

## Employment in the region approaching pre-pandemic rate

The most recent update to the regional employment situation shows a much stronger job performance than initially estimated.

The Employment Department revision was based on the more accurate indicator of payroll records.

For Jefferson County, including the reservation, the employment numbers are beginning to approach the pre-pandemic levels of February 2020.

The unemployment rate for October, for instance, was 5.8 percent, down from 6.2 percent the month before. For comparison: The February 2020 unemployment rate in the county was 4.1 percent.

Total non-farm employment rose by 70 jobs in October. For Jefferson County, job gains over the past year have been diverse, with strong ad-

ditions in local government, retail trade, leisure and hospitality, and manufacturing.

The only notable job losses were in private education and health services that shed 30 jobs from October 2020.

Deschutes County: The adjusted unemployment rate dropped significantly in October to 4.9 percent from 5.2 percent in September.

The unemployment rate remains higher than before the first impacts from Covid-19 in February 2020 when it was at a record low of 3.3 percent; however, levels of unemployment are now well below the 10-year average of 6.9 percent.

Crook County: The unemployment rate dropped significantly to 6.2 percent in October, down from 6.6 percent in September. The pre-pandemic rate for Crook was 4.4 percent.

## Around Indian Country

# Yakama win appeal in 42-year case

State authorities cannot regulate the number of acres the Yakama Nation irrigates on its reservation, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled last week.

The ruling was in response to three appeals in the massive 42-year case known as Acquavella, which adjudicated water rights throughout the Yakima River Basin.

The state Department of Ecology initiated the water-rights case involving 2,100 complainants in 1977. It concluded in May 2019, when a Yakima County Superior Court judge approved an order that divided the basin into multiple subbasins, each with specified water rights.

Three parties filed appeals challenging portions of the order.

The Yakama Nation challenged the state's authority to regulate the number of acres it could irrigate. The Rattlesnake Ditch Association

claimed the order did not consider expert testimony on the loss of water during delivery, resulting in users getting less than their fair share. And the Ahtanum Irrigation District argued that two natural creeks were unfairly deemed irrigation canals that couldn't be tapped outside the irrigation season.

Last week, the state's highest court decided in favor of the Yakama Nation and the Rattlesnake Ditch Association, but not the Ahtanum Irrigation District.

The final order approved by a Superior Court judge served as an umbrella over multiple suborders defining each subbasin and its respective water rights.

The Yakama Nation took issue with the final order because it limited the tribe's irrigable land to 120,000 acres. The tribe said there's more irrigable land than

that on the reservation and argued the federal government, not the state, has authority to set those limits.

The Yakama reservation is served by the Wapato Irrigation District, which is operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Nation pointed to the order defining the tribe's water right, which set no limits and conflicted with the final overarching order called the Final Schedule of Water Rights, or FSOR.

Ecology conceded and issued a brief saying as much.

"We accept Ecology's concession and remand to the superior court to strike the acreage limitations in the FSOR and reiterate that federal law governs how diverted water may be allocated within the Project," justices wrote in their unanimous decision.

# A Year in Review ~ 2021 ~ (from page 4)

## March

After prayer, Ms. Whitford and 103 other tribal members from throughout the Columbia River Gorge received first doses of the Covid-19 vaccine at the Celilo Longhouse.

It was a vaccination event that required collaboration between two states, four counties, the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission, a number of social service agencies and transportation partners.

Leading the effort was one of the Oregon Health Authority's partners, One Community Health—OCH for short—based in Hood River and The Dalles. In March 2021 school news:

**Madras High School athletics** are back in full swing, after a year of teams not being able to compete. The March 2021 sports include volleyball, boys and girls soccer, cross country and football. Traditionally, these are fall sports, now in play because school was closed last fall.

School sports activities are possible because the Jefferson County Covid-19 risk level in March improved from 'extreme' to 'high,' and then last week to 'medium.' Elsewhere:

The **Warm Springs Senior Wellness Center** will remain closed until further notice due to water damage from vandalism. The flooring needs to be replaced, so Senior program staff in March have focused on removing everything from the building; and beginning to remove the damaged flooring tiles.

All programming, including the Seniors Meal program, are on hold. The cooks are planning to use the Agency Longhouse kitchen, in order to resume the Meals program, which many Elders rely upon.

The Senior Meals are provided weekly to hundreds of people in the Warm Springs community.

The water damaged happened when someone turned on an outside faucet of the Seniors building. The water apparently ran during the weekend of March 12-14, until staff arrived and turned it off. And this:

Mt. Hood Meadows hosted the **Tribal Ski Day** in March. This



March covid vaccination event at Celilo Village.

year the event saw turnout of about 30 tribal members. Meadows provided the ski and snowboard gear, lessons, lift tickets and lunch. Attendance was down a little this year, as the bus space was limited for safety. Meanwhile:

Across much of Indian Country, Native American tribes are seeing some of the **most successful Covid-19 vaccination campaigns** in the U.S.

Three Indigenous principles have helped provide the impetus to get vaccinated, according to activist Allie Young, a citizen of the Navajo Nation:

Recognizing how Native Americans' actions will impact the next generations.

Acting in honor of ancestors who fought to ensure their sur-

vival, and elders who carry on their traditions and cultures. And holding on to ancestral knowledge.

Many Native American tribes—in Oregon, for instance, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Siletz Indians, and Umatilla Tribes—are seeing great success with their vaccination clinics.

## April

Oregon's U.S. Senator Ron Wyden stopped at the Warm Springs Media Center in April to broadcast his **virtual town hall meeting**. "I would rather meet with people eye to eye," Sen. Wyden said. But with the covid restrictions, he said, the next best option is a Facebook Live broadcast, during

which he fielded questions from the Warm Springs and Madras communities.

For the Confederated Tribes, the first topic of discussion was the water infrastructure on the reservation. Sen. Wyden, with Senator Jeff Merkley, are the primary sponsors of the Western Tribal Water Infrastructure Act, which would help address the tribes' water, and some other infrastructure needs. This bill recently crossed a major hurdle toward becoming law; so in related April 2021 news:

Tribal Council Chairman Raymond Tsumpti Sr., and other tribal leaders, advocated to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for passage of a **Western tribal infrastructure bill**.

The Senate committee then approved the bill, sponsored by Oregon's U.S. Senate delegation. This is encouraging news, as on average only one in four bills are reported out of committee.

Infrastructure needs on the reservation exceed \$40 million, with immediate improvement to the watery system estimated at \$5-\$6 million, Chairman Tsumpti said. Investment in infrastructure could lead to economic development and employment for the membership, Mr. Tsumpti said.

The Senate first heard the proposal to fund Western tribal infrastructure—inspired in large part by the condition of water system serving the Warm Springs Reservation—two years ago.



Sports returned in March 2021, with the year starting with the fall sports, including football.

The Western Tribal Water Infrastructure Act would provide up to \$62 million specifically for long-neglected Western reservation infrastructure. In other March news:

Like last year, there will be no **Pi-Ume-Sha Treaty Days Powwow** this year. Elders made the decision in April at the Root Feast, held safely this year outdoors at the Community Center Pavillion area.

The artwork of **Lillian Pitt** was featured in April at the Columbia Center for the Arts. Ms. Pitt is among the most highly regarded Native American artists in the Pacific Northwest. Born on the Warm Springs Reservation, Lillian is a descendant of Wasco, Yakama and Warm Springs heritage.

The Museum at Warm Springs in April hotsed **Sacred Reflections: The Art of Umatilla Artist Ellen Taylor**.

Ms. Taylor is renowned for her Contemporary Native American paintings, a description of her style being: "Picasso meets Native American type of Contemporary art in Andy Warhol's living room..."

By the latest count, as of mid April, the Indian Health Service at the Clinic had provided 2,268 primary doses of **Covid-19 vaccination**. In addition, IHS had provided 1,828 secondary doses.

Some of these vaccines were administered to qualifying members living off the reservation. However, most have gone, and are going to people of the immediate reservation community.

With the vaccination numbers steadily increasing, there is cause for optimism. Meanwhile, the obligation to continue the safety measures—for yourself, family and community—is more important than ever, as some end finally may be coming into view. In education news:

With many safety precautions in place, the Jefferson County **School District 509-J schools** early this year began the second term on-site. This was an achievement, as less than a third of the schools in the state were able to re-open on site. In the 509-J district, 80 percent of students chose to return to in-person learning; so the demand was obvious.

The April jobs report for the region shows something of a surge in employment—the strongest monthly jobs gain in year, since the first summer of the pandemic.

More **Review** in the next *Spilyay*