

Renovations will close trail center for two-plus years

BLM will operate ‘Oregon Trail Experience’ in Baker City during closure

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Starting about a year from now, people who visit Baker County to learn about the Oregon Trail will have to go somewhere other than the Interpretive Center that has stood atop Flagstaff Hill for almost three decades.

But only temporarily. The Bureau of Land Management, which owns and operates the center, is planning a major renovation of the building to make it more energy efficient.

The center, which has drawn nearly 2.4 million visitors since it opened on May 23, 1992, about 5 miles east of Baker City, will be closed during the approximately 2½-year project, which will cost at least \$3 million, according to Larisa Bogardus, acting director for the center.

During the closure, the BLM will have a temporary “Oregon Trail Experience” in Baker City, Bogardus said. BLM officials are working on plans for the temporary facility, including its location, she said.

“It will absolutely be in Baker City,” said Bogardus, who is also the public affairs officer for the BLM’s Vale District, which manages the Interpretive Center. “We’re very cognizant of the economic role of the Interpretive Center



Baker City Herald, File

The Interpretive Center’s location atop Flagstaff Hill, and its extensive windows, contribute to its energy inefficiency.

in Baker County.”

Bogardus said the current plan is to put the renovation project out for bid in July or August. Construction will start on March 1, 2022. The center will likely be closed for at least a couple of months before that to allow workers to move artifacts, Bogardus said, and for a couple additional months after the renovations, to allow staff to prepare the facility for reopening.

The impetus for the project, by far the largest since the center opened, was a nationwide survey comparing

the energy efficiency of BLM buildings, Bogardus said.

That survey, which included an inspection of the Interpretive Center in May 2018, earned the center the “dubious distinction” of being the agency’s least efficient building, she said.

Among the findings is that the facility’s “Energy Use Intensity” — a measure of its inefficiency — was 170 kilo-British Thermal Units per square foot. The average for BLM facilities is 84, according to the survey.

The center, which operates solely on electricity (natural gas isn’t available on Flagstaff Hill), runs up a monthly power bill averaging about \$1,000, Bogardus said.

Its location contributes to the center’s energy gluttony. The crest of the hill that gives visitors a panoramic view of the Baker Valley and the Elkhorn Mountains also exposes the facility to the summer sun and to year-round winds that often gust above 25 mph.

“The siding takes a beating up there,” Bogardus said.

She said today’s building materials, including insulation, are more effective at protecting buildings from heat and winter chill. Heating and air-conditioning systems have also become more efficient since 1992, and all of the center’s HVAC equipment will be replaced during the renovation project.

The work will be extensive. The contractor will replace the center’s siding and roof, in effect stripping the outside of the building and installing all new materials, Bogardus said.

Although the center itself will be closed, a portion of the trail system on Flagstaff Hill, including the Oregon Trail ruts, will remain open.

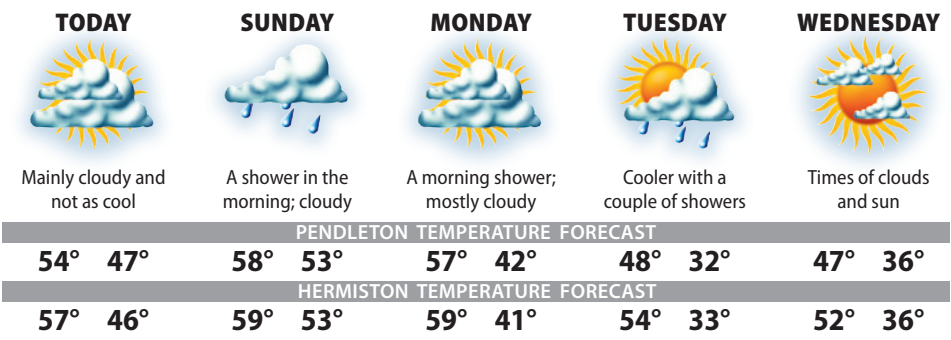
Bogardus said BLM officials are working on the details. The upper sections of trail will be closed for safety reasons, since workers will be removing and replacing large parts of the building.

Although the extended closure of the center and the need to set up an alternate Oregon Trail experience for visitors is a daunting challenge, Bogardus said the renovations will ensure the center remains a major attraction in Baker County for decades to come.

“It’s very exciting to see the agency make the commitment to the longevity and efficiency of the Interpretive Center,” she said.

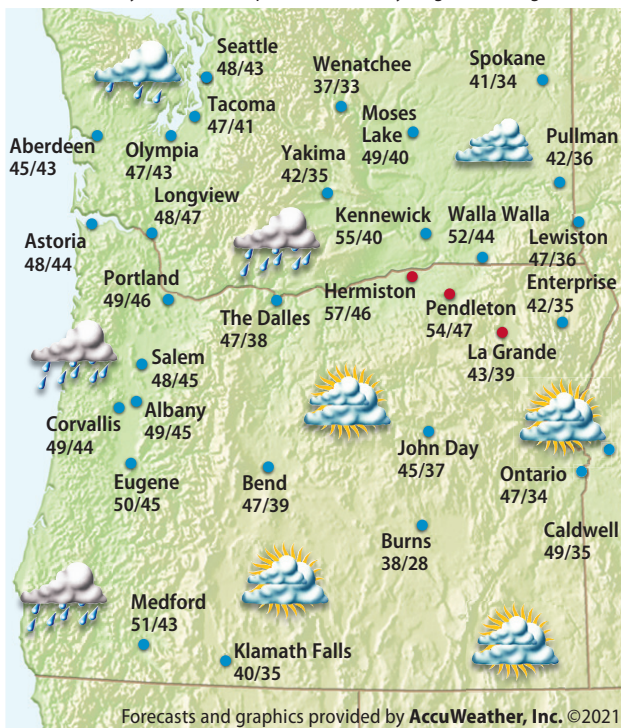
Bogardus said about 30% of the money for the renovation will come from the Great American Outdoors Act, a bill that President Donald Trump signed into law on Aug. 4, 2020. That law includes up to \$1.9 billion a year for 5 years for maintenance on public lands, including national parks and national forests.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



ALMANAC

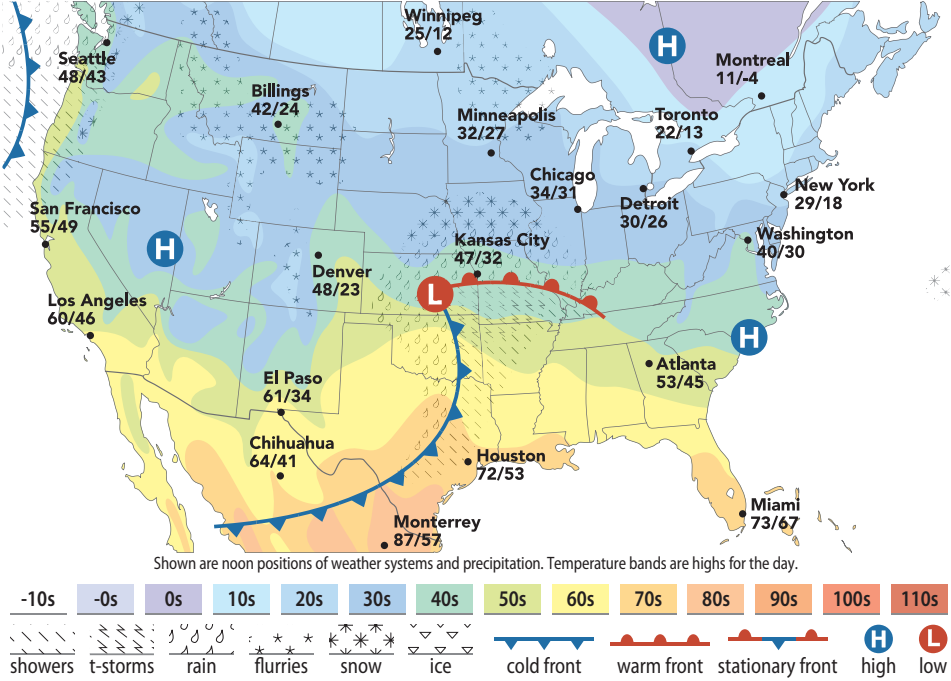
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	39°	32°	
Normals	43°	28°	
Records	65° (2018)	-17° (1950)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.13"		
Month to date	0.91"		
Normal month to date	1.31"		
Year to date	0.91"		
Last year to date	2.02"		
Normal year to date	1.31"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	44°	32°	
Normals	44°	29°	
Records	61° (2004)	-23° (1957)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.03"		
Month to date	0.52"		
Normal month to date	1.20"		
Year to date	0.52"		
Last year to date	0.24"		
Normal year to date	1.20"		
WINDS (in mph)			
	Today	Sun.	
Boardman	S 4-8	SSW 4-8	
Pendleton	S 7-14	SSE 8-16	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	7:19 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	4:59 p.m.		
Moonrise today	7:22 p.m.		
Moonset today	8:49 a.m.		
Last	New	First	Full
			
Feb 4	Feb 11	Feb 19	Feb 27

NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 79° in Weslaco, Texas Low -17° in Crane Lake, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



USDA offers temporary debt relief to more than 12,000 farmers

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

WASHINGTON — The USDA will temporarily suspend some debt collections and foreclosures as part of the Biden administration’s plan to help financially distressed farms during the pandemic.

According to USDA officials, the agency will temporarily halt past-due debt collections, wage garnishments and non-judicial foreclosures for farmers borrowing under two major loan programs administered by the Farm Service Agency. These loan programs are called the Farm Storage Facility Loan and the Direct Farm Loan.

Additionally, the department will seek to stop foreclosures and evictions that are already in progress under the two programs.

The decision was

announced on Wednesday, Jan. 27.

USDA has also extended the deadlines for producers to respond to loan servicing actions. This, officials say, will help farmers, including delinquent borrowers, who are facing economic hardship.

Data from USDA show this decision will immediately lessen financial hardship for more than 12,000 borrowers nationwide — about 10% of all borrowers in the programs.

The agency did not immediately respond to *Capital Press*’ request for comment about how many of those 12,000 farms are in the Western United States.

“USDA and the Biden administration are committed to bringing relief and support to farmers, ranchers and producers of all backgrounds and financial status, including by ensuring producers have access to temporary

debt relief,” Robert Bonnie, the department’s deputy chief of staff, said in a statement.

Bonnie said the Biden administration is evaluating how to improve borrowing options for the future so that farms can continue “earning living expenses, providing for emergency needs and maintaining cash flow.”

Officials say the temporary suspensions will remain in place “until further notice.” A USDA statement says farmers can expect the suspensions to continue for as long as the national COVID-19 disaster declaration is in place.

Government officials encourage farmers who have questions or might be impacted by this decision to contact their local county Farm Service Agency office, where FSA staff can discuss loan servicing options and temporary changes. To learn more, go to www.farmers.gov/coronavirus.

IN BRIEF

Walla Walla man arrested in child rape case

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — A Walla Walla man was arrested on Tuesday, Jan. 26, for investigation of child sex crimes, according to police.

Timothy L. Palmer, 63, is being held at the Walla Walla County Jail for investigation of first-degree child rape, first-degree child molestation, distribution of obscene depictions of a minor engaged in sexual conduct, and possessing depictions of a minor engaged in sexual conduct.

He was scheduled for his first court appearance on Wednesday, Jan. 27. His bail is set at \$75,000, according to the online jail roster.

The investigation began in 2020, but this month police obtained a search warrant for a house on Hobson Street in Walla Walla to look for child pornography, according to a Walla Walla Police Department press release on Jan. 27.

Investigators allegedly found child pornography, as well as evidence of sexual assault of a child. The release states that Palmer admitted to viewing child pornog-

raphy and having sexual relations with an underage victim in his talks with detectives. Police said Palmer allegedly knew the victim.

COVID-19 outbreak strikes Malheur County Jail

VALE — For nearly a year the Malheur County Jail proved to be an exception to the rule that COVID-19 can infiltrate correctional facilities and create mayhem.

Earlier this month, though, the jail’s luck ran out.

Between Jan. 4 and Jan. 7, the jail recorded 21 COVID-19 cases among employees and inmates. Overall, from the beginning of January through Monday, 25 people — 17 inmates and eight sheriff’s office employees — were infected, said Travis Johnson, Malheur County undersheriff.

No one died or was hospitalized from the outbreak and the worst appears to be over, said Johnson.

“Right now, as far as I am aware, everyone else is on the mend. We don’t have any current cases,” said Johnson.

— EO Media Group and Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

EAST OREGONIAN

— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —

211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays

EastOregonian.com

In the App Store:

East Oregonian (USPS 164-980) is published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, by the EO Media Group, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, OR. Postmaster: send address changes to East Oregonian, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801.

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Circulation Dept.

For mail delivery, online access, vacation stops or delivery concerns call 800-781-3214

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	Local home delivery	Savings (cover price)
EZPay	\$10.75/month	50 percent
52 weeks	\$135	42 percent
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13 weeks	\$37	36 percent

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\$1.50 Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

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