



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pilot Rock Fire Chief Herschel Rostov, the department's first full-time paid fire chief, offers instruction on attaching air tanks Nov. 18, 2021, during a training at the fire station in Pilot Rock.

Chief:

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Rostov said he grew up in communities south of Seattle. He earned associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees in fire and emergency services and public administration.

He started as a volunteer firefighter in 1992 and joined the Mercer Island Fire Department, Washington, four years later. He remained there for about 23 years, he said, the last four of which he was fire marshal. Out of its two stations, the department handled, on-average, 2,600 calls annually.

He then joined North Whatcom Fire & Rescue near Bellingham, Washington, for a year and a half before applying for rural departments. That's how he found Pilot Rock.

Rostov has no connection to Pilot Rock or Umatilla County. He said he simply wanted to work in a slower-paced farming area where neighbors help neighbors. Searching for a job as chief, he didn't apply to any large agencies.

"That community feeling, everybody knows everybody, people are willing to get out there and help each other — that's always appealed to me," he said.

He said he recognizes many challenges facing rural departments. Recruiting and retaining staff can be a struggle. With a small tax base, it can be difficult for small departments to find ample, up-to-date equipment. Much of the department's equipment, he said, dates back decades, including vehicles from the 1970s.

Among Rostov's goals are applying for grant funds to seek new equipment and finding volunteers the training they need. Soon, Rostov will attend a course at the National Fire Academy in Maryland, and he said he hopes to send volunteers to receive similar certification and training to improve their medical skills. He also aims to update equipment, including breathing packs and vehicle extrication gear.

In 2016, Pilot Rock hired its first full-time police chief. The move to hire Rostov is yet another step in the community investing in public safety, Carnes said. Rostov's new role will provide the public somewhere to turn if they are ever in need.

"That's been a high-level need from the department's perspective, just having the ability to be part of Pilot Rock itself, as opposed to just going on the calls and providing service," he said.

Already, Rostov and Carnes said they are planning on getting him involved in providing fire education and recruitment at local schools.

Carnes recalled recent years where Pilot Rock didn't have an ambulance service and residents sometimes had to wait too long for help.

"If you're having a heart attack," she said, "it's real nice to have somebody five minutes away instead of 20 minutes away."

Hiring Rostov, Carnes said, is one more step toward ensuring vulnerable community members receive help when they need it.

Vote:

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Gerrymandering is most often used when a governing body draws constituency boundaries to favor one political party over another. For instance, Oregon Republicans recently accused Democrats of gerrymandering the state after proposing and passing political maps that are anticipated to create strong majorities for Democrats in the Legislature and in Oregon's congressional delegation.

According to the Prison Policy Initiative, prison gerrymandering works by including prisons and county jails as inmates' place of residence when redistricting instead of the places they lived before they were incarcerated. That means people who live near prisons and county jails are given a greater political voice than those that don't by using a population of people who can't vote, pay taxes or otherwise participate in the community they're incarcerated in.

"It gives certain people who live close to prisons more say in government," Mike Wessler, the group's communications director, said in an interview.

The Prison Policy Initiative claims to have ended prison gerrymandering in a dozen states and more than 200 cities. Wessler said Pendleton caught the nonprofit's attention because it's one of just two cities in Oregon that use prison population for its political districts.

In 2010, EOCI contained 1,605 inmates and the Umatilla County Jail had 254, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Justice. Given that each ward contained approximately 5,500 people after the council redrew ward lines in 2011, about one-third of Ward 2 constituents were in the custody of the Oregon Department of Corrections or the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office at the time.

Pendleton's total inmate population was fairly static from 2010 to 2020, but Wessler said these groups are more transitory than they seem.

About three in four jail inmates are released within 72 hours, accord-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton Mayor John Turner calls the city council meeting to order Tuesday, Nov. 16, 2021, at Pendleton City Hall.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton City Councilor McKennon McDonald listens to a planning commission report Tuesday, Nov. 16, 2021, during a city council meeting in Pendleton.

ing to the American Jail Association. And although prison inmates tend to be incarcerated for longer, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that 42% of inmates in 2018 were released less than a year after entering the prison system. Even inmates with long-term sentences are unlikely to stay in one place, as three-quarters of incarcerated people serve time in more than one facility.

Wessler said the disconnect is compounded by the fact that most inmates return to their home communities after completing their sentence rather than stay in the place where they were incarcerated.

He added that the U.S. Census Bureau made it easier for state's and communities to filter out jail and prison population data when redistricting. But whether the Pendleton City Council will add redistricting to its agenda is an open question.

Redistricting not on council's radar

The council last redistricted its wards in 2011 with the help of Portland State University, creating the boundaries that exist today.

In accordance with the Pendleton city charter, the council drew lines for three

wards with two councilors representing each of them. The council is rounded off by two at-large councilors and the mayor.

A decade ago, the council approved a map that only made minor changes to the wards. Broadly speaking, Ward 1 covers downtown Pendleton, the South Hill and Riverside, Ward 2 covers the North Hill, Westgate and the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, and Ward 3 covers everything south of Interstate 84, including Southgate, Tutuilla Road and McKay Creek.

At the time, the map drew a few complaints from residents, but they didn't concern how Pendleton's prison and jail would affect representation in Ward 2. Instead, critics honed in on how the base of North Hill was left in Ward 1, opening the door to having most of the council living in one neighborhood.

The council passed the maps nonetheless, and 10 years later, the council have left the wards intact even as other governing bodies adjusted their boundaries. While the city charter does require the council to undergo redistricting from time-to-time, it isn't tied to the unveiling of the U.S.

Census every 10 years like legislative and congressional redistricting is.

"The Council shall, by ordinance, fix the boundaries of the three wards and amend the same whenever required by changed circumstances to assure fair and equitable representation to the citizens of Pendleton," the charter states.

Mayor John Turner said he would be open to talking about redistricting, including gerrymandering, but it wasn't high on their priority list. On a scale of 1-10, he rated the issue somewhere between 5-7 in terms of urgency.

McDonald, who represents Ward 2 on the council, said the council is always open to hearing from groups about issues they care about, but she reiterated Turner's point that the council had been focusing on other topics. She added that this was the first time she had heard about the issue of prison gerrymandering since she started on the council and would need to do more research before forming an opinion.

"It hasn't come up as a priority, as a thing to do or a thing to change," she said.

McDonald said she would be interested in studying Pendleton's population after the 2020 census, especially since Ward 3 has attracted several new housing developments over the past decade. Brandsen, Ward 2's other councilor, wrote in a text message that she was traveling and deferred to other city officials.

A complicating factor for redistricting is that filing is already open for the 2022 city council elections under the current boundaries. McDonald has already filed to run for a third term.

Salmon:

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"We have a lot of work, we've only just begun really, but I know from our experience from over here in the Clearwater that it can be really successful," Johnson said.

Between 1980 and 1996, just 89 coho salmon were counted at the Lower Granite Dam. Due to the reintroduction efforts, the fish have returned in higher numbers — though far removed from their previous numbers, before the construction of the eight dams between the Pacific Ocean and the confluence between the Clearwater River and the Snake River at Lewiston.

"I want to put it in context, though," Johnson said, "because you know coho used to be very abundant up here just like spring chinook and fall chinook and steelhead. So, historically, there were probably about 200,000 coho that returned here (to the Lostine River). So we're super excited — happy to see this return of coho this year, but also want to contextualize that this is a mere fraction of what it used to be like here."

According to Johnson, the program to reintroduce coho to the Lostine is based on the tribe's success in the Clearwater Basin. The tribe reintroduced the salmon to the Clearwater and Snake basin areas in the late 1990s. Before then, the fish were extinct in the area.

The fish were bred from stock collected at the Bonneville Dam; however, the next phase of the Lostine coho program will use returned fish as brood stock for the next generation of salmon, hoping to make use of the fish that made the long journey home.

"Those fish have survived," Johnson said. "They've not only migrated out as juveniles for 600 or so miles over eight dams to the

ocean, but then they also turned around and came back up those eight dams over those 600 miles and successfully returned, so we want to use those genetics, you know that stamina from those adults for the next generation. That's what we did on the Clearwater, and it's been pretty successful."

At the same time as the record breaking coho run, a smaller number of chinook and steelhead runs have made their way back up the rivers. Steelhead trout, especially, were returning in much lower numbers than before.

Just 39,359 steelhead have made it past the Lower Granite Dam, in contrast to its 10-year average of 59,147, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The 2020 numbers for steelhead were 55,307, according to the same data.

But the reason for the coho's greater numbers have flummoxed experts.

"Coho are bonkers all the way up the West Coast, and I don't really know why to be honest," said Kyle Bratcher, a fish biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "There's something going out in the ocean that's changed that's allowed them to do well."

The effects of the recent drought, as well, could play a part in the years to come, Bratcher said, though the effect will be muted by regional environmental factors and the current La Niña weather system.

It also will be some time before the impact of the drought can be accurately gauged, as the lifecycle of chinook, coho and steelhead vary — steelhead and chinook can take up to six years to make a return, while coho's much shorter lifespan of two to three years means that it can act as a bellwether to ocean and weather conditions.

"We get a little bit lucky some-



Rick Swart/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Coho salmon swim in Eagle Creek, Oregon, in October 2009.

times because we have the Wallowa Mountains here, we tend to still keep a little cool water around even when it gets pretty bad," Bratcher said. "We didn't see any of that this year but where it's going to hurt us — the drought — is probably in the next two or three years, especially in the return."

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

The Lostine River flows north from the Minam Lake near Lostine on Nov. 18, 2021, in the Wallowa Mountains. A record breaking coho salmon run has made its way through the Pacific Northwest, and some are returning to the Lostine River, which saw its largest coho salmon return after decades of the Nez Perce tribe's extirpation efforts.

