

State can provide little in the way of aid to fire victims

Only very low-income households are eligible for relief funding

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Although Gov. Kate Brown said the state will do everything it can to make sure victims of the Canyon Creek Complex fire have the tools, resources and knowledge they need to rebuild, the state can provide little in the way of direct aid.

The state's only aid program for fire victims — the wildfire damage housing relief program — has strict income restrictions that will exclude all but the poorest of applicants.

Earlier this year, state lawmakers passed a bill that dedicated \$50,000 in financial assistance to very low-income residents who lose their primary homes to wildfire, with claims limited to \$5,000 per household.

To qualify for the program, a household's income must be 25 percent below the federal poverty level. For example, a household of four would have to earn \$18,188 or less per year to be eligible.

Organizations that serve needy Oregonians in the fire area expect that the criteria will likely prevent some homeowners from getting help from the program.

"There definitely are people within that income bracket, but there are more people that

need help also," said Margaret Davidson, executive director of Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, an agency that serves Grant County.

When the organization learned of the program, "We thought, 'This is going to exclude a lot of people,'" she said.

The \$50,000 allocated to the program may not be sufficient if many homes are lost to wildfires in one year, Davidson said.

State could shift money

It is possible for Oregon Housing and Community Services, which administers the program, to shift money from other parts of its budget into the wildfire relief fund if necessary, said Rem Nivens, assistant director of public affairs for the agency.

As of Aug. 20, nobody affected by the Canyon Creek Complex fire has applied for assistance, he said.

The program is aimed at closing the financial "gap" that low-income residents face when they suddenly need to relocate after a fire, said Scott Cooper, executive director of NeighborImpact, a nonprofit that serves central Oregon.

"It's \$5,000 max, so it's not going to rebuild your house. But at least it can help you figure out the next steps of your life after you've lost everything," he said.



Gov. Kate Brown visited the Incident Command Center of the Canyon Creek Complex fire Wednesday in John Day. While Brown says the state will help connect victims with resources to help them rebuild, the only state program that provides direct aid has strict income requirements.

George Plaven/EO Media Group

The program will help those who would have "fallen through the cracks otherwise," Cooper said. "You're talking about people who could not afford to pay an insurance premium."

Some wanted more money

State Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, originally wanted to devote \$200,000 to the wildfire damage housing relief program but scaled back the amount after discussions with legislative leaders, said Kara Walker, his spokesperson.

The Legislature's Emergency Board — which makes emergency funding decisions — may decide to increase the overall amount and ease the income requirements, she said. McLane is a member of the board, which meets next month.

It's also possible that assistance funding could be obtained through the Federal Emergency Management Agency if the wildfire is declared a federal disaster, said Cooper of NeighborImpact.

However, that's unlikely to happen unless an event dis-

places large numbers of people, Cooper said. "Wildfires don't usually rise to that level."

Melissa Navas, a spokeswoman for Brown, said state agencies will partner with institutions such as the American Red Cross to help residents who have lost homes.

"The governor is utilizing existing staff and structures within her office, such as Regional Solutions and Constituent Services, to foster collaboration between state agencies and local governments," Navas said in an email. "This will connect those affected by fires

with resources and develop strategies to assist them."

While the Oregon Revenue Department doesn't have specific tax relief programs for wildfire victims, residents may be able to get property tax reductions from their county governments, said Bob Estabrook, spokesperson for the agency.

Depends on disaster declaration

Sorting out funding for repairs to roads and other infrastructure will have to wait until the fire is under control, said Dave Thompson, spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Exactly how much state and federal money is used to repair highways and county roads will depend on the wildfire being declared a disaster the federal government, he said.

Right now, the focus is on fighting the fire and saving lives, Thompson said. "Quite frankly, the funding thing we'll worry about later."

The Canyon Creek Complex fire has caused more destruction to homes in Oregon than any blaze in recent history, said Rich Hoover, community liaison for the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office.

So far, 36 homes have been destroyed by the fire. In 2002, 18 homes were lost in the Eyerly fire in Jefferson County, and before that, 19 were lost in the Skeleton fire near Bend in 1996, he said.

Astoria High School has hired new vice principal

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Daily Astorian

Liane Donovan just got her first shot as administrator, joining Astoria High School as vice principal under Principal Lynn Jackson.

She replaces Chad Madsen, who after three years as vice principal at AHS became principal of Ilwaco Middle School in Pacific County, Wash. She joined the district last year as a special education teacher at Astoria Middle School's resource room, helping students needing extra support with reading, writing and math.

"I've spent a significant amount of my life in high schools," Donovan said, adding she is able to impact more students as an administrator than as a teacher. "People are in high schools because they



Liane Donovan is the new vice principal at Astoria High School.

Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

want to be there. We see people with a lot of energy here."

Donovan, 50, and her husband Michael, a retired administrator and former principal at Seaside Heights Elementary School and Broadway Mid-

dle School in Seaside, have two sons, ages 21 and 19. Her

sons being out of the house, she said, is what gave her the time to commit to the students of AHS.

Donovan said she hopes to be seen by students as tough but fair in doling out discipline, which she described as one of her central duties.

"You follow the rules, but you have to listen to kids," Donovan said. "I think you really have to hear why they're behaving the way they are."

After graduating with her bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics and math education from Arizona State University, Donovan taught math at a high school in Tucson, Ariz., from 1987 to 1999,

moving to Warrenton afterward.

"My older son is on the autism spectrum, so I stayed home with him for 10 years," said Donovan, who took a break from education.

In 2010, Donovan got back into teaching through the Clackamas Education Service District at Youth Villages Oregon, a residential treatment center in Lake Oswego. She earned her administrative license through Concordia University and an endorsement as a special education teacher from Lewis & Clark College.

The best thing the district

can do for students, she said, is make them creative, independent and persistent in an oft-changing job market. The biggest challenge at the district, she added, is having to balance what the school thinks is best for students and what the state mandates.

While there are a lot of different efforts to better the high school, Donovan said, it is her job to facilitate, not direct, the process.

"It's the special ed person in me," she said. "I don't want to tell anyone where to go. I want us to all go there together."

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Clatsop Care

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