

Governors view snow damage in Treasure Valley

By SEAN ELLIS EO Media Group

PAYETTE, Idaho — Idaho Gov. Butch Otter and Oregon Gov. Kate Brown flew in a Black Hawk helicopter together Feb. 10 to get a close-up view of the damage caused by this winter's heavy snowfall.

The governors earlier attended town hall meetings in their respective states where they heard from people affected by this winter's heavy snowfall, which has resulted in the collapse of at least 50 onion storage buildings and packing sheds, in addition to several hundred other structures in the region.

The governors were shocked by the extent of the damage, which is estimated at about \$100 million to the region's onion industry alone.

"We saw a lot of devastation and we heard about a lot of devastation (today)," Otter said during a joint press conference. "We're going to work to recover just as fast as we can."



Capital Press/Sean Ellis

Idaho Gov. Butch Otter, middle, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little exit an Idaho National Guard Black Hawk helicopter Feb. 10 following a tour of the damage in both states caused by an unusually large amount of snowfall this winter.

Brown, who earlier in the day was provided a vehicle tour of some of the dozens of collapsed onion buildings, was stunned by what she saw.

"It looks like a tornado disaster. It's just awful," she said during a town hall meeting in Ontario. "Thank you for sharing your stories. I think it will help us craft a solution for the community and region."

Brown pledged to do "everything I can to help you all get through this and move into recovery mode."

Both governors said agencies from the two states would work together to try to expedite recovery as quickly as possible and find assistance for those affected by the damage.

They brought with them cabinet members as well as the directors of their respective state agriculture departments, emergency management officials and National Guard leaders.

During the Ontario town hall event, farmers and other local business owners stressed how important it was to help the local agricultural economy recover.

"Without the farmers, ranchers and processors, this community goes fallow," said John Kerby, who owns a retail business in Ontario. "To say we are in crisis, in peril, is understating what is happening here."

The immediacy of the need for assistance was also stressed.

"We have unfolding a disaster of epic proportions and we need to have a response that matches the challenges we face," said Oregon Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day.

The governors said both states are actively working to obtain federal assistance for the area.

BRIEFLY

Trump named as defendant in youths' climate lawsuit

EUGENE (AP) — A group of youths who say the government has endangered their future with climate change has added President Donald Trump to the list of people and corporations they blame.

The Register-Guard reports that Trump has been added as a defendant in the case, which seeks a court order requiring the government to quickly reduce carbon dioxide emissions, which many scientists have linked to global warming.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs, a group of 21 people ages 9 and 20, notified the court Thursday that they would remove President Barack Obama as a named defendant and replace him with Trump.

Obama was sued in his official capacity as part of the lawsuit filed in 2015. Now that he no longer holds office, Trump must be substituted as a party to the litigation.

Heavy snowfall collapsed several roofs in the region, resulting in millions of dollars in lost inventory at onion storage facilities. One onion industry official estimated the loss as high as \$100 million.

Brown initially made the emergency declaration on Jan. 11. The extension adds 30 more days, and came at the request of local officials.

On Jan. 31, Brown also issued an order to ease and expedite recovery coordination in Malheur County.

That allows the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to temporarily suspend certain rules to accelerate demolition and removal of collapsed buildings in Malheur County.

Man sentenced for stabbing mother's boyfriend

SALEM (AP) — A Woodburn man who confessed to stabbing his mother's boyfriend has been sentenced to nearly six years in prison.

The Statesman Journal reports 28-year-old Roberto Chacon accepted a deal from prosecutors Thursday in which he pleaded guilty to assault and burglary in exchange for other charges being dismissed.

Chacon told investigators said he committed the crime out of jealousy. The boyfriend was hugging Chacon's mother, and not allowing him to do so.

The boyfriend was stabbed in the chest and hand. Hospital staff told deputies the man's sternum stopped the knife from reaching his internal organs. The cut on his hand required surgery.

Chacon was arrested on assault and drug charges in 2013 and was sentenced to two years in prison.

Governor Brown extends storm-related state of emergency

ONTARIO (AP) — Gov. Kate Brown has extended a statewide state of emergency to provide assistance for storm recovery efforts while touring Ontario where she saw buildings collapsed from accumulated ice and snow.

The extension comes after severe, record-breaking winter storms continually swept across Eastern Oregon in January.

"It's clear communities like Malheur County and businesses in Ontario face ongoing challenges," the governor said.

Fish commission will revisit gillnet rules next month

By CLAIRE WITHCORBE Capital Bureau

TIGARD — The day after Gov. Kate Brown released a letter admonishing the state's fish and wildlife commission for its decision to continue to allow gillnetting in the main stem of the lower Columbia River, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Curt Melcher said the commission will address the issue again in about a month.

Melcher acknowledged the governor's letter at the conclusion of the commission's meeting here Friday.

The gillnetting rules will be taken up again at the commission's scheduled meeting March 17, or at a special meeting of the commission prior to the first week in April, Melcher said.

The governor said she expected the commission to adopt permanent rules by April 3 that will be in line with her administration's policy and with Washington state's plan to phase out gillnetting.

A gillnet is a large, efficient net that traps fish by the gills. Sports fishermen by and large oppose the use of gillnets, as do environmental groups, and there are a complex set of rules in place for when and how many protected species, such as Chinook, can be caught with gillnets at certain locations in the lower Columbia River. Commercial fishermen contend that taking away gillnetting would jeopardize how they make a living.

The commission, by a 4-3 vote, adopted a plan Jan. 20 to maintain some gillnetting along the main channel of the river. The move diverged from the expectation that the state would phase out the method altogether, as part of an agreement with Washington initiated several years ago by former Gov. John Kitzhaber.

Oregon's neighbor to the north, through its fish and wildlife commission, decided last month to phase out the use of gillnets along the lower Columbia in two

years. In a letter to Commission Chair Michael Finley, Brown said Thursday that the Oregon commission's decision to diverge from the bi-state agreement was "not acceptable."

"It will make enforcement complicated, confusing and untenable," Brown wrote, "and put at risk ongoing funding and bi-state cooperation necessary for fishery reforms."

Tom Wolf, executive director of the Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited — a coldwater conservation organization — told commissioners Friday, as an aside during a hearing on sturgeon, that he lobbied legislators after he heard a rumor that certain commissioners would be asked to resign.

"I just want to commend all the commissioners for, frankly, for the way you've taken the crap that has been hurled on you lately concerning the decision that you reached on Jan. 20,"

Wolf said. "Even though the members of my organization opposed the decision that you made, I have nothing but respect for you."

Brown's office addressed the rumor circulating Thursday that two commissioners would be removed. A spokesman for Brown wrote in an email Friday that "membership changes are not being considered at this time."

Jim Wells, of Salmon for All, an association of gillnetters and other fishing-related businesses based in Astoria, called the governor's letter "disturbing" and asserted Brown had broken a promise to "stay out of the process and let the appointed commissioners do their work."

However, commissions such as the fish and wildlife commission are generally expected to comply with gubernatorial policy, says Jim Moore, director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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