

## OREGON TRAIL

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Larisa Bogardus, the Center's acting director, announced in late January that the building, one of Baker County's major tourism draws since it opened on May 23, 1992, would be closed, likely in January or February 2022, and remain closed for about 2 1/2 years so workers can renovate the building to make it more energy efficient.

The project, which will cost at least \$3 million, includes replacing the Center's roof, siding, insulation and heating and air-conditioning systems.

Bogardus said the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC) is the least-efficient building in the BLM's inventory, with a monthly electricity bill averaging about \$10,000.

Bogardus also said that BLM officials were working on plans to have a temporary "Oregon Trail Experience," while the Center is closed, and that the temporary site would "absolutely be in Baker City."

In their letter to Bushue, Oregon's senators wrote that the plan "would provide for co-locating (Center) exhibits and staff with the Baker Heritage Museum in Baker City."

The county-owned Heritage Museum is at 2480 Grove St., just east of Geiser-Pollman Park. The museum is in the brick building that formerly housed the Baker City natatorium.

"The staff from both the Museum and the (Center) will collaborate to curate a unique

experience, including potentially expanding events and activities to a city park across the street," Wyden and Merkley wrote in their letter.

Bogardus said she couldn't talk about any details, but she confirmed that BLM and Baker County officials have been meeting to discuss the proposal.

Bill Harvey, Baker County Commission chairman, emphasized on Friday that although county and BLM officials are "working on" an agreement, none has been reached.

Harvey said he believes the proposal could be beneficial to both parties and to the county's tourism economy, for which the Interpretive Center is an integral part.

The senators wrote that although they "fully support" the renovations designed to conserve energy at the Interpretive Center, "there is a powerful economic argument to maintaining a solid NHOTIC presence during the facility renovation."

The Center has attracted a yearly average of almost 44,000 visitors since 2008, and the senators, in their letter, note that "in 2019, tourism visitors spent \$48.4 million in Baker County."

"We recognize and appreciate the spirit of collaboration and partnership the Vale District BLM staff have brought to working with the community and with the Baker County Heritage Museum," the senators wrote. "We urge you to support this innovative solution that allows the much beloved interpretive center to maintain a presence and support the local community."



Baker County Heritage Museum/Contributed Photo

Some exhibits from the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center could be moved temporarily to the Baker Heritage Museum next year when the Center is closed for a major renovation project that will take more than two years.

## COVID

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Holly Kerns, a public information officer for Baker County, notified the Baker City Herald that the OHA report was in error. The agency later corrected the mistake, clarifying that one, not two, Baker County residents had died after testing positive.

Four county residents who tested positive have died since Feb. 26.

In addition to the 85-year-old man who died March 6, a 64-year-old woman died on March 7 after testing positive on Feb. 18. She also had underlying conditions.

An 87-year-old woman and an 88-year-old man both died on Feb. 26, two days after testing positive. Both had underlying conditions, according to the OHA.

An increase in cases and in the county's test positivity rate from Feb. 21 through March 6 resulted

in the county moving from the lowest of the state's four risk levels to the moderate category, the second-lowest, on Friday, March 12.

The county will remain at moderate risk through at least March 25.

The county had 44 new cases during the most recent two-week measuring period.

For the first five days of the current measuring period — March 7-20 — the county has had 12 cases. The county had 20 new cases for the first five days of the previous two-week measuring period.

To drop back to the lowest risk level, the county must have fewer than 30 cases during the measuring period, and a positivity rate below 5%.

Baker County sponsored its third large COVID-19 vaccination clinic on Friday at Baker High School.

Even before that clinic, almost one in four of Baker County's 16,800 residents had received either a first dose (about 14.4%) or both doses (8.8%) of a vaccine.

Another 103 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which requires only one dose, had been administered in the county through Thursday, March 11.

Baker County's vaccination rate of 2,319 per 10,000 residents is the second-highest among Oregon's 36 counties.

Only Wheeler County, the state's least populated county with about 1,440 residents, had a higher vaccination rate at 3,268 per 10,000.

Vaccination rates for counties in the region include:

- Union: 1,711 per 10,000
- Wallowa: 2,190 per 10,000
- Grant: 1,602 per 10,000
- Malheur: 1,384 per 10,000
- Umatilla: 1,385 per 10,000
- Harney: 1,982 per 10,000

## Oregon needs more doses to meet Biden's vaccine goal

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon would need up to double the doses of COVID-19 vaccine it currently receives to fulfill President Joe Biden's seven-week sprint to allow all adults to be offered inoculation, Oregon health officials said Friday.

Gov. Kate Brown and top state medical experts held a press call Friday, March 12 to say they hoped to meet Biden's timeline, but would move cautiously.

Brown said she welcomed Biden's "audacious announcement."

"I will do everything I can to make it happen," Brown said.

Oregon's current staggered priority groups wouldn't match Biden's deadline until July 1.

States have the central authority over public health and Brown said

the present plan would stay in place until there was a guaranteed supply before she would unleash additional demand onto the already strained system.

Oregon officials were only recently told they would receive 200,000 doses per month, up from the previous 120,000 doses.

Asked how much more vaccine Oregon would need to meet Biden's schedule, Allen said it would "require a doubling of those doses."

"It would need to be an increase on that kind of order of magnitude," Allen said. "Maybe 300,000."

Part of the math problem has to do with the vaccines themselves. Until recently, Oregon was only receiving the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, each of which requires two shots given about a month apart.

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