

Wyden welcomes end to proposal to reduce care for area veterans

East Oregonian

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden announced the proposal to make the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla, Washington, an outpatient clinic is coming to an end.

Wyden in a press release Wednesday, June 29, said he welcomed the news that Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester, D-Montana, U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Washington, and a bipartisan group of senators will block the veterans Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission's proposals to reclassify the Walla Walla veterans facility as a community-based outpatient clinic and to move its 31-bed residential rehabilitation treatment program 180 miles north of Walla Walla to Spokane.

This comes as Wyden has been pressing the Veterans Administration through town halls he hosted for Eastern Oregon veterans, their families and veterans service providers to ask top VA officials about proposed VA cuts and service changes that would have gone to the AIR Commission for consideration.

Wyden shared Eastern Oregon veterans' concerns at a June 4 town hall about VA recommendations to the Walla Walla VA

medical center. "What I heard earlier this month from veterans in Umatilla, Union, Walla, Baker and Morrow counties was their deep and well-justified concern about how these proposals would undercut the quality and accessible care they earned with their service to our country," said Wyden, who also wrote a letter last month to the VA detailing the rural Oregon veterans' concerns. "The end to the process that could have led to poorer and more distant care for Eastern Oregon veterans is good news, and I'll continue to advocate for these rural veterans to ensure these ill-considered proposals don't resurface."



Central Oregon Fire Information/Submitted photo

The Rosland Road Fire, northwest of La Pine in July 2020.

Survey finds wildfire fears eased after spring rains

By MICHAEL KOHN
The Bulletin

Significant rainfall this spring noticeably greened up the Oregon countryside and appears to have calmed nerves across the state, according to a survey about wildfire danger conducted in June by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.

The survey, conducted from June 2-11, found that 60% of respondents felt wildfire was a threat to their local community. In May 2021, that number was 68%.

The wildfire perception survey interviewed 1,446 Oregon residents 18 years or older. The survey sought to gauge how concerned Oregon residents are heading into what officials have warned could be a dangerous wildfire season.

In mid-May Gov. Kate Brown warned that this year's fire season could be extreme due to drought and climate change. But May

and June were relatively cool and wet in the Pacific Northwest, lowering drought levels across the region.

Oregon's only remaining swath of exceptional drought — the highest level of drought according to the U.S. Drought Monitor — is located in an area straddling Crook and Jefferson counties.

"Considering the extremely wet spring, it is not a major surprise that when asked about their area of Oregon, Oregonians' concern for wildfire has decreased a bit since May of last year," according to a statement from the polling group.

While the fear of fire danger in the short term has been slightly lowered, 88% of respondents expect wildfires to increase over the next 10 years. Nine out of 10 Oregonians (92%) see wildfires as a serious threat to "people living in Oregon."

However, not as many people believe they are in harm's way. Just six out of 10 respondents (60%) see wildfire as a very or somewhat serious threat in their local community. Five out of 10 people (53%) see wildfires as a direct threat to themselves and their families.

When asked about their greatest concerns over the impacts of fire, most Oregonians (83%) said they were worried about the health impacts of smoke. Loss of wildlife and fish habitat registered as the second-highest level of concern among Oregonians, with 82% saying they had great or moderate concern.

Eight out of 10 (79%) of respondents had moderate or

great concern about the loss of public forestland.

"We already lost so many trees to logging, we should try to save as many as we can," said Mandee Seeley, a Deschutes County resident.

Another Deschutes County resident, Robin Johnson, said the best way to deal with fires is for fire officials to attack and extinguish them instead of letting forest fires burn naturally.

"The fires can quickly get out of control so they need to be managed," said Johnson. "In addition, the smoke impacts larger portions separate from the fire causing respiratory issues, and the fire may take out habitat."

Survey results show that 75% of Oregonians agree with Johnson. The remaining respondents lean toward or agree with, the idea of allowing a wildfire to burn out naturally.

A respondent from Polk County, who declined to be named, was more blunt when it comes to managing wildfire.

"We just can't let our state burn to the ground," she said.

Just how many Oregonians have had to evacuate due to wildfire? According to the survey, 19% of respondents said they have evacuated their homes due to wildfire. Some 43% of respondents said they have an evacuation plan in place.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is an independent, nonpartisan organization. The center partnered with Pamplin Media Group and the EO Media Group, which owns The Bulletin.

The survey has a margin of error of about 2.5%.

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	7:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	9:00pm	Family Fun at the Thunder Room — DJ
THUR	9:00am	Tough Enough to Wear Pink Walk
	9:00am	Steer Tripping, Three Rounds
	2:00pm	Slack — Arena
	6:00pm	Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
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	6:00pm	Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	7:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	9:00pm	All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center
	9:30pm	Live Music and Dancing at Thunder Room — Whiskey Creek
SAT	10:00am	Grand Parade — Main Street
	2:30pm	Slack — Arena
	6:00pm	Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	7:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	9:00pm	All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center
	9:30pm	Live Music and Dancing at Thunder Room — Whiskey Creek
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