

Emergency: ‘Within two hours, we were evacuating’

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others from roadways across the county. State of Oregon Search and Rescue Coordinator Scott Lucas was unsure of specific locations, but said as many as 30 soldiers were active throughout the county Friday.

“They’re standing by to assist,” he said.

By 5 p.m. Friday, Interstate 84 reopened after various closures, but a section between mileposts 182 and 188 remained closed. Other major roadways across the county and region also experienced closures, and Oregon Department of Transportation spokesman Tom Strandberg urged residents to check the department’s TripCheck.com website.

Although several communities declared an emergency on Friday, private property owners may still have to shoulder their own burden in the recovery effort.

Pendleton City Manager Rob Corbett told his city council that the declaration would allow the city ask for funds and assistance in cleaning up and repairing the aftermath of the flood. But organizations like the Federal Emergency Management Agency are unlikely to compensate property owners without flood insurance, he said.

Flood stages and precipitationThe Umatilla River crested at 19.8 feet Thursday night between 9-10 p.m. in Pendleton, and by 5 p.m. Friday water had receded to about 16 feet, discharging at below 14,000 cubic feet per second, according to the Northwest River Forecast website.

WHERE TO GET HELP

For those who have been forced to leave flooded homes, the need for food, clothing, shoes, a warm blanket is essential. There are local agencies and organizations prepared to lend a helping hand. The city of Pendleton has set up a shelter at the Pendleton Convention Center for those displaced by flooding. The shelter is administered by the Red Cross. At this time, officials are advising against food donations at the shelter.

“We are encouraging people to not donate food, as Red Cross is leading the efforts and their policy is they cannot accept donated food to give to those they serve,” read a statement issued by the city. “We will notify people via website/social media when there is a need.” Below is list some helpful contact information and the services provided.

American Red Cross
A shelter has been set up at the Pendleton Convention Center, 1601 Westgate, in Pendleton. Anyone in need of

assistance can simply show up for help. Find out information on what to bring to a Red Cross shelter here: <https://www.redcross.org/.../disast.../find-an-open-shelter.html>

Salvation Army
The Pendleton Salvation Army is providing vouchers for clothing, blankets and shoes for anyone who has been evacuated due to flooding and has need. Contact the Salvation Army, 150 S.E. Emigrant Ave. in Pendleton; Telephone: 541-276-3369; E-mail: DeWayne.Hals-tad@usw.salvationarmy.org; Website: <http://pendleton.salvationarmy.org>

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
The Cmuytpama Warming Station will receive evacuees for urgent needs. The designated coordination center is the Mission Gym, 73282 July Grounds Lane, Pendleton, OR 97801. A press release also stated the people impacted by the flood need donations

of bottled water, batteries, flashlights, first aid kits, to-go containers, toilet paper, paper towels, disinfectant wipes, laundry detergent and personal hygiene products.

Those wishing to volunteer or donate should contact Julie Taylor with the Department of Children and Family Services at 541-969-8413.

Blue Mountain Community College
The college has opened “The Den” food pantry to provide food to students in need. Also if students and their family need a shower, BMCC has opened its athletic locker rooms and shower facilities. Trailers and RVs can also be parked on campus lots.

Other Shelters
Echo: Echo Community United Methodist Church
Walla Walla: The Walla Walla County Fairgrounds has a shelter for those affected in the Milton-Freewater area.

— East Oregonian

the weekend. She said her landlord was shocked by the amount of floodwater in the area, where she’d lived for 55 years.

The Confederated Umatilla Journal reported Friday evening that helicopters were spotted over the Nixyaawii Governance Center and rescues were being conducted, though the status of those missions was unknown.

As of 6 p.m. Friday, *CUJ* reported there were no injuries or fatalities on the Reservation and the tribes had appropriated \$100,000 for those impacted by the flooding to get room rentals, food, equipment and more.

Power outages and water useBoth Umatilla Electric Cooperative and Pacific Power stated Friday afternoon that power outages occurred in eastern parts of Umatilla County, leaving a total of 258 customers between the two utilities without power as of 7 p.m. Friday. They did not offer an estimate for when power would be restored.

At a press conference Friday, County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said residents using well water in the county should boil it for one minute before use or rely on bottled water. He warned people relying on septic systems in the area.

“If they’re being flooded they’re not going to work well,” he said. “Conserve water as much as possible.”

Fiumara added that due to increased water in wastewater treatment plants, and flooding in manufacturers across affected areas, chemical and biological components were likely in floodwaters.

secondary major flood crest also occurred and was projected Friday evening to decrease late into the weekend. At 5 p.m. Friday, water rose to about 20 feet, discharging at about 29,700 cfs and approached record observation, according to the Northwest River Forecast website. Water was projected to remain at about 20 feet through the weekend.

Austin said temperatures should start dropping around the Blue Mountains near Sunday, and conditions should start drying in the lower surrounding areas.

“It should be a downward trend,” he said. “(But) this is an extremely dangerous time.”

Surrounding areas
The Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office said Friday

afternoon that families were stranded across the county, including in the Echo and Rieth areas.

Further north, Weston received notable floodwaters as well.

East Umatilla Fire & Rescue Chief Davy Baty said Pine Creek, which runs through the middle of the city’s downtown, hit levels they hadn’t seen before and caused flooding to all the houses and businesses along the creek.

As of Friday evening, Baty said he was unaware of any people needing to evacuate their homes and that the city was coming together with up to 45 volunteers spending hours loading and delivering sandbags to those in need.

“We’re lucky to live in this place and around so many great people,” Baty said.

In a Facebook message from Sheila Riddle Jasper, who works at Weston City Hall, she said a second load of sand and gravel arrived Friday afternoon and the city had stockpiled sandbags that people could grab for free at Memorial Hall behind the Post Office on 210 East Main St.

On the reservationNicole Carver and her family live on Mytinger Lane within the boundary of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. She said they all left their mobile home late Thursday night as floodwaters approached the home’s front steps.

“You could see the high-rising water down the road,” she said. “Within two hours, we were evacuating.”

She and her family will stay at her sister’s house for

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Umatilla County.

“You see it on the TV and your heart breaks for them,” Stewart said. “But you never expect it to happen to you.”

Both Meacham and Stewart live off of Social Security and are disabled. One of the two dogs Meacham left behind was her service dog, which she has to help ease anxiety. Without anywhere else to go, they were grateful to have a shelter at the convention center.

“I feel very blessed,” Meacham said. “I got a text, ‘Go to the convention center,’ and I was so thankful to get that text.”

Nadine McCrindle, executive director of the Eastern and Central Oregon chapter of the American Red Cross, said the region has seen an influx of volunteers in the last few months, which has been essential in their relief efforts following Thursday’s flood.

“It’s the community helping the community,” she said. “The wonderful

thing about having our new volunteers is it means when a disaster happens, and you never know when a disaster will happen, we can respond immediately.”

According to Pat Beard, the convention center director, most of the 45 people who came to the shelter overnight dispersed and found other family or friends to stay with. However, about a dozen still remained Friday morning with no other places for refuge.

Linda Kelly, her partner, and her daughter, Stacy Rattray, have family in Hermiston and Stanfield but were unable to reach them due to flooding that hit those areas Friday morning and they remained sheltered at the convention center.

Kelly said the group has no clothes with them because she hadn’t even been home when water began to flood Pendleton’s Riverview Mobile Home Estates. Kelly first heard there was a problem through calls from concerned friends wondering if they were safe from the

ANIMAL SHELTER SEEKING FOSTER HOMES

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter/Pioneer Human Society is seeking volunteers and emergency foster homes for the several displaced animals due to flooding in the region.

Michelle Glynn, the PAWS shelter manager, said as of Friday afternoon there were seven dogs needing a place to stay and those needs are expected to grow in the days to come. Glynn said they are currently working to make space at the shelter to meet any needs but that they always are in need of additional volunteers and foster homes.

Those that wish to volunteer or serve as a foster home can call PAWS at 541-276-0181 or message them on Facebook.

— East Oregonian

flood while she was driving home.

Kelly immediately called Rattray, who was home alone with their two cats, and began to explain to her what she needed to grab while trying to keep her calm. Rattray is independent and can fend for herself, Kelly said, but her developmental disability can make some stressful situations more challenging.

When Kelly arrived, the road to the park was already being shut down and authorities were beginning to help

evacuate the neighborhood. Concerned about her daughter, Kelly reached out to law enforcement and let them know there was someone with disabilities that needed help.

Almost immediately authorities were there to help get Rattray from the home and the two were reunited. However, the family’s two cats remained at the home because they had yet to establish a shelter to take in pets.

“I hope they’re OK and there’s enough space for

them above the water,” Kelly said. “Cats are resourceful.”

With the family altogether, they headed to the convention center along with Kelly’s service dog, Budda, who alerts Kelly when she is going to have a seizure. Beard said the convention center can take in people with cats and dogs thanks to the help of PAWS, the Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter.

The Pendleton Round-Up Grounds are also helping shelter any large animals that were displaced by the floods.

American Red Cross volunteers working at the convention center said finding shelters that can take in animals is rare but essential because so many people will refuse to leave their pets behind. However, those in Pendleton were struggling with relatively no clean or dry clothing on Friday.

“I don’t think anybody has much clothing because we were so caught off guard,” Kelly said.

Though grateful for a temporary bed and the

food and water provided by the American Red Cross, Stewart said it wasn’t easy adjusting to the shelter.

“It’s a little weird,” Stewart said. “I miss my bed. But all we can do is put our trust in God.”

Seated at a table in the makeshift reception room, the four women tried to remain jovial Friday morning as they joked about just how nice a hard drink of something would be. But Meacham struggled to keep her mind from drifting to her husband and dogs still at home.

“I’m a nervous wreck right now,” Meacham said as her hands began to shake and tears began flowing from her eyes. “I’ve never been through anything like this.”

The two families hadn’t met prior to the floods, but as Meacham’s emotions overtook her, Rattray stood up and wrapped her arms around her in an embrace.

“We’ll get through this,” Rattray said. “We’ll take it step by step and we’ll get through this. You’re my new friend.”

Pendleton: The city’s bridges were able to withstand the rising waters

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EO Publisher Chris Rush said a mailroom employee first noticed some water in the parking lot around 9 p.m., but it wasn’t long before the whole parking lot and the surrounding streets were covered in water.

As the water inched toward the building’s back entrances, Rush said he was prepared to shut down the facility, putting the newspaper’s production in jeopardy.

As they communicated with the city, *East Oregonian* staff were eventually able to flag down a police officer around 10 p.m., and public works staff were soon on the scene.

Patterson said the section of the levee behind the *EO* was built on top of an old race mill that channeled water toward the office once the flood began.

The waters began to recede as soon as public works staff tamped down the area with dirt.

The city’s bridges also withstood the river’s surging current and the debris, a combination that can destabilize and even break those kinds of structures.

Patterson said the bridges that cross the river at Eighth Street, Main Street, and 10th Street were fine, although the 10th Street Bridge was temporarily closed as the city dealt with a floating tree that got stuck and tangled its branches with overhead power lines.

The Bedford Bridge, a thin pedestrian bridge west of 10th Street, was hit hard by the flooding and remains closed as of 5 p.m. Friday.

Patterson said the sewer plant at the confluence of the Umatilla River and McKay Creek is inundated



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Pendleton Public Works crews use an excavator to pack gravel and rock into a hole in the levee behind the East Oregonian office in Pendleton.

with water, but operational. He worried that the excess water may have washed out the “bugs,” the microscopic organisms that help treat the water.

In a bit of irony, the public works department had recently completed a set of

repairs meant to fix damages caused by April’s McKay Creek flood.

“We’ll find out how well our repairs hold out,” Patterson said.

Throughout the day, city officials said the water from the municipal drink-

ing water system remains safe to drink, although some odor and murkiness is to be expected and could last through Sunday.

At a press conference, Police Chief Stuart Roberts told the assembly that he hoped to let Riverside residents back into their homes on Saturday. He recalled how police helped most residents to safety before the waters rose too high, but the city was forced to put several in the bucket of a frontloader to get them out.

This is the second time in less than a year that Pendleton has been battered by floods, following last April’s McKay Creek overflow.

With a river running straight through the heart of the community, Pendleton is no stranger to floods.

Back in 1906, a flood washed away large portions of the city’s fledgling levee,

blanketing about a third of the town in water.

In late 1964 and early 1965, a severe rainstorm destroyed bridges and washed out roads across the region.

At the press conference, Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said this is the worst flood he’s seen since 1996.

That year, low level snow packs released up to 10 inches of water in as little as 48 hours, leading to floods around the state. Riverview Mobile Home States was flooded that year as well.

Local officials seemed optimistic that declining water levels would allow them to reopen roads and neighborhoods over the weekend. But the next stage of work begins once the water recedes and people find out what the floods left behind.