

VA

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modestly and largely outside of Walla Walla. According to the Walla Walla paper, the recommended strategy is to invest in new outpatient facilities and expand services in existing clinics to meet future demand, while "rightsizing" services at the Walla Walla VA, officials said.

The full set of recommendations call for closing a total of 17 VA medical centers nationwide while building 14 new ones and 140 new clinics, according to the Spokane Spokesman-Review, and encourages veterans, especially in rural areas, to seek care from private providers.

Under the proposal, Walla Walla would become an outpatient clinic similar to those in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Wenatchee, Washington, per the Spokesman-Review. Along with ending surgeries and other inpatient treatment at the Walla Walla hospital, the plan proposes relocating the residential rehabilitation treatment program housed there to Spokane, where such a program doesn't exist.



Andy Porte/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, File

Patrick Brennan, a "living history restorer" with the 10th Cavalry Regiment, talks with Harold King and Terry Drinnon in 2017 about the regiment's role in the Spanish-American War during a "Welcome Home to Historic Walla Walla VA" job and information fair at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center. The Department of Veterans Affairs in March 2022 released a report proposing to make the center an outpatient clinic.

No changes in La Grande

According to Walla Walla VA Medical Center Public Affairs Officer Linda Wondra, the proposed changes to Walla Walla will not lead to any changes at the local level in La Grande, which has provided services to veterans from as far away as Pendleton.

"At the current time, we have no knowledge or concern that the La Grande

clinic will be affected in any way," Wondra said. "All our sites of care are expected to continue providing care as before."

Per the Spokane paper, relocating services to Spokane and Richland would serve a larger number of veterans than the Walla Walla area, the VA report says. According to an assessment of VA's Inland Northwest market, about 5,000 veterans enrolled in

VA health care services live within an hour drive of Walla Walla, while more than 9,100 live within an hour of Richland and nearly 29,000 within an hour of Spokane.

Not all local veterans oppose the plan to move to outpatient services. Vietnam War destroyer sailor George Oblisk, of Athena, said that's how he uses the Walla Walla VA now.

"The change wouldn't



The Observer, File

Proposed changes to reduce services at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla should not impact services at the La Grande VA Clinic, according to Walla Walla VA Medical Center Public Affairs Officer Linda Wondra.

affect me," he said. "They just expanded dental services and eyeglasses there. They put up a whole new building."

And if he needed surgery, the VA would send him to Portland or pay for it at St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton, or Providence St. Mary Medical Center, Walla Walla.

"I wouldn't want to undergo surgery at the Walla Walla VA," he said.

A statement from the Walla Walla VA stated the proposals are strictly recommendations, with nothing set in stone to date.

Any potential changes to the infrastructure of health care within Vet-

erans Affairs could be several years away, depending on congressional decision making.

The Walla Walla VA is continuing efforts to strengthen its regional health care services in areas with a high volume of veterans, such as Richland and Yakima. Moving forward, the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission is set to conduct public hearings on any new recommendations heading into January 2023 — input and feedback at these hearings could impact the extent of the recommendations to the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla.



The Observer, File

The piggy train rolls along during the 2012 Hog Wild Days celebration in Island City. The Island City Lions Club canceled the event for 2021 — the second year in a row — due to the pandemic.

HOG WILD

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and other organizations to advertise. "It will be a great way to promote summer activities," Tolan said.

The parade has been a part of Hog Wild Days for possibly all of its history, said La Grande Middle School Librarian Keri Myer, who grew up in Island City and remembers its early days more than three decades ago. She saw some unusual sights in the parade during those early years.

"One year my brother walked a chicken in the parade with a leash," Myer said.

The street fair lined with vendors will again be a big part of Hog Wild Days. Tolan has sent invitations to

80 vendors asking them to participate. Hog Wild Days had between 35 and 40 vendors at the 2019 Hog Wild Days, the last one conducted before the pandemic hit. Vendors in the past have sold arts and crafts items, food, clothing and much more.

The Island City Lions Club's popular piggy train, long a Hog Wild Days fixture, will be rolling again this year during the street fair on June 4 and June 5. The train is a collection of pig-shaped cars for children made from plastic barrels that are pulled by a riding mower whose blades have been removed.

The piggy train is so popular that it provides rides at other events, including the Union County Fair, Tolan said.

All of the money the Island City

Lions Club raises at Hog Wild Days is spent on its community service projects, which include a scholarship program for students who attended Island City Elementary School.

De Long said the return of Hog Wild Days is a victory of sorts over COVID-19.

"It is good to know that the pandemic did not destroy something that has been so important to the community," De Long said.

Karen Howton, Island City's city recorder, said the absence of Hog Wild Days the past two years left a void.

"This is an event that has definitely been missed in our community," she said. "It kicks off the summer."

WOLVES

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state's wolf population as they expand in distribution across the state and show a strong upward population trend," Brown said in a statement.

Environmental groups argued the report shows Oregon's wolf population is in crisis due to poaching and other human-caused mortality.

Danielle Moser, wildlife program coordinator for Oregon Wild, said the deaths reported by ODFW are "only known mortalities and there are certainly many more unaccounted for deaths and poaching of uncollared wolves."

Zoe Hanley, Northwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife, said the group is concerned Oregon's wolf recovery is not adequately addressing threats like poaching.

"This year's report is a call to action for agencies like (ODFW) and Oregon State Police to recognize the severity of poaching incidents and take additional steps to protect Oregon's vulnerable wolves," Hanley said.

John Williams, wolf committee co-chairman for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association based in Enterprise, said he was surprised by the wolf population being mostly unchanged, considering ranchers are seeing wolves in areas where they've never seen them before.

"We know their areas are expanding. We know the numbers are expanding," Williams said.

Most wolves in Oregon inhabit the far northeast corner of the state, though they are branching into new territory. ODFW established four new areas of resident wolf activity in 2021, covering parts of Grant, Jefferson, Klamath and Union counties.

The state now has 21 known wolf packs — 16 of which qualify as breeding

pairs — in addition to eight other groups of two or three wolves.

Wolves also continued to prey on livestock in 2021. ODFW confirmed 49 cases of wolf depredation, up from 31 in 2020. In all, wolves killed or injured 95 animals, including six cows, 44 calves, 17 ewes, 11 lambs, 14 goats and three guard dogs.

The vast majority, 92%, of those depredations occurred between July and November, with 86% on private land and 14% on public land.

Williams said wolves are becoming an increasing problem for ranchers across the state, with the impacts extending beyond killed or injured livestock to lower birth rates for cows and lower birth weights for calves. He urged the state to take a more proactive approach to managing the predators.

"The rancher is taking the brunt of it," Williams said. "It is becoming one of the major expenses for the producer."

Between August and October, ODFW killed eight members of the Lookout Mountain pack in Baker County after wolves repeatedly attacked cattle.

Under Phase III of the Oregon Wolf Management Plan, wolves can be killed east of highways 395, 78 and 95 if they meet the state's "chronic depredation" threshold of two confirmed depredations in nine months.

Ranchers must first be using non-lethal deterrents and remove all potential wolf attractants in order for an incident to qualify toward lethal removal.

Western Oregon wolves were restored to the federal endangered species list following a court ruling earlier this year.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture's wolf compensation program awarded \$130,814 in grants to 10 counties in 2021, which helps pay for non-lethal deterrents and provides

direct payment for ranchers covering dead and missing livestock.

"After a calm spring with few incidents, we saw a much higher number of depredations from July through November despite livestock producers' extensive non-lethal efforts to reduce conflict," Brown said. "We thank all producers who have taken preventative measures and encourage all those in areas with wolves to reach out for assistance."

Brown did express concern about an uptick in poaching that included the poisoning of eight wolves, including all five members of the Catherine pack in Union County, in 2021.

So far in 2022, three wolves have also been poached in northeast Oregon.

All cases are being investigated by the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division.

Pendleton Whisky Music Fest announces full 2022 lineup

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton Whisky Music Fest returns July 9 to Pendleton with an all-star lineup.

Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year Eric Church is the headliner of the festival at the historic Pendleton Round-Up rodeo grounds alongside Grammy award-winner Macklemore. Country artists Dylan Scott and Ashley Cooke as well as Oregon-based singer-songwriter Nate Botsford join the "Party in Pendleton" lineup.

Church and Macklemore were to perform at the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest in 2020, but the pandemic led to rescheduling, according to a news release from the festival, so they will make their debut this summer at the sixth annual Whisky Fest. Fans who purchased tickets for the sold-out 2020 event were given the chance to rollover tickets for 2022 so only a limited number of relinquished tickets are available for purchase this year.

"Following the cancellation of the 2020

festival and capacity restrictions in 2021, we're thrilled to give fans the full festival experience this year," Andy McAnally, Pendleton Whisky Music Fest co-organizer, said in the press release. "Thank you to Eric Church, Macklemore and the fans for your patience in rescheduling this event, it's time to party in Pendleton once again."

Pendleton Whisky Music fest will kick off with a party in downtown Pendleton on Friday, July 8, featuring Kurt Van Meter, Precious Byrd and DJ Sovorn-T. This event is free and open to the public.

Ticketing information

A limited number of tickets from the originally scheduled 2020 sold-out festival went on sale Friday, April 22, through the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest website. All ticket buyers who chose to roll over their tickets from 2020 will receive their tickets 30 days prior to the event.

For more information on the 2022 Pendleton Whisky Music Fest, visit www.pendletonwhisky-musicfest.com.



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