

U.S. to ease drilling controls protecting sage grouse

By **MATTHEW BROWN**
Associated Press



AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File

In this April 20, 2013 file photo, male greater sage grouse perform mating rituals for a female grouse, not pictured, on a lake outside Walden, Colo.

BILLINGS, Mont. — The Trump administration moved forward Thursday with plans to ease restrictions on oil and natural gas drilling and other activities across millions of acres in the American West that were put in place to protect an imperiled bird species.

Land management documents released by the U.S. Interior Department show the administration intends to open more public lands to leasing and allow waivers for drilling to encroach into the habitat of greater sage grouse.

Critics warned the changes could wipe out grouse colonies as drilling disrupts breeding grounds. Federal officials under President Barack Obama in 2015 had adopted a sweeping set of land use restrictions intended to benefit the birds.

Interior Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt said the agency was responding to requests by states to give them more flexibility in how public lands are managed.

He said the goal to conserve sage grouse was unchanged.

"I completely believe that these plans are leaning forward on the conservation of sage grouse," Bernhardt told The Associated Press. "Do they do it in exactly the same way, no. We made some change in the plans and got rid of some things that are

simply not necessary."

The changes drew a sharp backlash from conservation groups and wildlife advocates, who warned excessive use of drilling waivers could push the birds onto the endangered species list.

"If you allow exception after exception, that might make sense for a par-

ticular project in a particular spot, but you add them all together and you have death by a thousand cuts," said National Wildlife Association vice president Tracy Stone-Manning.

The ground-dwelling grouse ranges across about 270,000 square miles in parts of 11 western U.S. states and

two Canadian provinces. Its numbers have plummeted in recent decades.

Under President Donald Trump, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has vowed to lift obstacles to drilling, and grouse protections have long been viewed by the energy industry as an obstacle to development.

Sage grouse are large, ground-dwelling birds known for an elaborate mating ritual in which males strut around breeding grounds with large, puffed-out air sacs protruding from their chests.

They once numbered in the millions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now estimates the population at 200,000 to 500,000. Energy development, disease and other causes have decimated populations in some areas.

The Trump administration's proposal would reverse or modify the Obama-era protections in seven states — Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, California, Idaho and Oregon.

The oil and gas industry chafed at the old rules. Once Trump took office, industry

representatives pushed the administration to give more recognition to changes in drilling practices that reduce how much land is disturbed for wells.

"We can do both — protect sage grouse and move forward with responsible energy development," said Kathleen Sgamma with the Western Energy Alliance, which represents more than 300 oil and gas companies. "We've reduced the size of well pads, reduced the numbers of wells. And we had done all these things and the prior administration assumed development was taking place like it was 20 years ago."

Governors from several western states previously raised concerns over a related federal directive that would limit a type of land swap that can be used to preserve habitat for the birds.

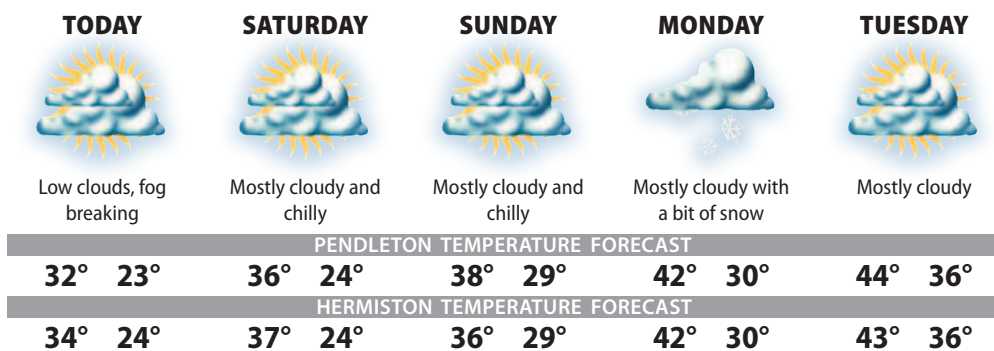
Following Thursday's release of environmental studies analyzing the changes in each state, governors and the public get another chance to weigh in before a final decision is expected in early 2019.

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.

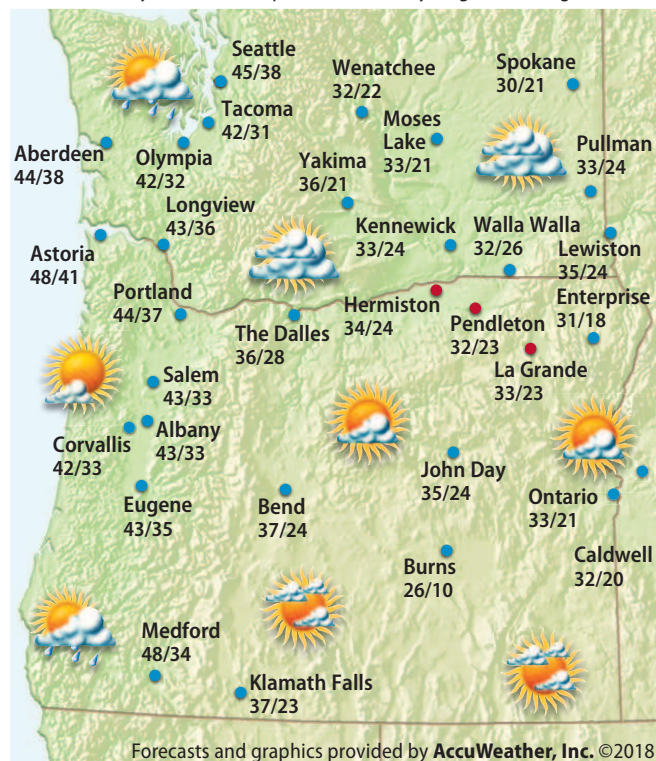
Forecast for Pendleton Area

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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 | 32° | 20° |
| Normals | 40° | 27° |
| Records | 65° (1987) | 0° (2013) |

PRECIPITATION

| | |
|------------------------|--------|
| 24 hours ending 3 p.m. | 0.00" |
| Month to date | 0.01" |
| Normal month to date | 0.27" |
| Year to date | 8.88" |
| Last year to date | 15.33" |
| Normal year to date | 11.74" |

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

| TEMP. | HIGH | LOW |
|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Yesterday | 33° | 18° |
| Normals | 41° | 28° |
| Records | 62° (1945) | 1° (2013) |

PRECIPITATION

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 24 hours ending 3 p.m. | 0.00" |
| Month to date | 0.01" |
| Normal month to date | 0.32" |
| Year to date | 6.97" |
| Last year to date | 8.77" |
| Normal year to date | 8.79" |

WINDS (in mph)

| | Today | Sat. |
|-----------|--------|--------|
| Boardman | NE 3-6 | NE 3-6 |
| Pendleton | NW 4-8 | N 4-8 |

SUN AND MOON

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| Sunrise today | 7:22 a.m. |
| Sunset tonight | 4:11 p.m. |
| Moonrise today | 7:32 a.m. |
| Moonset today | 4:53 p.m. |

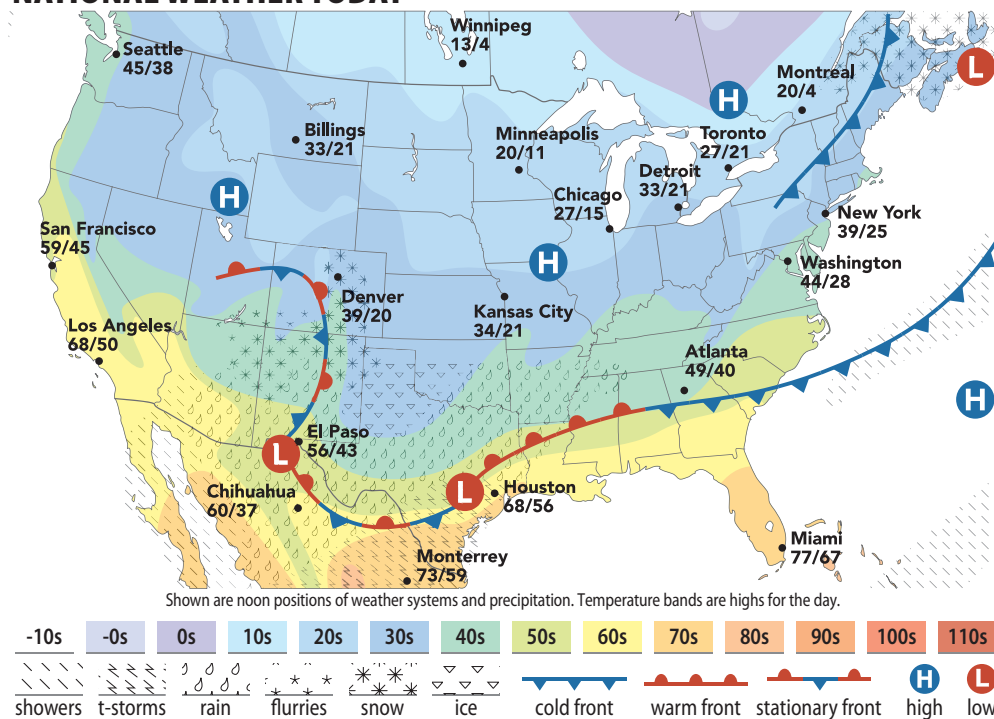


NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 83° in Edinburg, Texas Low -31° in West Yellowstone, Mont.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Task force backs controversial opioid pain treatment plan

BEND (AP) — An Oregon proposal to expand alternative treatments for certain chronic pain conditions while limiting the use of opioids has moved forward with minimal changes, despite outcries from chronic pain patients and criticism from pain experts across the country.

The Bulletin reports that the state's Chronic Pain Task Force, an ad hoc committee providing recommendations on treatments for chronic pain under Oregon's Medicaid program, backed a proposal Wednesday to provide coverage for five chronic pain conditions currently not covered by the Oregon Health Plan.

That would allow patients to receive services, such as physical therapy, acupuncture and other types of treatment. Opioids would be covered in limited doses for some of the chronic pain conditions, but not for fibromyalgia or centralized pain syndrome, a central pain processing disorder that can heighten the response to painful stimuli.

The task force concluded

that opioids are not beneficial and can be harmful for those conditions.

Overprescribing of prescription opioids has been blamed for the ongoing severe epidemic nationwide.

Patients who are already taking doses above the opioid limits would be required to begin a taper of their medications at rate determined in conjunction with their doctor. Patients with fibromyalgia or centralized pain syndrome would be required to taper off opioids completely.

"This is basically more extreme and draconian than any approach in the country. It goes against all of the guidelines," said Kate Nicholson, a civil rights attorney from Colorado and a chronic pain advocate. "And importantly, it does so without regard for any attempt to measure potential harms or benefits to patients."

The proposal is the second try by the task force to craft the chronic pain coverage guidelines.

A previous proposal would have limited opioid coverage to 90 days and required

patients to taper off painkillers within a year. After hearing from patients and providers, Oregon Health Authority staff reworked the proposal to soften the language and provide patients and their doctors more flexibility in the rate of tapering.

"We at OHA believe that health care delivery is really dependent on the trusting relationship between a patient and provider," Dr. Dana Hargunani, chief medical officer at OHA, told the task force. "All of the proposal elements, particularly addressing the opioid tapers, including the timelines, the rates and the ultimate success in getting to zero, are intended to be flexible and to meet individual patient needs based on the patient and doctor relationship."

Oregon Health Authority officials estimated that about 67,400 people would gain coverage to alternative pain treatments under the proposal and that between 600 to 1,200 patients would need to have their opioid treatments reevaluated by their providers.

Legislature to release sexual harassment records

SALEM (AP) — After losing an appeal, leaders in the Oregon Legislature said Wednesday they'll obey a judge's order to turn over documents to the state's labor commissioner, who is investigating sexual harassment at the Capitol.

Senate President Peter Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek said they would do so only reluctantly. Their decision came just hours after the Oregon Appeals Court dismissed their appeal of a lower court's ruling that they comply with Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian's bid to get the materials. Courtney and Kotek had said they were worried about protecting the anonymity of those who came forward and didn't want to be identified.

The #MeToo campaign that swept the nation felled one lawmaker in the Oregon statehouse, Sen. Jeff Kruse, who was accused of inap-

propriate behavior by several female lawmakers and interns. The Republican senator announced his resignation in February, after an independent investigation verified many of the complaints.

Avakian, the commissioner of the bureau labor and industries, known as BOLI, sent shock waves into the Capitol during the summer when he accused Courtney and Kotek, both fellow Democrats, of allowing a sexually hostile environment and of being slow to protect women from Kruse. Courtney and Kotek denied Avakian's accusations and said his investigation would have a chilling effect on others to come forward when they face harassment.

"I worked as hard as I could to protect those who had come forward about working conditions," Courtney said in a statement

Wednesday. "Sadly BOLI and the courts have ordered the Legislature to hand over all confidential records of these individuals."

Kotek said she hopes Avakian can protect the confidentiality of all those who are identified in the records and who want to remain anonymous. Labor agency lawyer Nena Cook earlier said the alleged victims' information would be kept private under a protective order.

James Nass, a state appeals court commissioner, late Tuesday terminated a temporary stay on a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge's decision that the lawmakers deliver the documents, and he tossed their appeal.

"The court vacates the order granting a temporary stay and denies appellants' motion for stay pending appeal," Nass wrote. "Appeal dismissed."

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