

Emergency rental assistance deadline extended

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon households behind on their rent will have a few more days to apply for emergency rental assistance because of a late infusion of \$16 million in federal aid.

The new deadline for applications is 11:59 p.m. Monday, March 21. Incomplete applications, which must be started by the first

deadline, must be completed by March 28.

The Oregon Housing and Community Services Department had announced last week it would close the online portal for applications on March 14. It had closed the portal on Dec. 1, then reopened it on Jan. 26. Since the reopening, almost 25,000 new applications have been filed in addition to thousands that have not been processed.

Under state law, tenants

are shielded from eviction proceedings for nonpayment of rent if they show proof of application to their landlords, and as long as the application is under review. Approvals are based on need, not on a first-come, first-served basis.

The \$16 million from the U.S. Treasury is in addition to \$100 million approved by the Oregon Legislature at a Dec. 13 special session, plus \$1.1 million released by the

Treasury afterward and \$13 million that the state housing agency was able to divert from housing stabilization programs.

Still, Gov. Kate Brown and Oregon's congressional delegation had urged the Treasury for \$198 million in addition to the state's original allocation of \$289 million, which the housing agency and its partners have now committed or spent to help more than 40,000

households. Oregon also has spent \$200 million in state funds approved in December 2020.

"Our message to U.S. Treasury remains loud and clear: If other states have money they can't use, send those dollars to Oregon," Jill Smith, inter director of housing stabilization for the state agency, said in a statement.

Oregon is among the top states in its share of emergency rental assistance

paid out, according to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition. The Treasury is in the process of reallocating emergency rental assistance that other states and communities failed to spend.

The state program is assisted by Public Partnerships LLC and community action agencies throughout Oregon. Five counties and the city of Portland also received federal money for rental assistance.



Audrey Comerford/Contributed Photo

An agritourism farm stand by County Line Flowers in Harrisburg.

OSU Extension Service offers agritourism course

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

CORVALLIS — The Oregon State University Extension Service is starting a new online training course this year for farmers statewide interested in starting or expanding agritourism ventures.

The purpose of the course is twofold. First, it is to help producers explore new opportunities for generating income. Second, it is to help them avoid common pitfalls of agritourism.

"As a participant, you will learn about the types of agricultural tourism and determine if it is a good fit for your whole farm business," said Melissa Fery, associate professor of practice with the Small Farms Program and one of the program's instructors.

Agritourism is on the rise in Oregon. Many farmers say it is an opportunity to make additional income, boost a farm's popularity and expose urbanites to farm life.

However, agritourism also carries risks and costs. According to Jim Johnson, land use and water planning coordinator at the state Department of Agriculture, common challenges in agritourism include land use violations, permitting problems, unhappy neighbors and liability issues sometimes escalating to litigation.

The new training course was designed in part to help farmers navigate or avoid these issues.



Comerford



Fery

The course was funded by a grant from USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture managed by the Western Center for Risk Management Education.

The curriculum was created by OSU Extension instructors Audrey Comerford, agritourism coordinator and Fery, of the Small Farms Program.

"We felt agritourism is an opportunity for farmers, but there's also a lot that goes into decision-making, including laws and regulations," said Fery. "We wanted farmers and ranchers that are considering some kind of agritourism to be able to do so on a correct pathway."

The online course, Fery said, will be self-paced so that farmers can complete it at their convenience.

The curriculum includes text, videos and worksheets about managing risk, understanding legal requirements, marketing farm businesses effectively, hospitality and customer service. Farmers will also have the opportunity to consult with course instructors.

Fery said OSU plans to offer the course long-term and eventually hopes to make it available year-round, but for

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Register:

To get more information and register for the course, visit the class website Developing a Successful Agritourism Business in Oregon or the OSU Agricultural Tourism website.

Partner organizations supporting the course include:

Travel Oregon
High Desert Food and Farm Alliance
Benton, Deschutes, Jackson, Lane, Linn, Marion and Polk counties
Oregon Farm Bureau
Willamette Valley Visitors Association
Strategic Economic Development Corporation

the first year, the course is only open to new participants this spring. The deadline to register for the 2022 course is March 31.

The cost is \$20, which pays for maintenance of the website learning platform. Scholarships are available upon request.

Fery said she's excited about the opportunity for farms to expand or begin successful agritourism enterprises. There are many possibilities, she said, ranging from a crop farm selling value-added products to a sheep rancher teaching an on-farm fiber arts class.

State panel: No new federal funds to be used for highway enhancements

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Transportation Commission has decided the state's share of flexible funds from the federal government should not go toward new highway expansions.

The commission directed the staff of the Oregon Department of Transportation to revise its options. About \$400 million in transportation money from the federal infrastructure bill, which President Joe Biden signed Nov. 15, will be divided among maintenance projects for roads and bridges, safe routes to school and improvements on state highways that function as main streets in communities.

The commission heard more comments at a meeting Thursday, March 10, after

which members refined what had been four scenarios for spending \$214 million of the \$412 million in flexible funds.

"We are committed to preserving the existing transportation network and investing in a range of improvements to reduce congestion and harmful emissions, and to support improved safety, electric vehicles, transit and local improvements," commission Chairman Robert Van Brocklin said. "The proposed scenarios will allow ODOT to invest in Oregon's transportation system in these and other important ways."

The commission will decide March 30 on the exact mix to be divided among the list of maintenance projects, known as Fix-It, plus safe routes to school and improved highways that function as main streets. It will decide

money afterward for specific projects within these categories; some projects will start this summer.

The \$400 million-plus is part of Oregon's \$1.2 billion that will come to the Department of Transportation during the next five years.

This amount counts about \$800 million the federal law earmarks for specific purposes, such as bridge repairs, charging stations for electric vehicles and programs to reduce greenhouse gases.

It excludes about \$200 million that larger metropolitan areas will get for transportation directly from the federal government. It also excludes money for broadband, water and sewer line upgrades that will not go through ODOT. Transit agencies also will share \$200 million they will get directly.

DOJ hires anti-poaching prosecutor

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Justice has hired a special prosecutor to crack down on illegal poaching.

Jay D. Hall joined the DOJ in February as a new assistant attorney general after 12 years with the Lane County District Attorney's Office in Eugene, where he made his mark prosecuting fish and wildlife crimes.

In 2010, Hall was named Prosecutor of the Year by the Oregon State Police for using the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organization statutes, or RICO, to topple an organized poaching ring that killed more than 300 deer and elk.

Capt. Casey Thomas, with OSP's Fish and Wildlife Division, said Hall will work with state troopers, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and local prosecutors to provide training and resources that will help discourage poaching.

"(Hall) brings an impressive resume to this position," Thomas said.

Before he was a prosecutor, Hall served as a sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps. He later worked for former U.S. Rep. Bill Young, a Florida

Republican, as a member of his traveling security detail and handled veteran legislative issues.

Upon returning to Oregon, Hall initially worked as a reserve deputy sheriff in Deschutes County. He went on to earn his law degree from the University of Oregon, graduating magna cum laude. From there, he joined the Lane County District Attorney's Office.

The hiring of an anti-poaching prosecutor marks the final step in a three-pronged campaign to fight poaching in Oregon.

In 2019, state lawmakers approved \$4.2 million to establish the Stop Poaching Campaign. Part of the money was set aside for education and awareness; part was used to hire four new OSP Fish and Wildlife troopers and one new sergeant; and part was earmarked for the new prosecutor.

Yvonne Shaw, campaign coordinator with ODFW, said hiring Shaw is "a big step forward in our campaign."

"This is a wake-up call for poachers," Shaw said. "There are going to be some repercussions for what they're doing."

According to the latest

data from ODFW, poachers illegally killed at least 447 big game animals in 2020 — up from 324 in 2019.

That includes 220 deer, 161 elk, 15 pronghorn, 13 bears, four bobcats, two wolves, one cougar and one bighorn sheep.

Several wolf poaching cases have also garnered headlines in recent months. Eight wolves were poisoned in northeast Oregon last year, including all five members of the Catherine wolf pack in Union County.

Two wolves were also found killed in the same region earlier this year, including one near Wallowa on Jan. 8 and one near Cove on Feb. 15.

Only a fraction of cases are reported to authorities, Shaw said. Oregon has vast landscapes and waterways, and the crimes often take place at night, which makes poaching difficult to detect.

"That is why it's so important to have this campaign," Shaw said. "We really rely on public involvement to report these cases."

Oregon relies on its Turn-In-Poachers program, or TIP, on which callers can anonymously report poaching and claim a cash reward. The program is cooperatively managed by OSP, ODFW and the Oregon Hunters Association.

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