

Wallowa County motels, RV parks dispel rumors of COVID-19 refugees

By Bill Bradshaw
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Rumors that Wallowa County is being flooded with visitors fleeing the COVID-19 pandemic in more populous areas appear to be just that — rumors.

Several motels and RV parks in the upper Wallowa valley said they have either fewer bookings than normal or at least no hordes.

Spokesmen at Enterprise motels, the Wilderness Inn and the Ponderosa Motel, confirmed that.

Jaden Hazzard, general manager at the Wilderness Inn, said it has fewer than normal bookings.

Kelly Noble, manager at the Ponderosa Motel, said the few customers they have are families taking advantage of school closures to break free of being cooped up at home.

“They decided to take the time with their families and go hiking,” Noble said.

She said her customers aren’t taking the so-called coronavirus flight too seriously.

“Folks who are traveling think it’s somewhat of a joke,” she said. “They’re just bonding as a family.”

Noble said the Ponderosa staffers have strict protocols in place to do their best to prevent the spread of any contamination. When a customer leaves a room, staffers air it out for three hours before even entering. Then they use a disinfectant spray



Bill Bradshaw / Wallowa County Chieftain

An empty parking lot at the Ponderosa Motel in Enterprise is testimony that helps dispel rumors of hordes of out-of-county visitors coming to Wallowa County to escape the COVID-19 outbreak. The manager there confirmed that room bookings do not reflect the rumors and they have protocols in place to keep all rooms extra clean.

similar to that which hospitals use to kill both airborne and surface germs. They also use a hospital-grade sanitation procedure for laundry, she said.

Noble said she believes those at highest risk of infection — particularly the elderly — are generally staying home.

Todd Morrow, owner of the Log House RV Park and Campground — Enterprise’s lone RV park — said he, too, has seen no evidence of people fleeing coronavirus. He said his bookings are down considerably from previous years and the few customers

he does have are locals who regularly book.

Raylene O’Connor, co-owner with husband Mike of the Bronze Antler Bed & Breakfast in Joseph, said their four-room B&B is empty and they’ve blocked their online booking system until early April.

“We’ve pretty much closed because of the coronavirus,” she said.

Marcy Hamilton, owner of 5 Peaks RV Park in Joseph, said that although her park is empty right now, she’s expecting things to pick up soon. She has just a couple reservations booked for the middle of

April and more for May.

But she’s noting that the closure of state and federal campgrounds may be a mixed blessing for private parks.

“I would imagine that those of us in the county are going to pick up with full-time RVers because, after all, where are they going to go?” she asked. “Unless we’re mandated that we can’t take them, I’m going to take them because I need the money and they need a place.”

But how to limit the spread of novel coronavirus?

“We’ll have to wear gloves handling money, I guess,” she said.

Governor: ‘Gravely concerned’ about state’s ability to deliver basic services

By Gillian Flaccus
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Gov. Kate Brown said Tuesday that she is “gravely concerned” about Oregon’s ability to deliver basic services over the next six months to a year because of the economic fallout from statewide closures, massive lay-offs by affected businesses and stay-at-home orders aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

“The bottom line ... is that we have far more needs than we have resources and the economy is tumbling down and we don’t know what that will look like until we have the forecast in mid-May,” she said in a conference with reporters.

“I am gravely concerned about our ability to deliver basic services over the next six months to a year given the drop in revenues and that’s why I am encouraging the Legislature to be extremely fiscally prudent,” Brown said.

Also Tuesday, the Oregon Health Authority said three more Oregonians had died, bringing the state’s death total to eight. Eighteen more cases were confirmed, bringing the state total to 209.

Brown plans to call a special session of the Legislature as early as next week to earmark \$250 million for the COVID-19 response and to ensure there is enough money for the upcoming wildfire season, she said.

The full damage to Oregon’s revenue won’t be clear until mid-May, when the revenue forecast comes out. State lawmakers have also expressed concerns, saying a spike in unemployment means far less money coming into Oregon coffers through an income tax.

A decision on whether to push back the state’s April 15 tax filing deadline for Oregon returns should come by the end of the week, she said.

Oregon’s economy was booming before the arrival of COVID-19, with unemployment rates at record

“It is going to be really challenging over the next few months to get the resources to implement those recommendations.”

— Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, talking about a roposal to overhaul the state’s child welfare system



lows and a \$1.5 billion tax surplus. That triggered Oregon’s unique “kicker” law which gave Oregonians a tax surplus credit that can be claimed on state income tax returns.

The state budget approved by the Legislature last year provides \$85.8 billion in total funds for the 2019-2021 bien-nium, an increase of \$7.8 bil-lion — or nearly 10% — over the previous budget.

One casualty of the state’s revenue woes will likely be an overhaul of the child welfare system, which came under fire for placing foster care children in out-of-state facilities where they were mistreated. Recommendations on how to reform the system that were made in the wake of the scandal could be affected, Brown said.

“It is going to be really challenging over the next few months to get the resources to implement those recom-mendations,” she said. “I just have to be up front with people.”

Brown also said Tuesday that the Oregon Medical Board had implemented emergency rules to make it easier for retired or inactive doctors and health care work-ers to return to the job and for volunteer-only doctors to resume working for pay.

Those who practice out-of-state can now practice in Oregon without previous restrictions.

The move could free up as many as 500 providers statewide, although it’s up to individual practitioners to decide if they want to go back to work, she said.

“We’ve got retired folks who are willing to reactivate their licenses. You’re literally putting your lives on the line to protect Oregonians and we are incredibly grateful,”

she said, speaking directly to healthcare workers.

Brown has previously ordered all schools statewide to close until April 28. Restaurants and bars are also closed for dine-in service, but can offer carryout or delivery. And Brown’s executive order on Monday means all Orego-nians must stay at home if at all possible.

Grocery stores, pharma-cies and other essential businesses will remain open during the shutdown, but a huge swatch of businesses from nail salons to gyms to bowling alleys were closed. Outdoor playgrounds, basket-ball courts and sport courts are also shut down.

It’s unclear when that order will be lifted, Brown said Tuesday, and it could also be made more restrictive if people don’t comply.

For most people, the new virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast major-ity recover.

Oregon’s sixth COVID-19 death was a 78-year-old man in Clackamas County, who tested positive on March 15, and died March 22 at Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center. He had underlying medical conditions.

The seventh death was a 63-year-old man in Mult-nomah County, who had un-derlying medical conditions and was not hospitalized at the time of death. He tested positive on March 16, and died March 23.

Oregon’s final death was a 90-year-old woman in Wash-ington County, who tested positive on March 19, and died March 23 at Providence

St. Vincent Medical Center. She had underlying medical conditions.

— Kathy Hedberg, Lewiston Tribune

REGIONAL BRIEFING

Crater Lake, Mount Rainier, other national parks closed to the public

PORTLAND — Crater Lake National Park, Mount Rainier National Park and several other national park sites across the Pacific Northwest have temporarily closed to the public, responding to the coronavirus outbreak that has spread across the U.S.

Crater Lake made the announcement Tuesday morning, while Mount Rainier and Olympic national parks closed on Tuesday afternoon. Park officials said rangers will remain at the parks to enforce the closure and protect the parks.

“The health and safety of our visitors, employees, volunteers, and partners at Crater Lake National Park is our number one priority,” park officials said in a news release.

Other park closures in Oregon include the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park and John Day Fossil Beds. In Washington, North Cascades National Park closed campgrounds and facilities, as well as some trailheads and access roads.

The closures come less than a week after the Na-tional Park Service said it was waiving entrance fees during the coronavirus outbreak, encouraging people to continue visiting park sites.

Idaho undersheriff says campers lured by county’s lack of coronavirus cases

GRANGEVILLE, Idaho — As Idaho County re-mains one of the few places with no confirmed cases of COVID-19 and an open courthouse, officials here are beginning to see what may become a migration of folks from other areas seeking refuge.

Undersheriff Jim Gorges told a gathering of about 16 people at the Idaho County Commission meeting Tuesday that he interviewed three couples who were camped last weekend at Shorts Bar along the Salmon River east of Riggins. One couple, he said, was from Blaine County, another from Ada County and the third from Nez Perce County.

They were here, Gorges said, to get away from the spread of the virus in other parts of the state. The cou-ple from Blaine County — where the highest number of coronavirus patients in the state is located, 40 as of Tuesday — had been quarantined at their home for two weeks. They planned to stay in Idaho County for a couple of weeks, return home and then likely come back to the Riggins area.

“We’re going to continue to see that, I’m sure,” Com-mission Chairman Skip Brandt said.

Brandt said he visited with a couple on Sunday from Walla Walla who had flown to Kooskia for lunch. There are three restaurants in Kooskia, and all remain open.

Idaho County Assessor James Zehner said his office has seen increased foot traffic in the past week from people applying for motor vehicle registrations and the circuit breaker program. Zehner said only the courthouses at Idaho, Clearwater, Adams and Owyhee counties remain open to the public.

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