

U.S. shutdown stalls training, other prep for wildfire season

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Just two months after a wildfire wiped out Paradise, California, officials are gearing up for this year’s fire season and fear the government shutdown could make it even more difficult than one of the worst in history.

The winter months are critical for wildfire managers who use the break from the flames to prepare for the next onslaught, but much of that effort has ground to a halt on U.S. land because employees are furloughed. Fire-fighting training courses are being canceled from Tennessee to Oregon, piles of dead trees are untended in federal forests and controlled burns to thin dry vegetation aren’t getting done.

Although the furloughs only affect federal employees, the collaborative nature of wildland firefighting means the pain of the four-week-long shutdown is having a ripple effect — from firefighters on the ground to federal contractors and top managers who control the firefighting strategy.

State and local crews who need training classes, for example, are scrambling



In this Nov. 12, 2018, file photo, a firefighter battles a fire along the Ronald Reagan Freeway, aka state Highway 118, in Simi Valley, Calif.

without federal instructors. Conservation groups that work with the U.S. Forest Service to plan wildfire-prevention projects on federal lands are treading water. Annual retreats where local, state and federal firefighting agencies strategize are being called off.

The fire season starts as early as March in the southeastern United States, and by April, fires pop up in the Southwest. Last year’s most devastating fire leveled the Northern California town of Paradise just before Thanksgiving, leaving just a few months to prepare

between seasons.

“I think a lot of people don’t understand that while there’s not fire going on out there right now, there’s a lot of really critical work going on for the fire season — and that’s not getting done,” said Michael DeGrosky, chief of the Fire Protection Bureau for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

It’s especially important with climate change making wildfire seasons longer, deadlier and more destructive.

DeGrosky was supposed to be teaching a course this

week for firefighters who want to qualify for the command staff of a fire management team. But the class was canceled without instructors from federal agencies.

Similar classes were called off in Oregon and Tennessee, and others face the same fate as the shutdown drags on. President Donald Trump and congressional Democrats are at odds over funding for a border wall.

A dozen senators from Oregon, California, New Mexico, Washington, Colorado, Nevada, West Virginia and Michigan sent a letter this week to Trump warning that the shutdown would put lives at risk this coming fire season. Classes necessary for fire incident managers, smokejumpers and hotshot crews are in jeopardy in the near future, the senators said.

Smokejumpers parachute into remote forests to battle blazes not accessible by firefighters on the ground and hotshot crews are small groups of elite firefighters trained to battle the most ferocious flames.

The winter is also when seasonal firefighters apply for jobs, get the required drug tests and move to where they will train and work. In many cases, there’s no one to answer the phone or process the applications, and some potential recruits may decide to work elsewhere to avoid the hassle.

“Even if the shutdown ends and we start hiring people, we will have missed the cream of the crop,” DeGrosky said.

The U.S. Forest Service said in an email that the agency was committed to hiring for temporary and permanent firefighting positions and would continue critical training “to the extent feasible.”



The Daily Astorian/Colin Murphey
The Haystack Rock Awareness Program recommends avoiding jellyfish that wash up on local beaches.

Jellyfish show up by the hundreds on North Coast

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
EO Media Group

An incomplete list of things that have washed up on North Coast beaches: a giant octopus, dead whales, pyrosomes, Japanese fishing boats, hundreds of Humboldt squid, so much bull kelp, so much plastic.

And now, earlier this week, moon jellyfish as far as the eye could see around Haystack Rock.

Large numbers of stranded jellyfish are not an unusual sight on local beaches, especially after storms or during times of strong waves and seasonal upwelling, the Haystack Rock Awareness Program noted on Facebook.

Moon jellyfish are just one type of jellyfish that shows up frequently. Pacific sea nettles, which do sting, are a common find. These jellies are yellow-brown with a sort of frilled edge when nestled in the sand. Tiny comb jellies will dot the beach, looking like oversized water droplets frozen in place.

Most years, rafts of *Velvella velvella* — or by-the-wind sailors that float on the water’s surface and are propelled across the ocean thanks to a triangular sail

— blow onto the beach and carpet the sand. They bleach white in the sun, send up a briny stink and are munched upon by foolhardy dogs.

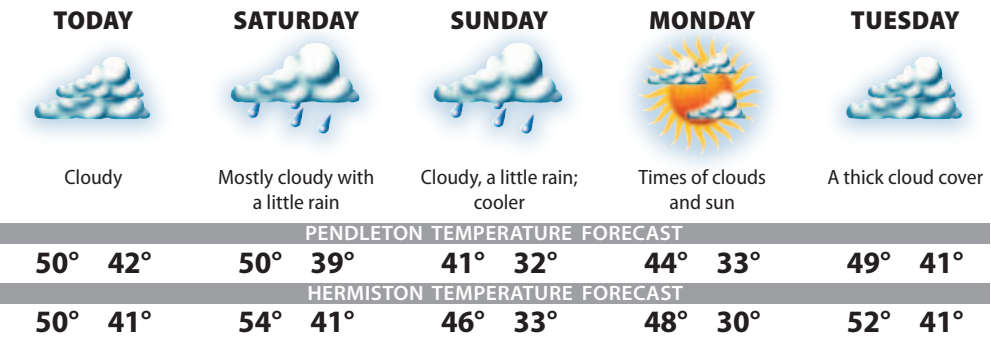
In recent years, the North Coast has hosted unexpected creatures like pyrosomes. The little-studied rubbery, tube-shaped, semitranslucent colonies showed up en masse on beaches across Oregon, and especially around Cannon Beach and Ecola State Park, in 2017. More common in warmer waters, pyrosomes confounded researchers and clogged up commercial fishing gear.

Oregon researchers continue to study the role of jellyfish in marine food webs and their potential impact on coastal fishing.

Jellyfish may drift gracefully and dreamily when in water, but on land they are gelatinous blobs sometimes spiked with intricate colors. They are always a fascinating find for beachgoers and tempting to poke or even pick up.

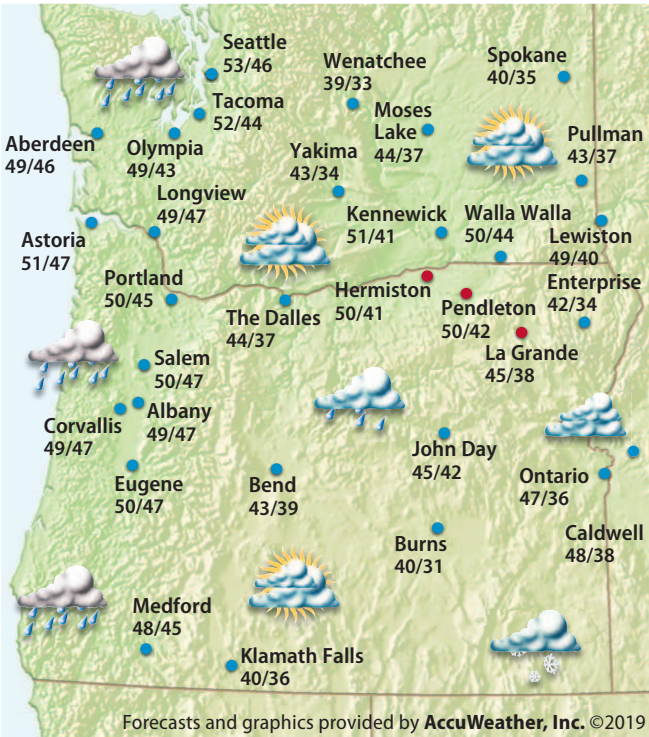
The Haystack Rock Awareness Program noted that moon jellyfish do not sting most people, but jellies like the Pacific sea nettle do wash up and can still sting even after the animal is dead.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



ALMANAC

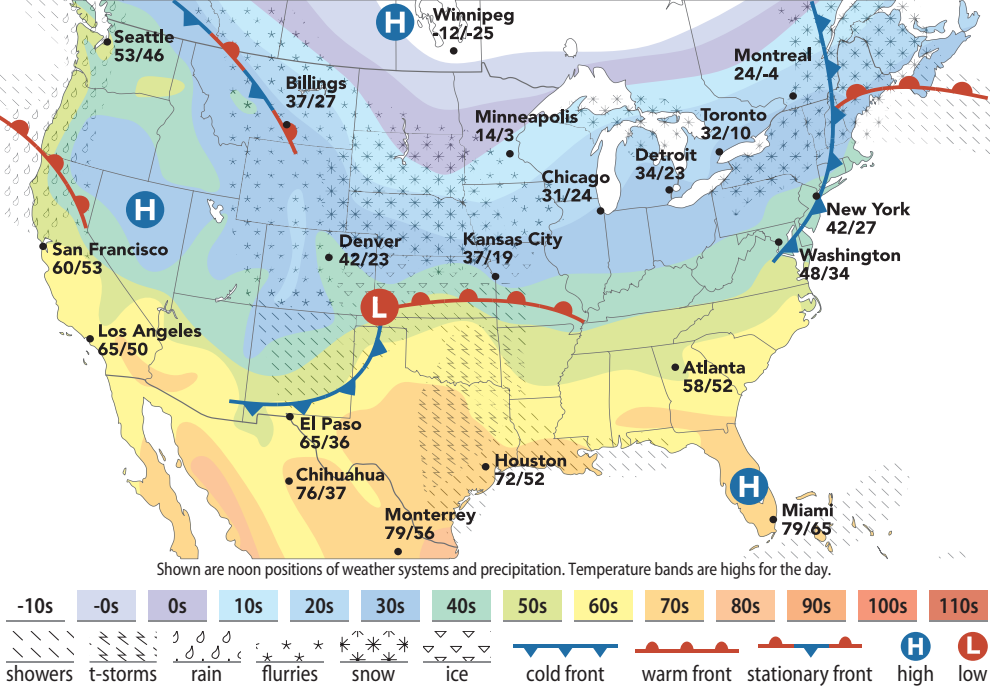
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	35°	30°	
Normals	42°	28°	
Records	64° (1919)	-17° (1930)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.26"		
Month to date	0.38"		
Normal month to date	0.89"		
Year to date	0.38"		
Last year to date	0.79"		
Normal year to date	0.89"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	40°	34°	
Normals	42°	29°	
Records	62° (1974)	-21° (1930)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.24"		
Month to date	0.42"		
Normal month to date	0.70"		
Year to date	0.42"		
Last year to date	0.64"		
Normal year to date	0.70"		
WINDS (in mph)			
	Today	Sat.	
Boardman	SSW 4-8	SW 6-12	
Pendleton	S 7-14	SW 7-14	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	7:30 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	4:41 p.m.		
Moonrise today	2:19 p.m.		
Moonset today	4:53 a.m.		
Full	Last	New	First
			
Jan 20	Jan 27	Feb 4	Feb 12

NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 79° in Boca Raton, Fla. Low -21° in Saranac Lake, N.Y.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Deschutes County addresses wildfire risk with zoning changes

BEND (AP) — Deschutes County has approved new zoning intended to reduce the chance that a major wildfire will hit Bend.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reported on Thursday that the county will require new construction on Bend’s west side to be low density and fire-resistant.

The idea is that this new zoning area will provide a long buffer between the pine forests and one of Oregon’s fastest-growing cities.

The zoning will mean 10 times fewer homes in the area than the previous code permitted.

Paul Dewey, executive director of Central Oregon LandWatch, says because of the winds, wildfire will hit those neighborhoods first and having fire-resistant zoning is critical.

The nonprofit advocacy group has been working with the county and private landowners for years to get the idea approved.

Student removed from North Bend school after online comment about guns

NORTH BEND (AP) — Police responded to North Bend High School and contacted a student in the cafeteria after receiving a report that the 14-year-old boy had responded to a discussion about cyberbullying with “I’ll bring the guns.”

North Bend Police Chief Robert Kappelman said in a statement that no weapons

were found and the student said he didn’t actually intend to bring guns. The student was removed from the school and prosecutors are reviewing the case.

KCBY reports that the situation started Wednesday evening when a North Bend High teacher learned of an online discussion among students about a student who was being cyberbullied

School administrators contacted police Thursday morning.

Lawyer who represented Saudi men who fled facing threats

PORTLAND (AP) — The Oregon attorney who represented Saudi nationals who fled the country after their government paid their bail has temporarily closed her law practice because of threats made since the cases were detailed by *The Oregonian*/OregonLive.

Ginger Mooney, of Hood River, told the newspaper she has received dozens of terrifying emails and calls with violent and virulent anti-Muslim messages.

Mooney has handled at least nine criminal cases involving Saudi students across Oregon who were accused of crimes including sex abuse and harassment.

Most ended with the charges dropped or reduced. In at least four of those cases, the men fled the country before trial or completing their jail sentence. The Saudi government paid for the bail in three of those cases.

Mooney’s lawyer said Mooney acted ethically in her representation of the men. She says the cases represent a fraction of her overall practice.

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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