

IN BRIEF

State reports new virus cases for county

The Oregon Health Authority reported eight new coronavirus cases for Clatsop County over the weekend and five new cases on Friday.

Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 4,515 virus cases as of Monday.

— *The Astorian*

Permits required to drive along waterfall corridor of Columbia River Highway this spring

Starting this spring, drivers on the Historic Columbia River Highway will need to purchase a permit to access the scenic route commonly known as the “waterfall corridor.”

The road allows access to many popular tourist spots, like Multnomah Falls, in the Columbia River Gorge.

Oregon Department of Transportation officials say the new permitting system is to address heavy traffic.

— *Oregon Public Broadcasting*

DEATH

Feb. 26, 2022

BALLA, R. Elaine (Brownson) (Firebaugh) (Doane), 92, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

MEMORIALS

Saturday, March 5

HUNT, Bonnie Jean Dotson — Funeral Mass 11 a.m. at St. Mary, Star of the Sea Catholic Church, 1465 Grand Ave. in Astoria. Interment will follow at Ocean View Cemetery, 575 S.W. 18th

St. in Warrenton.

WHITE, Ronald “Ron” Sr. — Viewing starts at 10 a.m., funeral Mass from 11 a.m. to noon, Holy Trinity Catholic Church, 13715 S.W. Walker Road in Beaverton.

ON THE RECORD

Assault

• Melissa Gayle Longo, 32, of Puyallup, Washington, was indicted on Friday for third-degree assault, two counts of failing to perform the duties of a driver to seriously injured persons, reckless driving and two counts of recklessly endangering another person. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in December.

Failing to perform the duties of a driver

• Adam David Ehrlich, 33, of Puyallup, Washington, was indicted on Friday for two counts of failing to perform the duties of a driver to seriously injured persons and two counts of hindering prosecution. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in December.

Burglary

• Matthew Scot Merritt, 37, of Astoria, was indicted on Friday for first-degree burglary, first-degree theft and contempt of court. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in December.

Criminal mischief

• Paul Lee Roebuck, 49, of Astoria, was indicted on Friday

for first-degree criminal mischief and reckless burning. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in November.

Theft

• Brett Win Frampton, 29, of Seaside, was arrested on Sunday at Walmart in Warrenton for first-degree theft and on a felony warrant.

Disorderly conduct

• Christopher Allen Ritter, 43, of Astoria, was arrested on Saturday on W. Marine Drive in Astoria for second-degree disorderly conduct and harassment. Ritter was allegedly involved in a bar fight.

DUII

• Ronald Wayne Cothren, 47, of Cathlamet, Washington, was arrested on Sunday at W. Marine Drive and Portway Street in Astoria for driving under the influence of intoxicants and reckless driving.

• Trevor William DeMander, 18, of Astoria, was arrested on Saturday at Astoria High School for DUII. He was allegedly involved in a two-vehicle accident at the high school.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Seaside Community Center Commission, 10 a.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A.

Clatsop County Fair Board, 5:30 p.m., 92937 Walluski Loop.

Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Jewell School District Board, 6 p.m., executive session, Jewell School Library, 83874 Oregon Highway 103.

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

WEDNESDAY

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 10 a.m., work session, (electronic meeting).

Gearhart City Council, 6 p.m., special meeting, (electronic meeting).

Cannon Beach City Council, Design Review Board and Planning Commission, 6 p.m., joint work session, (electronic meeting).

the Astorian

Established July 1, 1873
(USPS 035-000)

Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by EO Media Group, 949 Exchange St., PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103 Telephone 503-325-3211, 800-781-3211 or Fax 503-325-6573. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Astorian, PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103-0210

DailyAstorian.com

MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEMBER CERTIFIED AUDIT OF CIRCULATIONS, INC.

Circulation phone number:
800-781-3214

Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

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Printed on recycled paper

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Effective January 12, 2021

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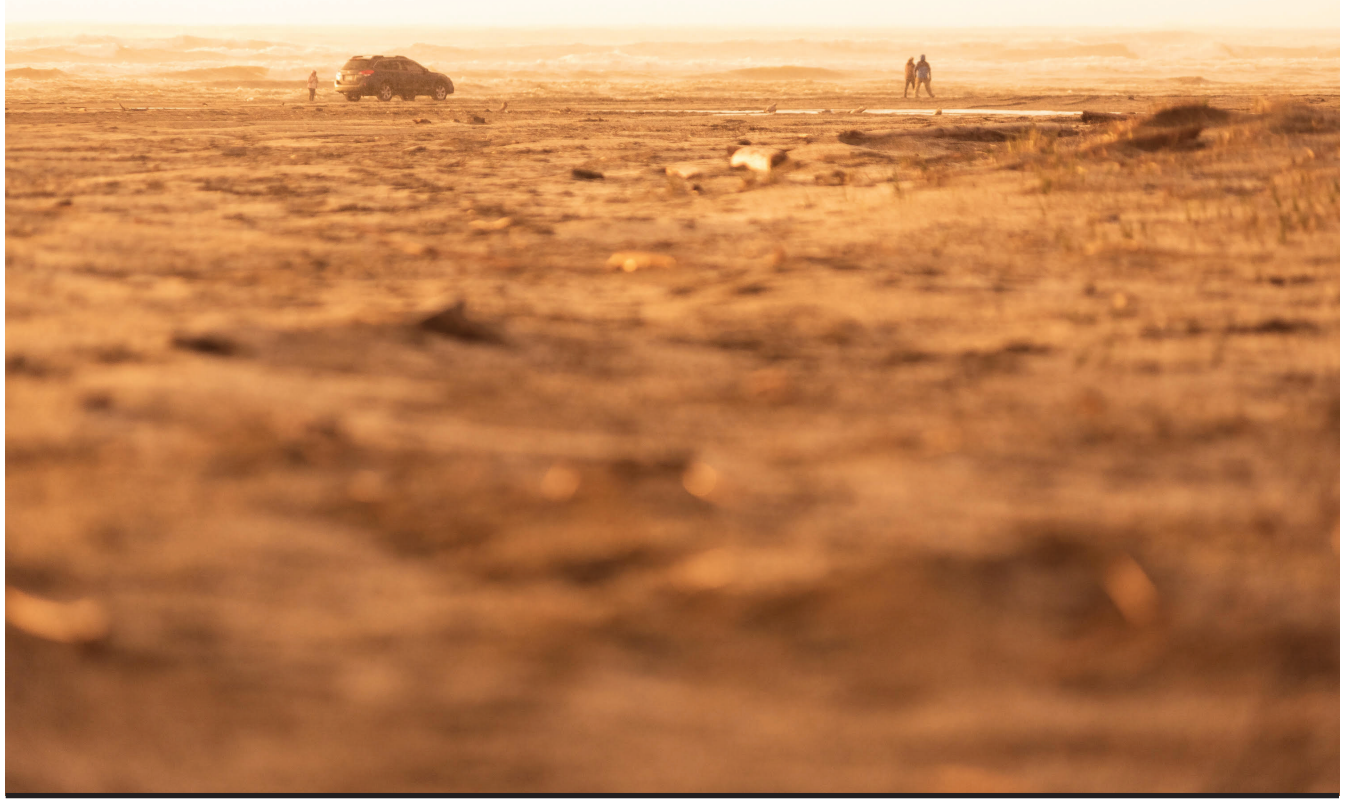
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DIGITAL

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LANDSCAPE

The sunset and stormy conditions color the landscape orange on the Long Beach Peninsula.
Lydia Ely/The Astorian



Oregon aims to lift indoor mask mandate next week

Joint decision with California and Washington state

By GARY WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon will drop its indoor mask mandate against COVID-19 more than a week earlier than planned.

Gov. Kate Brown said Monday morning that Oregon, California and Washington state would lift their mandates simultaneously at 11:59 p.m. March 11. The new date includes ending mask mandates in schools. The order will affect over 51.2 million people from the Mexican border to the Canadian border, about 15% of the national population.

The move comes on the two-year anniversary of the first case of COVID-19 reported in Oregon. Working with California and Washington state was crucial to having a unified timeline for the change in mask policy, Brown said.

“As has been made clear time and again over the last two years, COVID-19 does not stop at state borders or county lines,” the governor said in a statement. “On the West Coast, our communities and economies are linked. Together, as we continue to recover from the omicron surge, we will build resiliency and prepare for the next variant and the next pandemic.”

The move by the three states comes after the federal



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Oregon will lift an indoor mask mandate next week.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention late last week called for new guidelines to determine risk that would allow for the loosening of restrictions for 70% of the country’s population where coronavirus is posing a low or medium threat to hospitals. However, the map released by the CDC showed much of eastern, central and southwestern Oregon remained in the 30% of population areas that remain at high risk.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee issued similar statements Monday morning with the same date and time for dropping indoor mask mandates.

The new date is the second time in two weeks that health officials have moved up the date for lifting mask mandates.

Brown had originally said that the mask mandate would end by March 31, about when Oregon Health & Sci-

ence University projected the state would drop below 400 daily patients hospitalized with COVID-19.

The decline in omicron-related severe cases accelerated and the date was moved last week to March 19. But on Thursday, OHSU issued a forecast showing Oregon would dip below the 400-mark by March 12.

The Oregon Health Authority said the lifting of the mask mandate did not include changes to federal and state rules on masks in health care settings, airline flights, public transit and other specialized places.

Brown’s statement on Monday did not change her plan to lift the state of emergency on COVID-19 earlier than April 1, the date she announced last week. The emergency rules gave Brown wide powers to set public policy during the crisis, including the closing and reopening of in-person classroom instruction, business

hours, mask usage and limits on event sizes.

The three West Coast states have sought to coordinate on COVID-19 response throughout the pandemic, though they have gone their own way at times, such as the vaccine priority list in early 2021. Brown said the governors believed the mask mandate change was best done at the same time for the stretch from the Mexican border to the Canadian border.

“Our communities and economies are linked,” Brown said.

Brown underlined that the move did not mean the pandemic was burning out or nearly over.

“As we learn to live with this virus, we must remain vigilant to protect each other and prevent disruption to our schools, businesses and communities – with a focus on protecting our most vulnerable and the people and communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19,” she said.

Oregon officials say they are confident that the move will not replicate the premature lifting of safeguards last summer that came almost simultaneously with the arrival of the virulent delta variant. Critics said at that time that lifting restrictions statewide did not take into effect the wide differences in vaccination rates and prior COVID-19 exposure.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Major renovation starts soon at Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The biggest project at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center near Baker City since it opened almost 30 years ago will begin Wednesday.

The \$6.5 million makeover is designed to turn the center, which has attracted almost 2.4 million visitors, from an energy hog to a building with a more modest appetite for electricity.

Achieving that will entail much more than cosmetic work.

The Bureau of Land Management, the federal agency that operates the center on Flagstaff Hill about 5 miles east of Baker City, has hired Hess Contracting of Preston, Idaho, to replace most items

attached to its frame.

That includes installing new cement board siding, insulation, roofing, windows and doors.

The contractor will also replace the heating and cooling system for the all-electric building.

The interpretive center has been closed since November 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Work started in October to remove exhibits and other items in preparation for the project. The center will remain closed during the remodeling.

The work is slated to be finished in the spring of 2023, but the center will stay closed for several more months while exhibits and fixtures are reinstalled.

That’s a shorter duration than the Bureau of Land



Baker City Herald

The Oregon Trail Interpretive Center has had more than 2 million visitors since it opened in 1992.

Management originally expected, said Larisa Bogardus, the public affairs officer for the bureau’s Vale District.

Initially, the bureau expected the remodeling would take more than two years.

The impetus for the project was a nationwide survey comparing the energy efficiency of Bureau of Land Management buildings.

That survey, which included an inspection of the interpretive center in May 2018, earned the center the “dubious distinction” of being the bureau’s least efficient building, Bogardus said.

The center had a monthly power bill averaging about \$10,000.

The remodel is estimated

to reduce the center’s energy use by 73%, according to the bureau.

“We want to be good stewards of our natural resources,” said Wayne Monger, the bureau’s Vale District manager. “This design utilizes high thermal insulation value materials and high efficiency heating and cooling technology to counter summer and winter energy demands of the site.”

Approximately 16% of the project is funded through the Great American Outdoors Act, which allocates up to \$1.9 billion annually for maintenance and improvements to critical facilities and infrastructure in national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, recreation areas and Tribal schools.

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