

Audit: Oregon agencies vulnerable to waste and fraud

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon has not prioritized internal audits at state agencies, leaving those agencies “more vulnerable to fraud, wasted taxpayer dollars, and other substantial risks,” a new Secretary of State audit finds.

Internal auditors work for the agency they audit, and provide ongoing monitoring of agency activities, which can save money, improve agency programs and services and prevent future problems.

Agencies that spend at least \$100 million every budget cycle, process \$10 million in cash or cash

equivalents annually, or have 400 or more full-time equivalent staff are required by state law to establish, maintain and support an internal audit function.

External auditors, such as those based in the Secretary of State’s Office, perform intermittent audits of state agencies and are not employed by those agencies.

Wednesday’s report claims that internal auditing is “not prioritized or well understood by agency management and the Legislature,” and has not been for more than 20 years.

“Policy makers face intense, competing demands for limited resources, and the prior-

ity of internal auditing in the state has diminished over time,” auditors wrote. “Oregon is not alone in this regard, as internal auditing and investigations are among the first areas cut by agencies in many states facing fiscal challenges. However, this practice is counter-productive, as auditors are especially helpful to management in finding opportunities for agency improvement, cost savings and additional revenues — opportunities that become especially valuable in times of budget shortfalls.”

Secretary of State auditors pointed to the Oregon Department of Energy as an example of an agency that could likely benefit

from more robust internal auditing.

“The Oregon Department of Energy has long struggled to maintain audit staff and meet state requirements for internal audit work,” auditors wrote. “... The agency has not performed a risk assessment or convened a meeting of its audit committee since 2015, and consistently has not met state requirements for audits completed. Yet the agency has faced challenges, such as fraud and waste related to Business Energy Tax Credits program that could have possibly been mitigated with dedicated audit resources.”

And in some state agencies, internal auditors

don’t meet guidelines for independence from management, lowering their effectiveness.

The Secretary of State’s Office also found that the Department of Administrative Services has failed to guide, manage or effectively coordinate state agency internal auditing functions.

DAS reports on internal audit activities are “often inaccurate, confusing and uninformative,” the audit report contends.

The internal auditors the state does have can do their jobs better, the Secretary of State review found, but DAS can also provide more guidance to help maximize the impact of the internal

auditors state government does have.

DAS has a five-year plan to tackle the work associated with the Secretary of State’s audit recommendations, state Chief Operating Officer Katy Coba wrote in a response to the audit, addressed to audits division director Kip Memmott.

Top managers at DAS, the state’s Chief Audit Executive, and the Chief Audit Executive Council plan to develop a “stronger and more informational” annual report on internal audit activities, review state administrative rules on internal auditing for possible changes and improving training materials for “productive audit committees.”

ROYALTY: They wouldn’t trade their speck of a town for a larger one

Continued from 1A

other and thanked Tate, then teamed up to tell the tale of preparing for their respective competitions. Moore credited Skramstad for acting as a mentor, calming nerves and instilling confidence. Skramstad said she honed her own skills as she advised Moore.

Moore’s mother, Andrea Moore, said she remained in awe of the pair’s tenacity.

“They worked hours and hours and hours,” Andrea said.

The drilling and planning paid off.

Judges rated contestants on a diverse list of skills during the two competitions. At the four-day Miss Rodeo Oregon pageant, Skramstad and her three fellow contestants took written rodeo knowledge tests, gave prepared speeches, answered judges’ questions, demonstrated horsemanship, signed autographs, modeled, did mock media interviews and participated in local rodeos. Skramstad said she wasn’t bothered by nerves.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Umapine residents Meredith Moore, 15, and Taylor Ann Skramstad both claim to have fond memories of walking to Tate’s Umapine Mercantile for treats while growing up in the small northeastern Oregon town.

“Each night, I slept like a rock,” she said. “I always joke that if I was more laid back, I’d be dead.”

Skramstad’s adrenaline level spiked a bit, though, upon learning she had won the crown.

“They announced my name and it sunk in for about half a second,” she said. “Then I started crying.”

Moore, who is a sophomore at Weston-McEwen High School, wasn’t quite as calm during her competition in July. She remembers texting Skramstad from her hotel room, “Taylor, I’m freaking out.” She relaxed a few days later when the crown was set on her head.

“I could breathe,” she said. “A huge weight came off my shoulders.”

Both women have rodeo and ranch experience, which they say will help them serve as ambassadors to the sport

of rodeo. Skramstad competed in barrel racing, break-away roping, goat tying and team roping for Walla Walla and Blue Mountain community colleges. Moore competes at the high school level. Both grew up on horses.

They have ambitious plans for the future.

Skramstad plans to finish her agricultural science degree at Eastern Oregon University and enroll in law school at Willamette University. She dreams of eventually advocating for agriculture and Eastern Oregon as a state legislator.

Moore hopes to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy and then Air Force flight school, where she’ll learn to fly bombers.

But, first comes a year of representing Oregon rodeo. They will travel far and wide, attending parades, rodeos and other events. Skramstad will compete for the Miss Rodeo America title in December of 2019.

The job brings awesome responsibilities.

“I am the face of rodeo,” Skramstad said. “I am expected to know just as much or more than rodeo contestants.”

“I am helping engage a new generation of rodeo fans and competitors,” Moore said. “A lot of kids nowadays don’t get the whole rodeo experience. I’m helping instill in them the western way of life.”

The women must spend

time fundraising for a portion of their expenses, so they are searching for sponsors, whose logos will go on the sides of the rodeo queens’ horse trailers. Jackpot ropings, wine and dessert raffles and other such fundraising events are in the works.

After official trips, they will return home to Umapine. Both women say they wouldn’t trade their speck of a town for a larger one. The community, they say, is close-knit and supportive.

“Our community is just a family,” Moore said. “It’s small, but connected. We have each others’ backs.”

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0810.

PARKS: After-school programs were very important

Continued from 1A

The top-rated facility was the aquatic center, which scored a 95 percent “good” and “excellent” rating in the maintenance category while 96 percent thought it had the right amount of amenities.

While parks and rec facilities were generally well rated, the parks system was more varied.

In terms of the right amount of amenities, Brownfield Park is the most highly rated park in the system, followed by Community, Pioneer, and Grecian Heights parks.

But Community Park is by the far most popular park in the system, with 66 percent reporting visiting it in the past year.

On a cloudy Thursday afternoon, the various people walking the paths, using the playground or playing the disc golf course seemed to reflect the popular feeling.

Samantha Brown was walking down the path toward the baseball fields as she pushed her 2-year-old daughter Aislyn in a stroller

with 4-year-old Autumn in tow.

Brown said she often brings her kids to the park, where it’s grassy, flat, and contains easy sight lines.

“I don’t do too well on hills,” she joked as her daughters started chanting the word “grassy.”

Over on the east side, Ralph Noy sat on the base of a slide as his wife Carol chased around their 3-year-old granddaughter, Paisley.

Noy remembered when it was an undeveloped wooded area where he would go to fish along McKay Creek, and although he hasn’t been to Community Park often since it was developed, he felt that its playground equipment was better suited for his grandchildren than Rice-Blakey Park, which is closer to his home.

Not every park is as beloved as Community Park.

Only about 50 percent of respondents felt like Aldrich Park had the right amount of amenities.

Other parks with low amenity scores included

the Let’Er Bark Dog Park, May Park, and Airport Park, although so few people visited the latter two parks the sample size only ranged from five to 18 patrons.

As short-term fixes, Campbell DeLong suggested addressing survey complaints by adding fencing to Let’Er Bark, and adding or upgrading amenities at May and Aldrich parks.

The survey also presented some more ambitious ideas that were polled among the respondents.

When asked what programs, activities or enhancements the survey takers wanted to see, 52 percent said it was “very important” to have after-school programs for elementary school children. Pluralities also considered it very important to cover the 50-meter pool at the aquatic center, more bicycle and walking paths for getting around the community, and affordable, year-round preschool and daycare.

Among the written comments, building a splash pad for toddlers would be a wel-

come addition to the parks.

Back at Community Park, Noy said he would like to see more playgrounds geared toward younger children in more parks.

Brown said she would like to see more parks — period — because the green spaces provided a nice contrast to the tans and beige that usually characterize the Pendleton summer color palette.

Campbell DeLong presented their findings to the council on Tuesday, prompting Councilor Paul Chalmers to ask if they polled respondents on how these new programs and facilities would be paid for.

While adding those kind of questions was debated, John Campbell, the Campbell DeLong director of training, planning, and assessment, said it was better to do a separate survey asking respondents what programs and facilities they would prefer to pay for.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

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