

State's fuzzy federal aid picture

By HILLARY BORRUD
The Oregonian

SALEM — Two months ago, Congress passed a \$900 billion COVID relief package to boost unemployment benefits, deliver another round of stimulus payments to households, aid businesses and schools, and support the roll-out of vaccines.

With attention focused on Democrats' new \$1.9 trillion relief plan, the December 2020 relief law might seem like a distant memory.

But the money Congress approved on Dec. 21, 2020, has been flowing into Oregon in huge buckets. *The Oregonian* found that state and local governments in Oregon — particularly school districts — will collectively receive nearly \$1.8 billion to spend on public services or distribute to struggling Oregonians.

Even experts on government spending, however, can't say for sure how much in total Oregon's state agencies and other governments will receive, *The Oregonian* concluded after days of reporting aimed at pinning that down.

In February, lawmakers and state analysts said they were still figuring out how much the federal funding might help fill an estimated \$1.6 billion state budget shortfall caused by slower than usual tax and lottery revenue growth, and significant state spending on pandemic and wildfire response. The Legislative Fiscal Office had yet to pin down the number as of Tuesday, Feb. 23.

FUNDING STREAMS

Here are the other December 2020 relief package funding streams identified by contacting various government agencies and other sources:

- **\$281 million** for rental assistance through the state and six counties.
- **\$280.8 million** in public health funding for COVID-19 testing, vaccine distribution and contact tracing work, some of which will go to local governments.
- **\$232.8 million** awarded directly to community colleges and public and private universities, according to the Oregon Department of Education.
- **\$225 million** for transit agencies, including \$190 million for the Portland area, smaller allotments for other urban centers and just \$2.5 million for rural transit providers, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation.
- **\$124 million** in relief funds for highway infrastructure program, according to ODOT.
- **\$103 million** in child care and development block grants, administered by the Early Learning Division.
- **\$41.8 million** in education funding to be spent largely at the governor's discretion, including \$27.6 million specifically for private schools.
- There is also a nationwide pot of **\$50 million** to support school-based mental health programs, but it's unclear how much Oregon will receive.

Gov. Kate Brown's administration was also unable to sum up how much the state expects to receive. "There are 21 different funding streams in the December federal relief package, which are distributed directly both to state agencies and to local entities, including counties, cities, behavioral health clinics, and higher education institutions," Deputy Communications Director Charles Boyle wrote in an email. "We don't yet have a total breakdown of the funds coming to state and local entities through those funding streams, as the state hasn't received all the dollars."

The Oregonian contacted staffers for all seven members of the state's congressional delegation, starting with Sen. Ron Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley the first week of February. Merkley's office was able to point to what appears to be the largest tranche of funding for Oregon governments, \$499 million for K-12 schools. Five senators' and representatives' staffers responded with varying amounts of information about the relief funding.

The fuzzy picture of how much federal aid Oregon is receiving points to the size and complexity of these federal relief bills — \$2.2

trillion in CARES Act funds are still being paid out 11 months after it passed. It sent at least \$2.45 billion to Oregon governments, plus stimulus payments paid directly to individuals, aid to businesses through tax cuts and the Paycheck Protection Program, and an array of other policies. Sara Hottman, state communications director for Merkley, wrote in an email that "funds are largely distributed based on grant applications, and right now CARES Act grants are still being awarded to applicants. So I'm guessing it'll be some time before we have state totals of the December bill."

Although state and local officials appreciate the last two rounds of federal aid, they have pushed for large additional injections of federal funds that state and local governments could use to backfill their budgets. Nearly a year ago when Oregon was newly in a COVID lockdown and the effects on the state's tax revenues were not yet clear, the governor said that not being able to replace lost revenue with CARES Act federal funds was a frustration "shared by governors around the country."

In practice, the state was able to apply \$56 million from the CARES Act to the state police budget and a number of city, county and special district governments used federal funds to help cover payroll and employee paid leave costs, state auditors found.



Austin Smith Jr./Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, File
Researchers have been monitoring the wolf dubbed OR-93 via his tracking collar and said the animal departed Oregon earlier this year, likely in search of a new territory, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Oregon wolf tracked near Yosemite park

Associated Press

BRIDGEPORT, Calif. — A young male wolf has been spotted near Yosemite National Park, the farthest south a wolf has been tracked in California in more than a century, officials said.

Researchers have been monitoring the wolf dubbed OR-93 via his tracking collar and said the animal departed Oregon earlier this year, likely in search of a new territory, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The wolf dispersed from the White River Pack southeast of Mount Hood. He was collared in June 2020 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in Oregon, according to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

OR-93 was tracked through Modoc County, California, and crossing state highways 4 and 208. It recently moved into Mono County, just east of Yosemite, the newspaper said.

"Given the time of year, we assume OR-93 has traveled such a long way in search of a mate," Center for Biological Diversity wolf advocate Amaroq Weiss said in a statement. "I hope he can find one."

This is the 16th gray wolf to have shown up in California, according to the department. Most have been from Oregon.

Previously, the farthest south a gray wolf was spotted in recent decades was the Lake Tahoe Basin. That wolf, OR-54, eventually headed back north.

Earlier this month, another male wolf, OR-85, was tracked to California's Siskiyou County, just south of the Oregon state line.

Gray wolves were eradicated in California early in the last century because of their threat to livestock. Their reappearance in the state has riled ranchers, who say wolves have preyed on their livestock on public or private land.

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