4,000 residents to one per 9,300 residents.

Oregon State Police fre-

quently uses that ratio to make its case for more funding, but it may not be the best approach, said Ian Green, the audit manager in charge of the report.

"They're looking at a population-based approach, essentially a ratio of troopers to Oregon's population," Green said. "What we found through our work looking at best practices out there is that if they analyze their workload to develop their budget requests, it's a lot more accurate of a model to develop their staffing needs than just a pure ratio of population to trooper levels."

OSP stands to lose more money over the coming years after voters approved a 2020 ballot measure that shifted revenue from rec-

reational marijuana sales from law enforcement to behavioral health services. The Legislature backfilled the \$40 million the agency would have lost during the current two-year budget cycle, but the shift means OSP will have to compete with other agencies for money from the state's general budget.

The agency also had more demands over the past few years because of wildfires and civil unrest. According to the report, nightly riots in Portland cost OSP \$2.5 million in overtime, travel and personal protective gear, while the agency's assistance with wildfires cost \$700,000. The legislative Emergency Board approved that supplemental funding in December 2020.



Mike McMillan/US Forest Service, File

A Hotshot crew hikes to the Bootleg Fire burning in Klamath and Lake counties on Aug. 2, 2021.

Structural cash flow problem

Forestry Department seeks budget infusion to cover fire costs

By **TED SICKINGER**
The Oregonian

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Forestry was once again forced to divert money last year from other programs, including money the Legislature provided for new programs to mitigate wildfire risks, to cover its \$129 million in firefighting costs, the agency told lawmakers last week.

It's a replay of a structural cash flow problem that has plagued the agency for years, repeatedly pushed it to the brink of insolvency, and, according to agency officials, begs for a permanent fix in an era of growing wildfire seasons and ballooning costs.

The basic problem is this: The department needs to pay for firefighting crews, aircraft and other supplies when the services are rendered, but often waits two years for reimbursement of some of those costs, primarily from the federal government.

Internal failures in processing invoices and promptly billing the federal government have exacerbated the problem, forcing it to tap funds dedicated to other programs, which undermines work in those areas. Meanwhile, the Oregon Treasury has become reluctant to provide a line of credit to tide the agency over, citing its past failures to promptly repay. And that leaves the agency begging lawmakers for more money.

The latter has proven problematic, as the For-

estry Department's financial and management problems have created distrust and reluctance at the Legislature to throw more money at the agency. The agency hired an outside consultant, Macias, Gini and O'Connell, to assess the forestry department's fire finance operation and recommend improvements.

The agency is working on those recommendations, and agency officials described that process to lawmakers this week in a hearing of the Natural Resources Subcommittee of Ways and Means. Lawmakers were also considering the agency's request for an infusion of \$155 million in the upcoming short legislative session. Agency officials said that would cover 2021 firefighting costs already incurred and provide \$30 million to help with current cash flow problems.

Shifting funds

Cal Mukumoto, Oregon's new state forester and director of the department, described the problem for lawmakers this way. Every year, the agency starts the fire season with \$10 million in cash for fire suppression provided by fees that landowners pay into the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund. This worked fine for when average fire costs were \$10 million or less, but since 2013, they have averaged \$70 million annually.

"Any cost exceeding \$10 million comes directly from ODF's budget intended for day-to-day operations," Mukumoto said.

Mike Shaw, acting chief

of the agency's Fire Protection Division, said Oregonians should continue to expect fire seasons like the ones experienced over the last decade. He says fires are becoming more complex, growing faster, and becoming more difficult to contain. Between 2002 and 2011, he said, incident management teams from the agency spent an average of 11,000 hours annually deployed on fires. Between 2012 and 2021, the average was 30,000 hours, and in 2021, it was 60,000 hours.

The agency's firefighting costs in 2021 were \$129 million. To help cover them, the agency diverted \$30 million of the \$188 million that lawmakers provided last year in Senate Bill 762, the state's first comprehensive attempt at reducing wildfire risks. The agency used \$15 million of the \$20 million that legislators had appropriated in the bill to pay for forest thinning and restoration projects designed to reduce wildfire risks and potentially reduce firefighting costs in the future.

WOW Hall shooting victims named

4 of the 6 victims in Eugene shooting are from Pendleton

East Oregonian

EUGENE — The Eugene Police Department has released the identities of the six victims of the shooting Friday night, Jan. 14, outside WOW Hall. Four of the victims are from Pendleton.

Eugene police on Jan. 18 reported the victims of the shooting are as follows:

- Richard Danial Lemmon, 26, of Pendleton.
- Jason Jamell Smith, 25, of San Francisco.
- Aaleigha Mechelle Tynan, 25, of Eugene.
- Reyshawn Dominic-Joseph Supuni, 30, of Pendleton.
- Tristin C. Vanblockland, 26, of Pendleton.
- Priscila Wavaline

Camarena, 21, Pendleton. All victims are in stable condition and/or have been treated and released.

"Eugene Police detectives want to reiterate the need for witness information and tips to help solve this case," according to the statement. "There has been some cooperation, which is greatly appreciated, but having a healthy level of solid tips and cooperation is what is going to help investigators."

Violent Crimes Unit detectives are continuing their work the case, and at this point, there is not enough information to say if the shooting was random or targeted to individuals or a group. Eugene police set up a tip line for the shooting and is seeking any witness information to help investigators with the case. The tip line's number is 541-682-5162.

On Jan. 14 at 9:29 p.m.,

there were reports of multiple shots fired at WOW Hall, 219 W. Eighth Ave., Eugene. Multiple law enforcement agencies, including the Eugene Police Department, responded, along with Eugene Springfield Fire.

The response included 25 Eugene police patrol units plus multiple detective units, with the first arrival. Officers arrived within 2.5 minutes "to a hectic scene of people who had been shot near the walkway/back entrance to WOW Hall, with a loud and frantic crowd," according to Eugene Police.

Officers rushed to provide medical aid to victims, including applying tourniquets and pressure to wounds, mitigating any potential threats, and coordinated with arriving Eugene Springfield Fire medic units to further treat the victims.

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