

Oregon gained back over 22,000 jobs in May despite pandemic shutdowns

By Jamie Goldberg
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — The unemployment rate in Oregon fell in May, but remained historically high as the state continued to navigate the economic fallout from the coronavirus crisis.

Oregon gained back 22,500 jobs in May as the unemployment rate fell from a record 14.9% in April to 14.2% last month.

Despite the job gains in May, Oregon has still shed 243,500 jobs since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. Oregon reported a histor-

ically low unemployment rate of 3.5% in March before the unprecedented pandemic devastated the state economy.

“Historically, this loss is unprecedented and currently thousands of Oregonians are still suffering the economic realities of being unemployed,” said Anna Johnson, senior economic analyst for the Oregon Employment Department.

Along with reporting the unemployment rate for May, the department clarified that the unemployment rate in April was

14.9%, somewhat higher than the 14.2% the department had reported last month based on data from the first half of April. Oregon’s April unemployment rate was the state’s highest since it started keeping comparable records in 1976.

While the unemployment rate dropped in May, the jobless rate still topped the worst days of the Great Recession, when Oregon unemployment peaked around 12% in 2009.

Oregon’s unemployment rate in May was 1 percentage point

higher than the national unemployment rate. The national unemployment fell from 14.7% in April — the highest since the Great Depression — to 13.3% in May due to a limited resumption of economic activity, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

The drop came as a pleasant surprise after some economists predicted that the national unemployment rate could increase to around 20%, but it is important to note that the Department of Labor numbers do not factor in people who have seen their hours cut due

to the coronavirus crisis or are not looking for work due to fears and new responsibilities associated with the pandemic.

Oregon’s numbers may understate the unemployment rate as well.

“Some of the workers who were recorded as employed, but absent from work, should have been classified as unemployed on a temporary layoff,” said Johnson, about the national numbers. “If they had been properly

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Deal near on Wallowa Lake dam work

By Bill Bradshaw
EO Media Group

WALLOWA — The Wallowa Lake dam is getting closer to long-awaited repair and rejuvenation.

A memorandum of agreement that will release funding to refurbish the dam is on the brink of being signed, said Jim Harbeck, director of the Nez Perce Fisheries division in Joseph. Nez Perce Tribal Fisheries is one of four signatory groups involved.

The century-old dam was completed in June 1917. The work was described as “firm as the Rock of Ages” in a Wallowa County Chieftain article at the time. The dam, which has no fish passage, also exterminated the run of thousands of sockeye salmon that spawned in the lake each year.

In 1996, Wallowa Lake Dam was listed as a high-hazard structure by the Oregon Water Resources Department’s Dam Safety division. Measures were taken to implement immediate structural improvements to stabilize the dam, and the reservoir has been held below full pool elevation to maintain safety levels. More permanent repair and refurbishment of the dam has been a long-time goal.

Monday, Harbeck met by phone with representatives of the other involved organizations — the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. They discussed the memorandum and agreed on most points.

“We are extremely, extremely close to coming to agreement,” Harbeck said after Monday’s meeting. “On the vast majority of the MOA, there’s agreement across the board. I’m hoping that within a week’s time there will be a document ready to be signed.”

The memorandum is critical because last year the Oregon Legislature passed and Gov. Kate Brown signed a bill that included a \$14 million appropriation for the dam — contingent on the signing of the MOA. Another \$2 million is still being sought from other sources, Harbeck said.

The \$16 million project pro-



Blane Hayes, caretaker of the Wallowa Lake Dam for the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District, looks up at the dam Friday, June 12, as water from the lake flows through at about 400 cubic feet per second.

“This is a win-win. It’s a win for fish as well as people and it’s a win for farmers and irrigators.”

Jim Harbeck, director of the Nez Perce Fisheries division in Joseph.

vide the dam with a facelift and extensive refurbishment, said Dan Butterfield, irrigation district president.

Mort McMillen, project manager for design and execution of the project, said plans are not to completely replace the century-old dam. McMillen works for McMillen Jacobs Associates of Boise.

He is a Wallowa County native who grew up on a ranch near the Silver Lake Ditch. He said the plan is to modify the existing structure by improving the spillway, adding fish passage, adding more concrete for weight, replacing the five conduit gates with new gates and



Water from Wallowa Lake flows through the Wallowa Lake Dam at about 400 cubic feet per second early Friday, June 12. The dam is slated for a \$16 million refurbishing next year that will include some form of fish passage.

upgrading the electrical and instrumentation.

In addition to restoring the dam itself, Butterfield said fish passage is a must. The dam has no fish passage at all.

But that won’t necessarily mean a fish ladder.

Freezing water in the winter can create long-term structural

problems for a concrete fish ladder, Harbeck noted.

“As the four Wallowa Lake Dam stakeholders conclude the MOA process, our attention will turn to the fish passage issue,” Harbeck said.

Last year, at the beginning

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New vet joins Enterprise animal clinic

By Ellen Morris Bishop
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — Brooke Greenshields never thought about being anything else than a veterinarian.

Now she is one, newly minted from the Oregon State University School of Veterinary Medicine, and the newest addition to the staff at Double Arrow Veterinary Clinic in Enterprise. Her license “kicked in” she said, on Monday. She doesn’t see herself working anywhere else. Everything she loves is right here.

“As a kid, I always followed around with my dad since I was tiny (Double Arrow veterinarian Randy Greenshields),” she said. “There’s never been anything else. I’ve always wanted to be a vet. I love animals and I really love working with the people.”

A 2012 co-valedictorian graduate of Enterprise High School, Greenshields participated in most rural kid activities, including 4H and FFA. She was a Tuckerette. She was on the 2011 Chief Joseph Days rodeo court. She played volleyball. But there always was the care of all creatures great and small foremost in her mind. So from high school she went to Oregon State, where she majored in animal science and then graduated in the spring from vet school.

“This kind of practice is one of the hardest,” she said. “Almost anything can walk through the door. Every day is so different. The thing I like most about practice here in a rural community is that it’s diverse,” she said.

Beginning as a toddler who hung out at Double Arrow with her dad, she’s seen “almost everything,” including llamas, alpacas, pigs and an occasional macaw, as well as captured raptors or owls in need of aid.

One of her first official patients last week was a hedgehog in need of a toenail trim.

“It’s a normal thing we do for dogs and cats, but on a hedgehog it’s a little more exciting,”

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Greenshields

La Grande Fire Department receives donation



LA GRANDE — The city of La Grande Fire Department recently received a donation of \$1,500 from Country Financial’s Paul Swigert. The fire department plans to use this donation for firefighting safety gear and public education material.

Grant provides for four-wheel drive ambulance



Contributed photo

ENTERPRISE — The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust awarded Wallowa County Health Care District with a \$152,000 grant to help Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Enterprise, purchase the county’s only four-wheel drive ambulance and its only ambulance with a neonatal transporter. Before the grant, the hospital was relying on emergency helicopters to make transfers for all patients in remote areas, but extreme weather conditions sometimes prevented helicopters from reaching patients or making safe transfers. The neonatal specialized equipment will allow the hospital to transport high-risk and critically ill newborns for the first time.