

# Short session takes on big ag issues

Capital Press

SALEM — The Oregon Legislature convenes in the coming weeks to pick up where it left off last year. The Capital Press takes a look at proposals lawmakers will consider and what they mean to agriculture.

## Overtime for farmworkers

Farm groups and labor advocates are expected to be preoccupied with agricultural overtime wages during Oregon's month-long legislative session that begins on Feb. 1.

The prospect of eliminating the agriculture industry's exemption from higher overtime wages got a lot of attention from lawmakers last year, but attempts to negotiate a compromise have been complicated by litigation over the issue.

A lawsuit alleges the exemption lacks an underpinning in state law and isn't constitutional because farmworkers are excluded from "privileges" enjoyed by other employees.

It's been an unsettling experience for farm representatives, who were negotiating in "good faith" with labor advocates who were "looking at us in the eye" while planning the legal attack, said Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of public policy for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

The overtime issue has

been presented as a "racial equity agenda item," but in reality, ending the exemption wouldn't put more money into farmworkers' pockets, she said. "It's just not going to be the result because our members can't afford to pay more wages."

Proponents of ending the overtime exemption seem to believe farmers can just raise their prices, when they'd actually be forced to limit employee hours to contain labor costs, said Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

"Clearly, we need to use different words because they don't understand the price-taking side of ag," he said.

## Timber compromise

Another major natural resource proposal before Oregon lawmakers will be the compromise deal between environmental groups and the timber industry, under which logging buffers near streams would be expanded.

The agreement would also restrict logging below steep slopes to prevent sediment from reaching streams and implement other changes in the forest practices law.

The "private timber accord" was negotiated with help from Gov. Kate Brown's office. It is

anticipated to receive a "rubber stamp" from lawmakers in 2022.

"This is a legislative priority and has all the ingredients to pass," said Cooper, adding that the Oregon Farm Bureau is still studying the proposal. "I have a hard time seeing a situation where it doesn't go forward."



Cooper



Smith

Certain aspects of the accord, such as increased regulations for beaver removal in forests, have made the Farm Bureau nervous about the implications for agriculture.

"It could be a reason to adapt that policy to other lands," said Lauren Smith, the group's director of government affairs.

The Farm Bureau also plans to advocate for the resumption of a program under which private landowners pay an assessment to raise money for predator control by USDA's Wildlife Services. The program was allowed to sunset during the previous legislative session after animal advocates opposed extending it.

"There doesn't seem to be an avenue for our communities to manage predators," Smith said.

## Climate legislation

There's likely to be action on climate legislation, if Democratic lawmakers try to enshrine an emissions reduc-

tion plan from the state's Department of Environmental Quality in law, Stone said.

"I expect there will be a bill to codify whatever the Climate Protection Plan rules say," he said. "I'd be surprised if the majority did not try to push something through legislatively."

## Other issues

Farm groups will probably lay the groundwork for future legislative proposals by initiating discussions about real estate tax reform and water storage, he said.

County tax assessors sometimes differ in what they consider taxable real property, such as stationary equipment for greenhouses and seed cleaning, Stone said. The goal would be to make those rules uniform.

As for water supplies, a grant program created several years ago is largely focused on efficiency and hasn't been used to develop water storage facilities, as intended, he said. "That needs to be taken down to the studs and rebuilt."

In light of the politically charged atmosphere and the governor's race, it's likely that agriculture will have to fend off "just plain stupid" proposals intended to score points with certain voters, Stone said.

"2022 I would hope it would be boring, but I fear it may not be," he said of the session. "I just don't want anything truly harmful to get any oxygen during a short session."

# Fishtrap prepares for move to its new home

By ANN BLOOM  
For the Willowa County Chiefstain

and strong for the long run," she said.

ENTERPRISE — Fishtrap, Willowa County's premier writing organization, is preparing for a new chapter in its life as it anticipates moving into its new home on Enterprise's Main Street after 20 years in the Coffin House.

The reason for the move, according to Fishtrap Director Shannon McNeerney, is the nonprofit had outgrown the Coffin House, which would have needed major renovations to make it work.

"It needed a lot of effort, time and money," she said, and that was when the decision was made to sell the house. And, the whole process was, she said, "like magic."

The sale, though, of the Coffin House was conditional on being able to find and lease a new space that fit all the organization's needs. Fishtrap had a list of what it wanted: a place that was centrally located, fully accessible under the Americans with Disabilities Act, with room for an office, a kitchen and at least 1,000 square feet of event space. The house was listed in June and by July they had an offer.

"We're using the proceeds from the sale of the Coffin House to make sure (Fishtrap's) programs are healthy

The new location is in the downstairs of the historical Bowlby Building as well as the adjacent former barber shop, giving the organization a large, 4,000 square foot office space that will house administrative space, a kitchen, a conference room area and a large venue for programs such as Fishtrap's popular Fireside readings, Winter Fishtrap, The Big Read and writing workshops. The space also will be made available to local organizations for their events, McNeerney said.

The building housing the new Fishtrap space is owned by Bill Warnock and Michele Starr, who McNeerney says, "have been remarkable to work with."

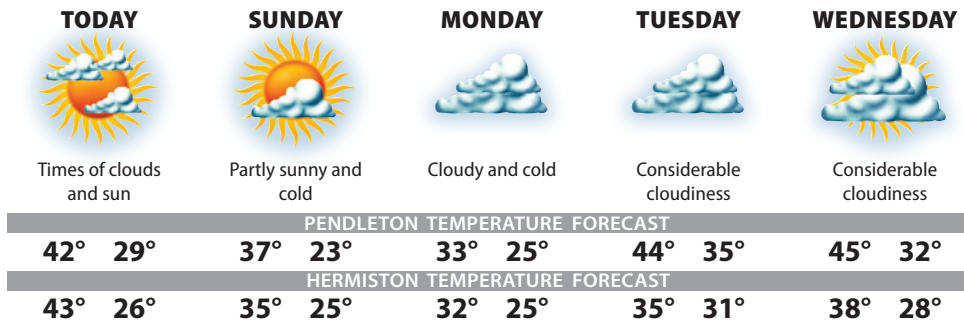
Some Fishtrap staff are working from home, and some are working from a small leased administrative office space.

McNeerney said she is, "excited about a clean, safe, beautiful space we can work in" even though, "we loved Coffin house."

McNeerney said she expects people's, "jaws to drop" when they see the fresh paint, open space and high ceilings of Fishtrap's new location. The expected move in date is April 2022 and McNeerney promises an open house.

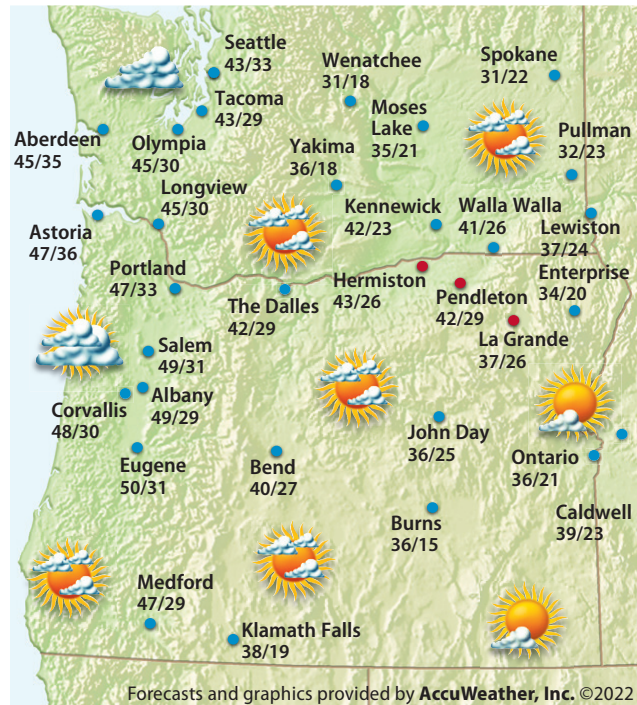
## Forecast for Pendleton Area

AccuWeather | Go to AccuWeather.com



## OREGON FORECAST

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



## ALMANAC

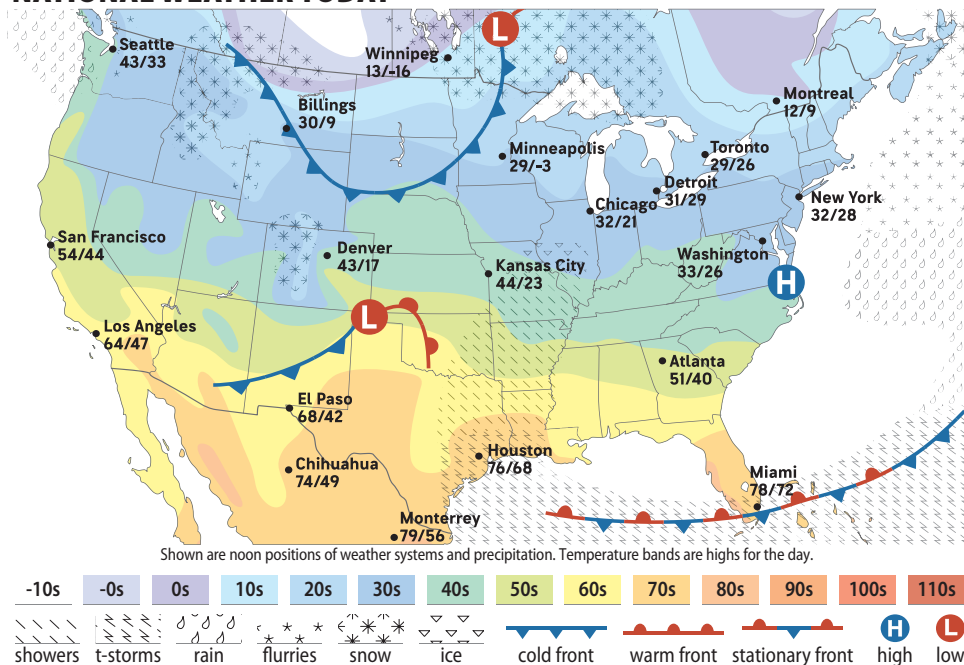
Table with weather statistics for Pendleton and Hermiston, including temperature, precipitation, and wind data.

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

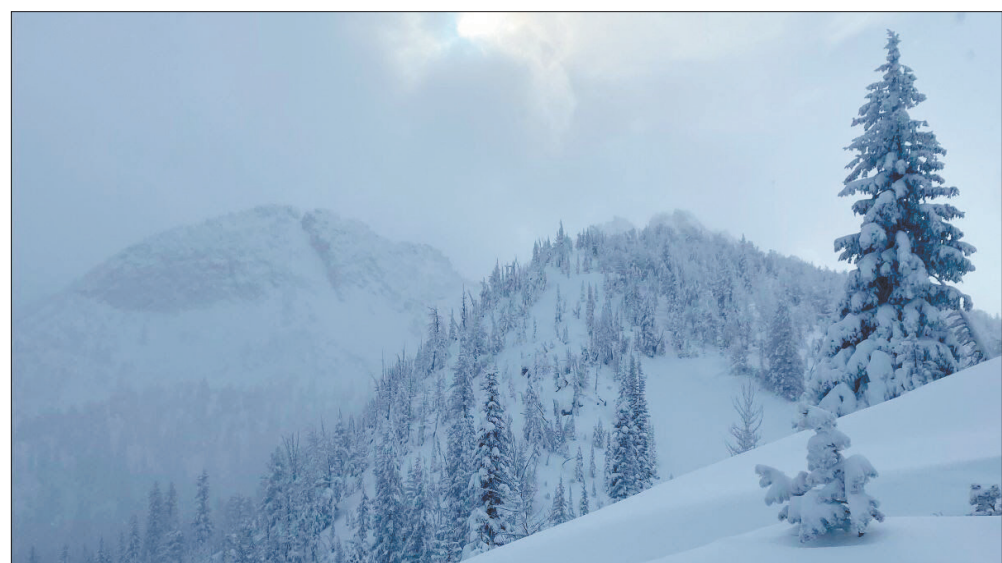
Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 85° in Key West, Fla. Low -38° in Wadena, Minn.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



## IN BRIEF



Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort/Contributed Photo

Two feet of snow has fallen in the past week of January 2022 at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

## Anthony Lakes open, but lodge closed this weekend

BAKER CITY — Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort will be open Thursday, Jan. 6, through Sunday, Jan. 9, but the lodge will be closed this weekend.

"Already short-staffed this season, Anthony Lakes has a handful of employees out due to COVID," the ski area announced in its daily report Jan. 6. "To prevent further spread and to keep our staff and community safe, we feel it is best to close the lodge. We plan to reopen again next weekend, staffing dependent."

Anthony Lakes has had 24 inches of new snow this week, although a passing warm front raised the temperature to 40 degrees the morning of Jan. 6. Colder temperatures are forecast into the weekend. The resort, in the Elkhorn Mountains about 34 miles northwest of Baker City, has a snow base of 54 inches.

## No one hurt in pickup vs. snowplow crash

JOHN DAY — A pickup ran into a snowplow on a snowy highway south of John Day on the evening of Tuesday, Jan. 4, but both drivers walked away from the crash.

The collision occurred about 6:15 p.m. on Highway 395 South near milepost 15C, at Starr Ridge summit.

According to a news release from the Grant County Sheriff's Office, James Garrett, 48, of Riverside, California, was driving north

in a 2016 Ford crew cab. The pickup started sliding as it came around a curve and met an oncoming Oregon Department of Transportation snowplow.

The snowplow driver, Todd Smith of John Day, tried to maneuver around the truck, but the pickup struck the corner of the snowplow blade and continued along the driver's side of the Volvo snowplow.

Both vehicles sustained extensive damage and had to be towed from the scene, but no injuries were reported in the crash.

The highway was restricted to a single lane for two hours until the scene could be cleared.

## Les Schwab Tire Centers celebrating 70 years

BEND — Les Schwab Tire Centers, which was founded in Prineville, will celebrate its 70th anniversary in business with a contest earning 70 winners \$700 in service certificates, the company announced Tuesday, Jan. 4.

The contest, which encourages customers to swap tire stories, runs now through Feb. 28. Customers can enter by going to lesschwab.com/70-anniversary/.

The company sells tires, brake service, alignment and shocks. The company was sold in 2020 to Meritage Group, a San Francisco-based investment firm, ending family ownership of one of Oregon's best-known businesses. It employs more than 7,000 people in more than 500 locations, according to the company.

—EO Media Group

**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.

East Oregonian logo and contact information: Founded Oct. 16, 1875 — 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211

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

ADVERTISING Regional Sales Director (Eastside) EO Media Group: Karrine Brogotti 541-963-3161

Classified & Legal Advertising Classified advertising: 541-564-4538 Legal advertising: 541-966-0824