

Major renovation of Oregon Trail Interpretive Center starts soon

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The biggest project at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center near Baker City since it opened almost 30 years ago begins March 2.

The \$6.5 million makeover is designed to turn the center, which has attracted almost 2.4 million visitors, from an energy hog to a building with a more modest appetite for electricity.

Achieving that will entail much more than cosmetic work.

The Bureau of Land Management, the federal agency that operates the center on Flagstaff Hill about 5 miles east of Baker City, has hired Hess Contracting of Preston, Idaho, to replace most items attached to its frame.

That includes installing new cement board siding, insulation, roofing, windows and doors.

The contractor also will replace the heating and cooling system for the all-electric building.

The Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, which has been closed since November 2020 due to the pandemic — work started in October 2021 to remove exhibits and other items in preparation for the project — will remain closed during the remodeling.

The upgrades are slated to be finished in the spring of 2023, but the center will stay closed for several more months while exhibits and fixtures are reinstalled.

That's a shorter duration than BLM originally expected, said Larisa Bogardus, public affairs officer for



The Oregon Trail Interpretive Center near Baker City has had more than 2 million visitors since it opened May 23, 1992. The center is getting a \$6.5 million makeover starting March 2, 2022.

Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald, File

the BLM's Vale District.

Initially the agency expected the remodeling would take more than 2 years.

The impetus for the project was a nationwide survey comparing the energy efficiency of BLM buildings, Bogardus said in 2021.

That survey, which included an inspection of the center in May

2018, earned the center the "dubious distinction" of being the agency's least efficient building, Bogardus said.

Among the findings is that the center'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 when operating had a monthly power bill averaging about \$10,000.

The remodel is estimated to reduce the center's energy use by 73%, according to a press release from the Vale District.

"We want to be good stewards of our natural resources," said Vale District Manager Wayne Monger,

whose office oversees the center. "This design utilizes high thermal insulation value materials and high efficiency heating and cooling technology to counter summer and winter energy demands of the site."

Approximately 16% of the project is funded through the Great American Outdoors Act, which allocates up to \$1.9 billion annually for maintenance and improvements to critical facilities and infrastructure in national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, recreation areas and Tribal schools.

During the extended closure, a new exhibit at the Baker Heritage Museum in Baker City, scheduled to open in May, will serve as an Oregon Trail Experience, with BLM park rangers on site to provide interpretive programs.

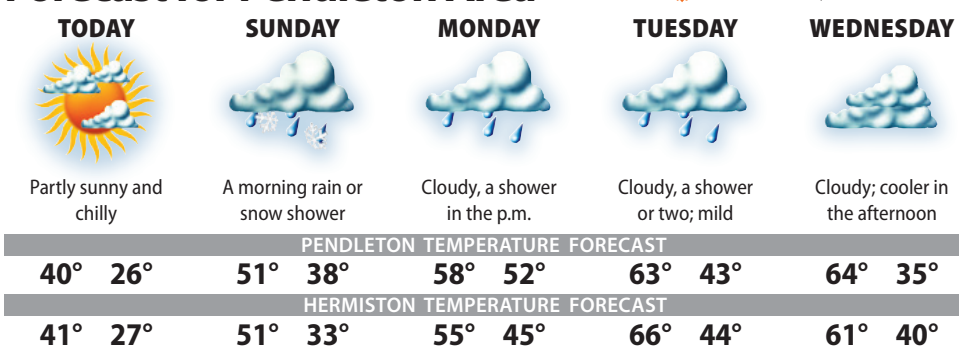
A series of living history demonstrations and other events will take place across Grove Street from the Heritage Museum at Geiser-Pollman Park.

"We recognize the important role the center plays in telling the history of Eastern Oregon and the settlement of the Pacific Northwest," Monger said.

Although the center itself will remain closed, the access road will be open to allow visitors to get to the network of paved and unpaved trails on Flagstaff Hill, which lead to Oregon Trail ruts.

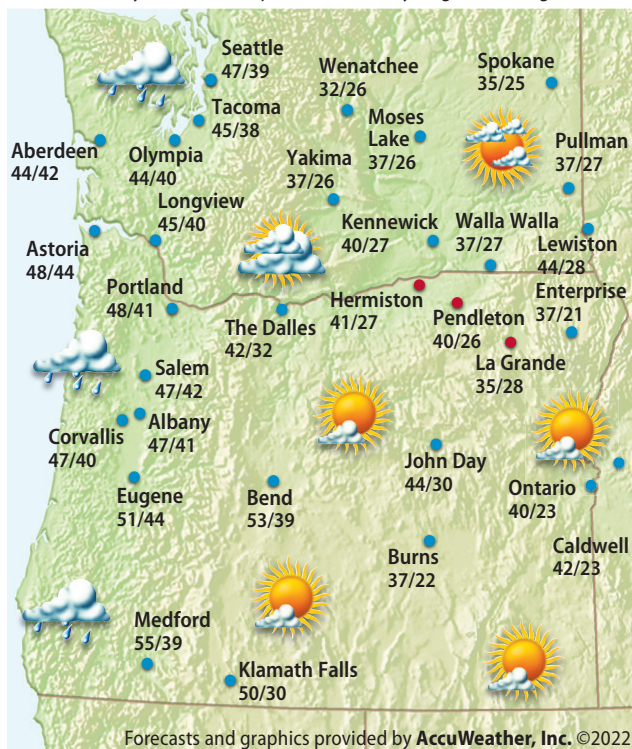
For more information and to learn more about the Oregon Trail, visit oregontrail.blm.gov or call 541-523-1843.

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	32°	7°
Normals	50°	31°
Records	68° (1932)	6° (2011)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.75"
Normal month to date 1.03"
Year to date 2.28"
Last year to date 2.99"
Normal year to date 2.57"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	40°	10°
Normals	53°	30°
Records	73° (1986)	-2° (1993)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.07"
Normal month to date 0.78"
Year to date 1.00"
Last year to date 1.08"
Normal year to date 1.92"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Sun.
Boardman	NE 4-8	SW 4-8
Pendleton	E 4-8	SSW 7-14

SUN AND MOON
Sunrise today 6:39 a.m.
Sunset tonight 5:38 p.m.
Moonrise today 4:27 a.m.
Moonset today 12:42 p.m.

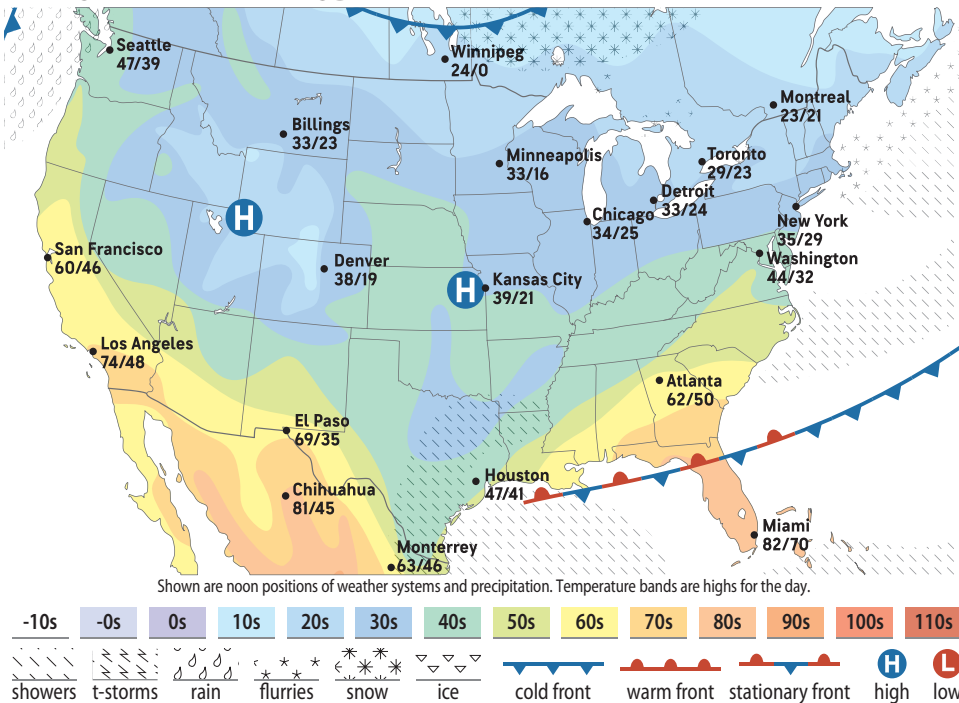
MOON PHASES
New Mar 2, First Mar 10, Full Mar 17, Last Mar 24

NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 90° in Plant City, Fla. Low -42° in Celina, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon wildfire coverage might look different next fire season

By ALEX WITTEWER
EO Media Group

EASTERN OREGON — News coverage of Oregon wildfires might look a lot different next fire season.

House Bill 4087, which would allow news media professionals to enter the scene of wildfires and natural disasters, passed the House 48-4 on Feb. 17, marking a turning point in wildfire coverage that will allow Oregon journalists to document wildfires similar to the way California journalists have for years.

"My aye vote was representative of transparency," said Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner. "I think we need to make sure the media has access to those types of generational situations, both for informing the public as to what's going on in their state, and also to capture history. For me, it's a pretty simple aye vote."

Previously, news and media organizations often have had to rely on press releases and submitted photos from government agencies. Often, coverage would come in the

form of photos of road closures and barricades, or from distant landscapes of the hellish glow from a wildfire. A prior bill that would have changed the laws regarding wildfire access died in committee during the 2021 session.

The language of the bill gives incident commanders the final discretion to bar news media from access to wildfires or natural disasters, as well as the ability to deny access to fires without an escort. If granted access, it is at their own risk and without promise of rescue.

That media escort, at times, can prove a hindrance to getting the stories from the front lines of the fire.

East Oregonian photojournalist and visuals editor Ben Lonergan knows from first-hand experience how public information officers can err on the side of caution and prevent those front-line stories from being told. In the summer of 2021, Lonergan was on assignment to get photos of the Elbow Creek Fire in Wallowa County.

"On that fire, I had an

escort, and we went in their vehicle, and they took us to all the areas of the fire that they deem safe to have us in," Lonergan said. "And we ran into some issues with that. We never made it to any spot where there was active fire-fighting. The only access we're given was to the peripherals. They drove us around and we never saw a crew on a fire line over there. In one case, they drove us to where some hot shots were staging, but they had already left, so the access we were given was very restricted."

Media personnel would be required to provide their own personal protective equipment, such as fireproof clothing and breathing equipment, and would be expected to complete the same basic wildfire fighting training that firefighters go through. The law only would apply to public land.

The Senate Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness on Thursday, Feb. 24, voted 5-0 on a recommendation for the Senate to pass the bill.

College Place police arrest man for robbery while he was awaiting trial

By JEREMY BURNHAM
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

COLLEGE PLACE — College Place police Feb. 19 arrested a Walla Walla man for robbery while he was out of jail awaiting trial on charges of stealing a vehicle from his mother.

Police arrested Raul Melgar Moreno, 23, for second-degree burglary, third-degree theft and obstructing a law enforcement officer, according to a College Place Police Department release, in connection to attempting to steal more than \$500 from the Hop Thief Taphouse, College Place.

At about 4:40 a.m. Feb. 19, officers responded to an alarm at the Hop Thief Taphouse on

Southeast Sydnee Lane. When they arrived, they saw a man step outside the building and then hurry back inside after spotting the officers, according to the release.

A call to the business owner verified no one should be in the building. After forming a perimeter around the building — with the assistance of the Walla Walla Police Department and the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office — officers began calling for the man to leave the building.

According to the release, when the man refused to leave, the man hiding under a table.

Melgar Moreno was on pretrial release for an unrelated Feb. 4 case where he's

facing charges of second-degree robbery, vehicle theft, fourth-degree assault, stolen vehicle possession and attempting to elude a police vehicle.

According to the probable cause for arrest affidavit in that case, Melgar Moreno's mother told police her son entered her room and said he was going to take the car. She said she told him not to. She told police he shoved her onto her bed and took the keys out of her purse.

He was released on his own recognizance Feb. 9.

According to the Walla Walla County Jail roster, he was in jail for his new charges as of Feb. 22. Bail has been set at \$25,000 bond or \$2,500 cash.

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