

# Medical marijuana cardholders decline in Oregon

By **SHAUN HILL**  
The Daily Courier



Diana Calvert, manager of River City Retail marijuana dispensary in Merlin, stocks the shelves with product on Oct. 26.

Timothy Bullard/The Daily Courier via AP

GRANTS PASS — Medical marijuana patients and growers in Josephine County and across the state are abandoning the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program.

Long considered a source of Oregon's black market, medical marijuana is fast falling victim to a combination of red tape and a different kind of market force: the convenience of recreational retail sales.

"Medical could officially have a gravestone," said Kit Doyle, who formerly sold medical marijuana but switched to hemp products through his business, the Murphy Hemp Company.

The number of patients registered with the OMMP is half of what it was a year ago. Statewide, it dropped 41 percent, from 59,137 to 34,892. In the county, it was almost 50 percent — from 7,027 to 3,540.

The number of registered growers also dropped precipitously. Statewide, it went from 23,175 to 13,959 — 40 percent. In the county, it went from 2,957 to 1,668 — a 44 percent drop.

Doyle and several industry watchers think the numbers will continue to go down.

Medical marijuana has been legal in Oregon since 1998, when voters created a system that allowed registered persons to grow their own marijuana — or obtain it from someone who grew it for them.

But even as the Oregon Legislature took steps to allow dispensaries for medical marijuana, a sea change occurred in 2014, when voters legalized recreational marijuana, allowing retail sales to anyone over 21 and setting up commercial production.

It also allows people to grow up to four recreational plants with no registration requirements, except where prohibited by local statute, such as within the city limits of Grants Pass.

To feed those outlets, the state issued licenses

to approved growers and operators.

As of this week, there have been 475 applications to grow, process, sell or test marijuana in Josephine County for the retail market. Reflecting the region's conducive-to-cannabis climate, the vast majority, 399, were for recreational farms.

Medical marijuana patients who buy at retail dispensaries are able to avoid sale taxes that can reach 20 percent, although they must pay an annual \$200 application fee to be an OMMP-registered patient.

The hassle of having to pony up \$200 for the annual application fee, and the proliferation of dispensaries selling recreational pot, appears to be a factor in the decline.

"I repeatedly hear from customers," said Diana

cannabis.

"With the changes they've made (to the OMMP program), it's much more difficult to care for other patients. Therefore, the number of growers willing to do that has dropped significantly."

As of this year, medical marijuana growers who are supplying patients with marijuana must use an online state reporting system that tracks movement of product. Some say the tracking system, known as METRC, is difficult to learn and use. The state provides training, but growers don't like it, and some might drop out because of it.

"The new reporting system is something people aren't going to be able to adapt to," said Pete Gendron, president of the Oregon SunGrowers Guild, a locally based association of growers. "The training is inadequate. The tech support is also woefully inadequate."

"It takes a minimum of 10-12 hours to access basic functionality of the system," Gendron continued. "I don't know a single person who is completely proficient. It's not an easy system to use. You can't really expect a 70-year-old to navigate it."

Gendron expects the number of registered medical marijuana growers to continue to drop. He himself has stopped growing for others, saying he doesn't have the time. He previously supplied eight patients, allowing him to grow 48 plants, or six mature plants per client.

Gendron said the situation for patients is made all the more difficult if they are low income — as are more than half of OMMP patients.

"They don't have the money to go to the corner dispensary," he said.

That might lead some to return to pills to treat their conditions, he said.

Gendron also blamed the drop in the number of growers on the county's ongoing attempts to restrict commercial marijuana operations in rural residential zones, although he mostly blamed new state regulations.

"The county shares a minority of the blame," he said. "It's really the state Legislature which has done the absolute most damage. When they changed reporting rules for the OMMP, they put into place barriers that destroyed patient-grower relationships."

Sheriff Dave Daniel guessed that the number of growers has dropped because of price drops associated with oversupply of marijuana. The state never set a limit on licenses or production.

"I think it's economics," Daniel said. "You saw a green rush. It took a year to hit home. Everybody came in and started growing. I think they found it difficult to get rid of the product, especially legally."

"I think there was an overabundance of marijuana and the market was full. That's my guess."

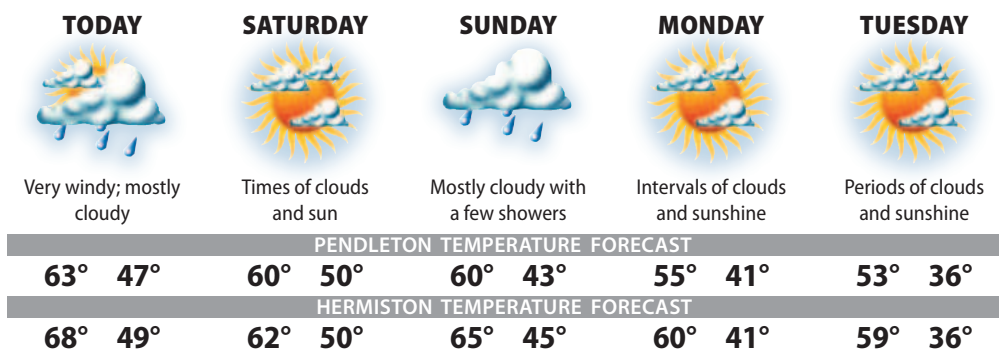
Calvert said dispensaries are paying about \$1,600 per pound for the best product, and as little as \$200 per pound for lesser quality product. Just a couple years ago, pot prices below \$1,000 per pound were unheard of.

Doyle, who now sells hemp products, said enforcement actions have caused some medical marijuana growers to leave the OMMP program.

"The medical industry thrived on the black market," Doyle said. "They're shutting that down."

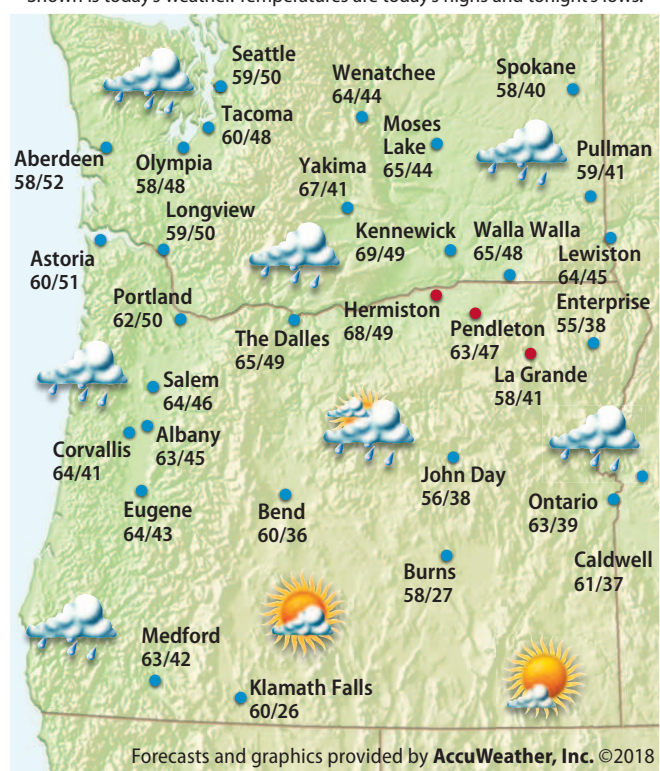
He also said that people are able to buy marijuana online or through social media connections, which may be more convenient and doesn't require OMMP cards.

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



## ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	65°	56°
Normals	56°	36°
Records	76° (1901)	12° (1935)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.03"	
Month to date	Trace	
Normal month to date	0.04"	
Year to date	8.15"	
Last year to date	13.70"	
Normal year to date	10.03"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	67°	60°
Normals	58°	35°
Records	72° (1988)	8° (2003)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.03"	
Year to date	6.45"	
Last year to date	7.80"	
Normal year to date	7.31"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Sat.
Boardman	W 10-20	WSW 7-14
Pendleton	W 20-30	WSW 7-14
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:36 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	5:41 p.m.	
Moonrise today	1:31 a.m.	
Moonset today	3:41 p.m.	
	New	Full
	Nov 7	Nov 22

# Early voting hits new high for midterm elections

By **AUBREY WIEBER**  
Capital Bureau

Perhaps there is something to all the fundraising, television ads and "get out the vote" efforts.

According to the Secretary of State's Office, 2018 is seeing more voter activity so far than any other midterm election in Oregon history.

By the end of the day Tuesday, 657,480 ballots had been collected throughout the state. That's a 23 percent increase over the previous high set in 2014, according to the state. Percentage wise, however, the turnout hasn't changed much.

The increase is credited by the Secretary of State's Office to increases in population and registered voters. The actual percentage of ballots returned is on par

with past mid-term years at 24 percent.

The state Elections Division said that as of Wednesday morning, 30 percent of registered Democrats have returned their ballots, as have 30 percent of Republicans and 25 percent of Independents.

Independent Party of Oregon candidate Patrick Starnes dropped out of the race Tuesday morning, endorsing Gov. Kate Brown. Though Starnes suspended his campaign, he did so after the deadline to withdraw and will remain on the ballot. His decision came after 28,000 voters registered with the party had already returned their ballots. They can't change their vote despite Starnes' decision.

The most active county in early voting is Wheeler, a small, Eastern Oregon county where 47 percent of

ballots have been returned. Washington County has had the lowest early voter participation with 19 percent. Multnomah County, by far the most populated, had 131,338, or 24 percent of its 538,700 registered voters, return ballots as of Tuesday evening.

Marion County is comparatively low in early voting, with 22 percent of ballots received. Polk County has recorded 25 percent of its ballots returned.

Oregon allows voters to send in ballots before Election Day, with a deadline of 8 p.m. Tuesday. Ballots must be received by that time to be counted.

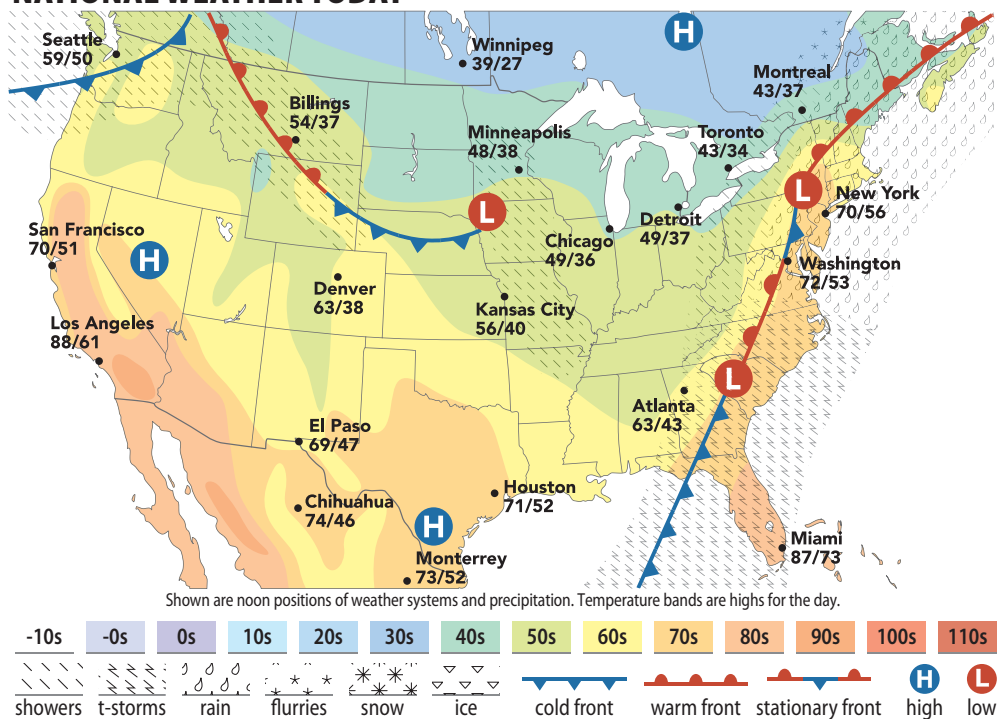
With only a few days before the election, the Secretary of State's Office is advising all voters to now drop their ballot in a collection box rather than mail them.

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 91° in Camarillo, Calif. Low 1° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



## Wolves kill fourth calf in Fort Klamath area

KLAMATH FALLS (AP) — Wildlife officials say wolves killed a calf in southern Oregon, marking the fourth kill by the Rogue Pack in the Fort Klamath area.

The Herald and News reports state Department of Fish and Wildlife officials confirmed Tuesday that the

dead calf found Friday on ranch lands in Wood River Valley was killed by wolves.

Three other dead calves were found over a three-day period last week.

Department wildlife biologist Tom Collum says personnel are taking turns camping in a field near the ranch, and they are using non-lethal methods to deter wolves, including sirens, bonfires, strobe lights and cracker shells.

Officials are also check-

ing remote cameras daily to track movement. They have set up traps to capture wolves, so they can place tracking collars.

## 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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