

# Local & Region

## Judge blocks public land grazing permits issued to the Hammonds

SALEM (AP) — A federal judge has blocked the grazing permits issued to father and son ranchers who were the focus of a battle about public land.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports that Judge Michael H. Simon issued a temporary restraining order Tuesday, halting the permits granted to Dwight and Steven Hammond by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke before he left the administration of President Donald Trump.

Environmental groups had sued over the permits, arguing they were granted in violation of Bureau of Land Management policies.

The Hammonds served jail time for setting fires on federal pastures in Eastern Oregon. They became a cause celebre for brothers Ryan and Ammon Bundy in

2016 when a federal judge brought the Hammonds back to jail to serve a longer sentence.

The Bundys led a takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Oregon as a protest of federal land-use decisions and policies.

President Donald Trump pardoned the Hammonds last year. And on Jan. 2, Zinke approved grazing permits for the father and son.

In their complaint, environmental groups led by Western Watersheds Project said Zinke issued the permits on his last day in office and that granting the permits overrode environmental concerns with the land and the Hammonds' use of it.

The Hammonds' "past violations of the

terms and conditions of their livestock grazing permit included arson during extreme fire weather situations that resulted in the destruction of important habitat for greater sage grouse and the spread of the fire-prone invasive weed cheatgrass," the groups argued in their May 13 complaint.

Government attorneys countered that the environmental groups were attempting to interrupt "longstanding practice" involving cattle permit management. They argued the plaintiffs had a high bar to climb when attempting to "prevent cattle from moving from one allotment to another."

Simon granted a temporary restraining order and will revisit the legal issues in late June.

## Report: Oregon's foster care system needs 'extensive work' on safety issues

By Sarah Zimmerman  
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon's troubled foster care system still needs to undergo "extensive work" if it wants to adequately address child safety issues, according to a new report released Wednesday from the secretary of state's Office.

But a lack of funding could stand in the way of any major progress, and the report notes the state's Department of Human Services will need an expensive overall requiring hundreds of new staff members plus years of dedicated investments from legislators and community members.

"There is nothing more important than the wellbeing of children," Secretary of State Bev Clarno said in a statement. "DHS is moving in the right direction, but there is still work that needs to be done to ensure proper staffing, suitable foster homes and residential facilities, and a better overall culture."

The report itself is a follow-up to a 2018 state audit that found systemic issues in the way the DHS manages the

approximately 7,500 foster children in its care. Child welfare workers, overburdened with high caseloads, had little to no time to meet in person with the children in their care. Out of a lack of quality foster care homes, the department has been forced to keep children in hotels, refurbished juvenile jails or in out-of-state, for-profit facilities where child welfare advocates say kids were neglected and left vulnerable to further abuses.

The agency has weathered years criticism and has recently been slapped with a federal lawsuit alleging that DHS has failed to shield children from abuse.

The secretary of state's office notes that DHS has taken some positive steps, working to improve workplace culture and expand training opportunities for caseworkers. But the report notes that problems still remain.

Progress going forward could be more difficult, as the office cautions that "uncertain funding for improvements could undermine those ef-

forts."

The report stresses that reducing caseworker turnover and workload is likely the "most important" step in addressing the flaws within the foster care system, but it's also the most expensive.

The Secretary of State's office estimates that the department would need an additional 570 caseworkers and 800 support workers to meet its staffing needs, far more than even DHS' original estimates. That, the office admits, would require "extensive funding."

It's a tough ask, especially as legislative budget leaders are looking to make 5% cuts across nearly all state agencies.

Gov. Kate Brown recommended spending \$762 million on foster care in her proposed budget late last year, which is \$56 million more than what the agency needs to maintain existing services. But her budget, which prioritizes recruiting foster parents and expanding placements for high-needs youth, notably doesn't include

## Lawmakers seek to crack down on racially motivated 911 calls

By Sarah Zimmerman  
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon moved to crack down on racially motivated 911 calls on Monday, responding to a series of publicized incidents across the country where predominantly white civilians called the police on black people going about everyday activities like napping or barbecuing.

Victims of those police calls would be able to sue the caller for up to \$250, under a measure overwhelmingly approved by the state Senate.

The move is a joint effort by the

Oregon Legislature's only three black lawmakers and is meant to "shine a spotlight on an issue African Americans have known for far too long," according to sponsoring Rep. Janelle Bynum.

"When someone gets the police called on them for just existing in public, it sends a message that you don't belong here," said Bynum, the only black member of the House.

A black family in Oakland, California, had the cops called on them for barbecuing in the park. A Yale graduate student was questioned for sleeping in her dorm's common

room. And a pair of black men were arrested in a Philadelphia Starbucks after one of them tried to use the restroom, sparking public outcry and the closure of 8,000 stores across the country for "racial bias" training.

Bynum proposed the legislation after being on the receiving end of such a call. She was canvassing door-to-door for her reelection campaign last year when a woman called 911 because Bynum looked "suspicious."

She said although she was able to get an apology from the woman, she

realized that most people have no way to hold these callers accountable.

Victims of these calls must be able to prove the caller had racist intent and that the caller summoned a police officer to purposefully discriminate or damage a person's reputation.

That's difficult to prove, said Sen. Alan Olsen, a Republican and one of the few critics of the bill. He adds it could discourage people from reporting crime, making "our communities less safe."

Sen. Lew Frederick, a black law-

maker and one of the measure's co-sponsors, said people could still call the police if they suspect a person is committing a genuine crime.

People of color fear police for reasons a predominantly white Legislature could never understand, Frederick said. Unnecessarily dispatching the police only heightens those tensions between police and the black community.

"It's not just an inconvenience when a police officer stops me," he said. "When a police officer stops me, I wonder whether I'm going to live for the rest of the day."

### OREGON BRIEFING

#### Oregon to become 15th state to grant electoral votes to popular vote winner

SALEM (AP) — Oregon has voted to become the 15th state to grant its electoral college votes to whoever wins the popular vote across the country.

The Oregon House sent the governor a measure to join National Vote Interstate Compact. It's a pledge between states to ignore the Electoral College and essentially overhaul the way the nation elects presidents.

The agreement would only kick in when enough states join to reach 270 electoral votes. That's the number needed to ensure the presidency.

Supporters say the current system encourages presidential candidates to focus their attention on only a handful of battleground states. They say a popular vote system would ensure that all votes are treated equally.

Gov. Kate Brown has indicated she will sign the measure.

#### Bill makes it easier for people convicted of marijuana offenses to clear records

SALEM (AP) — Those with outdated marijuana convictions will be able to have their records expunged faster under an Oregon bill approved by the House.

Lawmakers voted 42-15 Tuesday to ease some of the bureaucratic hurdles involved in setting aside marijuana convictions that occurred before the state legalized the drug in 2015.

Those seeking expungement will no longer have to pay a fee nor will they have to provide fingerprints or undergo a background check.

Rep. Janelle Bynum says those with outdated convictions have trouble securing housing and employment and that they are "still paying the price for actions that we have decriminalized."

Bynum, the only black member of the House, adds that this issue disproportionately affects people of color. The ACLU reported in 2013 that blacks were 2 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession in Oregon than whites.

The Senate already approved the measure but has to approve a technical change before it heads to the governor.

#### Deschutes County prosecutor cited for leaving his baby in backseat of car

BEND (AP) — Officials say a Deschutes County deputy district attorney has been cited and put on administrative leave after police found his baby in the back seat of a car outside his office.

The Deschutes County District Attorney's Office said Tuesday that Bend police discovered the baby in a car seat inside the parked car Friday.

The district attorney's office says deputy district attorney Evander McIver apparently forgot that his sleeping child was in the car when he went to work.

The child was uninjured.

Police cited McIver with misdemeanor child neglect and the incident is under review by the Oregon Department of Justice.

McIver in a statement called it the worst mistake of his life and that no matter the fallout to him, he's grateful that his son is happy and healthy.

## Reclassification of radioactive waste draws critics' ire

By Nicholas K. Geranios  
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — The U.S. government on Wednesday reclassified some of the nation's most dangerous radioactive waste to lower its threat level, outraging critics who say the move would make it cheaper and easier to walk away from cleaning up nuclear weapons production sites in Washington state, Idaho and South Carolina.

The U.S. Department of Energy said labeling some high-level waste as low level will save \$40 billion in cleanup costs across the nation's entire nuclear weapons complex. The material that has languished for decades in the three states would be taken to low-level disposal facilities in Utah or Texas, the agency said.

"This administration is proposing a responsible, results-driven solution that will finally open potential avenues for the safe treatment and removal of the lower level waste," Energy Undersecretary Paul Dabber said. "This will accelerate cleanup and reduce risk."

The agency will maintain standards set by the independent Nuclear Regulatory Commission, "with the goal of getting the lower-level waste out of these states without sacrificing public safety," Dabber said.

Critics said it's a way for federal officials to walk away from their obligation to properly clean up a massive quantity of radioactive waste left from nuclear weapons production dating to World War II and the Cold War.

The waste is housed at the Savannah River Plant in South Carolina, the Idaho National Laboratory and Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state — the most contaminated nuclear site in the country.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democratic presidential candidate, and state Attorney General Bob Ferguson said the Trump administration is showing disdain and disregard for state authority.

"Washington will not be sidelined in our efforts to clean up Hanford and protect the Columbia River and the health and safety of our state and our people," they said in a joint statement.

The new rules would allow the Energy Department to eventually abandon storage tanks containing more than

100 million gallons of radioactive waste in the three states, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The change means that some of the "most toxic and radioactive waste in the world" would not have to be buried deep underground, the environmental group said.

"Pretending this waste is not dangerous is irresponsible and outrageous," group attorney Geoff Fettus said.

Tom Clements of Savannah River Site Watch, a watchdog group for the South Carolina nuclear production site, called the reclassification of waste "a cost-cutting measure designed to get thousands of high-level waste containers dumped off site." He said moving the waste to Utah or Texas is a bad idea involving "shallow burial."

The old definition of high-level waste was based on how the materials were produced, while the new definition will be based on their radioactive characteristics — the standard used in most countries, the Energy Department said.

The old definition said high-level radioactive waste resulted from a military production stream, Dabbar said. That meant, for instance, that all the waste from plutonium production at Hanford was classified as high level.

It was a "one-size-fits-all approach that has led to decades of delay, cost billions of dollars, and left the waste trapped in DOE facilities in the states of South Carolina, Washington and Idaho without a permanent disposal solution," the agency said.

Hanford was established

by the Manhattan Project during World War II to make plutonium, a key ingredient in the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, Japan.

The nuclear site 200 miles southeast of Seattle contains about 60% of the nation's most dangerous radioactive waste that's stored in 177 aging underground tanks, some of which have leaked.

Cleanup at Hanford has been underway since the 1980s, at a cost of more than \$2 billion a year.

The Energy Department said it would immediately begin studying one waste stream at the Savannah River Plant to see if it should be reclassified as low-level waste.

"We are excited about reducing the risk faster in South Carolina as a result of this," Dabbar said.