

Economic forecast grim were Elgin plywood plant to close

■ Boise Cascade announced recently that it might close or reduce hours at the plant

By Kaleb Lay
The (La Grande) Observer

ELGIN — If the Boise Cascade plywood plant in Elgin closes this year, it could cost Eastern Oregon 446 jobs, nearly \$21 million in labor income and more than \$78 million in economic output within a year.

That’s according to an economic impact analysis conducted by the Eastern Oregon Center for Economic Information, a division of the Eastern Oregon University College of Business.

“The reason I wanted to do something on this is really just to bring people to the table so that they can figure something out, because it would be catastrophic for our region,” said Scott McConnell, an economics professor at EOU who led the forecasting project.

Boise Cascade announced it might close or reduce hours at the plywood plant in Elgin — which employs 230 people — after a permitting dispute with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality over dioxin-contaminated wastewater broke out in late October 2020.

The EOCEI found the closure of the Elgin facility would have far-reaching effects across Eastern Oregon, but Union County would bear the brunt of the blow.

“Not only will the economic effects affect the lumber and plywood industry, but local area restaurants, schools and grocery stores will feel the economic impacts of this closure as well,” the report stated.

In the fallout of the mill’s closure, according to the analysis, 76% of the job and economic output losses would fall on Union County, particularly in Elgin. That comes to



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Vapor trails through the air the morning of Oct. 22, 2020, at Boise Cascade’s plywood plant in Elgin. The wood products company has announced it could reduce workers’ hours or even close the plant, at least temporarily, in 2021. A new economic analysis predicts major losses in Union County and Eastern Oregon if the mill shuts down.

339 jobs, almost \$16 million in lost labor income, more than \$59.6 million in lost economic output and about \$79,600 in lost tax revenue at the county level.

But the effects of the Elgin plant’s closure would extend across the region. The analysis found that total losses in Union, Baker, Wallowa, Malheur, Umatilla, Grant and Harney counties would be 446 jobs, just shy of \$21 million in labor income and almost \$78.4 million in economic output.

McConnell said most of the additional losses would be felt in Umatilla County.

The commercial logging industry would lose 52 jobs as an indirect consequence of an Elgin mill shutdown, and another 14 would be lost in support activities for agriculture and forestry. Crop farming, truck transportation, hospitals, restaurants and

even real estate also could lose jobs.

The report estimated that tax revenue across all affected counties would drop by more than \$195,000 at the county level, more than \$920,000 at the state level and almost \$2.5 million at the federal level.

“This analysis shows that, along with the direct and indirect economic loss, there will be significant economic losses throughout the region due to the ‘multiplier’ effects of the lost incomes,” the report stated. “These effects will be felt by businesses of all types, primarily within Elgin, but throughout Union County and the greater region.”

Importantly, the analysis did not account fully for the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using data from the second quarter of 2020, the EOCEI found the mill’s closure could yield even greater

losses than were predicted in the analysis.

“There is evidence that the impact could be potentially greater with new COVID numbers,” said Cedric Riel, an EOU economics student who helped develop the analysis. “That’s a point of emphasis for me, is that this is developed off of 2018 economic data. With the new COVID data, there’s evidence that the indirect employment loss increased by a factor of 12.”

The COVID-19 pandemic did not reach its state of protracted severity in Union County until the fourth quarter of 2020, which suggests the pandemic could exacerbate the effects of the mill closure. Sarah Buddingh, another student who worked on the EOCEI analysis, agreed.

“The really scary thing is that it could be so much worse,” she said.

STATION

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The new 7,800-square-foot station, which will replace a structure built in the 1960s, will be built in the northwest portion of a two-acre property the Fire District owns in Halfway, adjacent to the Pine Valley Fairgrounds and near Pine Haven Cemetery.

Dawson wrote that construction is slated to start this summer, and that the project should take about a year to finish.

She said the Pine Valley station, which will include five equipment bays with room for the Department’s vehicles and equipment, will be similar in size to one built recently in Richland for the Eagle Valley Fire Protection District.

The current fire station can’t accommodate all the equipment, and it’s also inefficient to heat, Dawson wrote.

The new station will also have restrooms, office space and a training room. There will be a paved parking area and potentially a helicopter landing pad for

emergency medical flights.

“The Pine Valley Rural Fire Protection District is an all-volunteer organization that provides firefighting services for the City of Halfway as well as the surrounding community,” Dawson wrote in her email. “The nearest fire station is in Richland. Because of the remote, rural location, PVRFD volunteers are often the first responders to fires on public lands (BLM, USFS) within a 20-mile radius. The PVRFD acquired the vacant land for the proposed fire station in 2015.”

NEGLECT

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The donkeys are now being cared for in the Keating area, and the other animals are being tended by volunteers with Best Friends of Baker.

Unless a security deposit or bond is posted within 72 hours of the scheduled hearing that would repay all costs incurred for the care of the two donkeys from Jan. 7 to the trial date in the matter, the donkeys would be forfeited, the petition states.

The charge of second-degree animal abuse, a Class B felony, alleges that Gould failed to provide minimum care for the animals.

In an affidavit filed in court Thursday, Baxter stated that “The dogs, cats and chickens were housed in cages that had feces several inches deep. The dogs and cats appeared to be in poor health. The donkeys’ hooves had not been clipped in quite some time, causing the donkeys to not be able to walk in a normal manner.”

Baxter added that “though the chickens were being held in deplorable conditions, the State is not pursuing charges for the chickens.”

Oregon governor accuses Trump administration of ‘deception’ in supplies of COVID-19 vaccines

By Gillian Flaccus
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said on Friday, Jan. 15 that the state’s efforts to increase COVID-19 vaccinations for those over 65 and teachers have been thrown into disarray because of “deception on a national scale” by the Trump administration.

Brown said in a statement on Friday morning that she was told late Thursday by Gen. Gustave F. Perna, the leader of the “Operation Warp Speed” federal vaccine effort, that states will not be receiving increased shipments of vaccines from the national stockpile next week “because there is no federal reserve of doses.”



Brown

“I’ll be pressing for answers. New leadership can’t come soon enough.”

— **U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., referring to the announcement that states won’t receive increased shipments of COVID-19 vaccines as federal officials had said**

Oregon Health Authority Director Patrick Allen wrote in a letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar late Thursday that the change in dose allotments, if true, would derail Oregon’s plans.

“Those plans were made on the basis of reliance on your statement about ‘releasing the entire supply’ you have in reserve. If this information is accurate, we will be unable to begin

vaccinating our vulnerable seniors on January 23rd as planned,” he wrote.

Brown said she was “shocked and appalled.”

During a press conference on Friday afternoon, Brown said vaccinations of teachers would begin Jan. 25, and starting Feb. 8, people 80 and older would be a priority.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said the news was “completely unacceptable” for Americans counting on the vaccines.

“I’ll be pressing for answers,” he said in a tweet Friday. “New leadership can’t come soon enough.”

On Thursday, Jan. 14, officials from the Oregon

Health Authority announced that vaccination sites had met the goal of administering a total of 12,000 coronavirus vaccine doses a day. The state had administered a cumulative total of 173,037 first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccines as of Friday.

At Mary’s Woods Senior Living, a retirement community in the suburbs of Portland, the news hit hard.

Several residents at the retirement’s live-in care facility have COVID-19, and some in its independent living apartments, in a separate area of the campus, are terrified the virus could spread to them soon.

Teen accused of causing damage exceeding \$46,000 in Portland protest

PORTLAND (AP) — A teen demonstrator arrested two weeks ago is accused of causing more than \$46,000 in damage at a Portland protest, police say.

The 15-year-old Columbia County boy is accused of burglary, rioting and other charges, according to Portland police. Police said he was arrested on a warrant during a gathering that began Dec.

31 and that he was being held in a Columbia County juvenile detention center as recently as Tuesday.

Surveillance footage showed the boy committing crimes during the demonstration, which was declared a riot, according to police.

Police didn’t say specifically what damage the boy is accused of causing.

But they have previously said

that “severe damage” was caused to two Starbucks locations.

Other businesses also had windows shattered, photos provided by police showed. Authorities served a search warrant this week for the clothes the teen wore during the gathering, according to police.

It wasn’t immediately known if the teen has a lawyer.

RESTRICTIONS

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McGuire said he did so while the county was in the extreme-risk category from Dec. 3-31.

He will continue to offer takeout meals, and keep open the drive-thru window he and his wife, Sandy, installed in March when the state first imposed restaurant restrictions.

“It’s nice to have options, but not everyone wants to do takeout or use the drive-thru,” Dave McGuire said.

Although he acknowledges he’s defying the governor’s orders by allowing limited indoor dining, McGuire said he will continue to follow recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Oregon Health Authority, including requiring employees to wear masks, and diners to wear masks when they aren’t eating or drinking. He said he will also ensure there is space between groups of diners.

“Our customers’ health is number one on our list,” McGuire said.

He said he has not had any contact with state officials about incurring fines or other penalties for failing to comply with the regulations.

Oregon OSHA has received at least five complaints about the Oregon Trail Restaurant defying state rules, according to the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services.

McGuire said he’s concerned not only about how 10 months of restrictions have harmed his businesses — he and Mark Linderman also own the adjacent Oregon Trail Motel — but also the ripple effect of the pandemic throughout the local economy.

“This is affecting all of us, it’s not just restaurants, bars and fitness centers,” McGuire said.

He thinks more business owners might refuse to comply with all regulations because their financial survival could be in jeopardy.

“As this progresses more businesses are being backed into a corner,” McGuire said.

Dylan Glock, who owns the Squeaky Stirrup in Baker City, where he sells saddles and horse tack, agrees with McGuire that restrictions on restaurants can affect other types of businesses — his included.

Glock said on Friday that many of his customers are ranchers who live outside Baker City, and when they plan a trip to town they like to combine their shopping and other needs with a restaurant meal.

“These people don’t come into town if they can’t get a cheeseburger,” he said.

Glock said he also derives some of his business from people who walk a few feet down the sidewalk on the north side of Broadway Street from El Erradero restaurant, which is next door to his shop.

That source of business has diminished considerably while El Erradero has been restricted to takeout meals, Glock said.

He also believes, as McGuire does, that business restrictions contribute to an atmosphere of fear that discourages people from leaving their homes — and patronizing local businesses.

“People just aren’t out and about,” Glock said.

McGuire said the widespread economic harm prompted him to form, on Dec. 23, the Eastern Oregon Business Association LLC.

He said he paid the \$100 filing fee to the Oregon Secretary of State’s office because he believes “we should all stand together.”

McGuire said one of his chief frustrations is that although state officials have frequently cited private parties and other social gatherings as a significant source of COVID-19 spread over the past two months, state restrictions are more stringent for restaurants, bars and fitness centers, among other businesses, compared with retail shops and grocery stores.

“I just don’t understand why we are targeted,” McGuire said. “I don’t think they have a reason.”

Glock said he supports McGuire’s efforts to promote solidarity among businesses in Baker County and around the region as they lobby against restrictions that Glock contends are illogical.

“This is not sustainable,” Glock said. “I’m more than happy to help everybody fight it. It’s the biggest farce ever pulled on the American people.”