

Presence of avian influenza confirmed in Oregon geese

PORTLAND (AP) — An avian flu that's spreading quickly across the U.S. has been detected in the Pacific Northwest in two backyard bird flocks in rural Oregon and Washington.

Several geese in a noncommercial flock of about 100 waterfowl died suddenly on a farm in Linn County and federal authorities confirmed Friday, May 6, that they died of the avian flu. It was the state's first case since 2015. Also Friday, authorities in Washington state received word that chickens and turkeys in a flock of about 50 birds at a noncommercial farm in Pacific County also had the disease.

All the birds in both states were euthanized Friday and the farms were put under quarantine.

The latest outbreak of avian flu hit North America in December and has led to the culling of about 37 million chickens and turkeys in U.S. farms since February. More than 35 million birds in flocks across 30 states have been affected.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has confirmed 956 cases of bird flu in wild birds, including at least 54 bald eagles. But the actual number is likely significantly higher because not every wild bird that dies is tested and the federal tally doesn't include cases recorded by wildlife rehabilitation centers.

The discovery of the avian flu in the Pacific Northwest wasn't unexpected as the virus has been spreading rapidly across the country in both domestic and wild birds, particularly waterfowl. The virus seems to be spreading as wild birds migrate north along the Pacific Flyway



Scott Olson/Getty Images/TNS

Microbiologist Anne Vandenburg-Carroll tests poultry samples collected from a farm located in a control area for the presence of avian influenza, or bird flu, at the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on March 24, 2022, in Madison, Wisconsin.

and sometimes those birds stop to rest amidst domestic flocks, said Dana Dobbs, a veterinarian with Washington state.

An infected bald eagle was found in British Columbia, Canada, in early March, said Dr. Ryan Scholz, Oregon's state veterinarian.

"The long and the short of it is the producer noticed that one day a crow flew in with some of

his chickens and the next day, he literally described that they were dropping like flies," she said. "We want to contain and eradicate this disease as soon as possible to protect our commercial poultry industry as well as some of our backyard flocks that are selling eggs and doing things like that."

The cases do not pose a risk to humans, and birds from the farms were not used for food.

Wildlife authorities in the Pacific Northwest said Friday that the virus seems to primarily affect waterfowl, but people who feed songbirds should take extra steps to clean their feeders frequently out of an abundance of caution.

There are no detections of the avian flu in commercial poultry in either state, state agriculture officials said Friday.

Blurry ballots may delay tally

CLACKAMAS (AP) — Defective barcodes on an unknown number of primary election ballots in Clackamas County will likely delay election results on May 17, election officials said.

Clackamas County Clerk Sherry Hall said last week that an unknown number of ballots have blurred barcodes that can't be read by the county's ballot-processing equipment and election workers will need to fill out new ballots by hand for those voters before they can be counted. Oregon is a vote-by-mail state.

The county includes the southwest suburbs of Portland and parts of it are in the new 6th Congressional District, which was formed when Oregon gained a U.S. House seat following the 2020 Census. A number of Democratic and Republican candidates are vying to advance to November's general election in a closely watched primary.

Election officials didn't notice the printing error before the ballots were sent to voters, Hall said. The problem isn't expected to delay the vote tally significantly, but election officials won't have a good sense of how many ballots are affected until next week.

"We have plans and procedures in place to competently and correctly respond with this situation and many others," Hall said in a statement.

"There is no better election staff than the one we have here in Clackamas County and we expect to meet all deadlines for the release of tallies and certification of results in spite of the increase in workload."

At least two election workers registered with different political parties will participate in the transferring of votes to the new ballots and election observers will be present. The county will keep the damaged ballots on file.

It's not the first time the county has had elections problems.

Clackamas County drew national attention in 2013 when a temporary elections worker filled in races left blank on two ballots for Republican candidates. Deanna Swenson, 55, received 90 days in jail and three years' probation for her actions, The Oregonian/Oregon Live reported. A citizen committee that reviewed the situation found that Hall followed protocol, but still suggested improvements to prevent something similar from happening again.

Hall, who has held the elected county clerk position since 2003, is being challenged this year by Catherine McMullen, who serves as a program specialist for the Multnomah County Elections Division and is certified as an elections administrator. The race will be on the November ballot.

Pandemic pushes Oregon's public defender system to the brink

BY GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

PORTLAND — A post-pandemic glut of delayed cases has exposed shocking constitutional landmines impacting defendants and crime victims alike in Oregon, a state with a national reputation for progressive social justice.

An acute shortage of public defenders means at any given time at least several hundred low-income criminal defendants don't have legal representation, sometimes in serious felony cases that could put them away for years.

Judges have dismissed nearly four dozen cases in in the Portland area alone — including a domestic violence case with allegations of strangulation — and have threatened to hold the state in contempt.

"We're overwhelmed. The pandemic is exposing all the problems that we have," said Carl Macpherson, executive director of Metropolitan Public Defender, a large Portland nonprofit public defender firm. "It just became abundantly clear that we are broken."

Public defenders warned the system was on the brink of collapse before the pandemic and some staged a walkout in 2019. But lawmakers didn't act and then COVID-19 shut down the courts. Now, the system is "buckling before our eyes," said Kelly Simon, legal director for the Oregon American Civil Liberties Union.

The crisis in Oregon, while extreme, reflects a nationwide reckoning on indigent defense, as courts seek to absorb a pandemic backlog of criminal cases with public defender systems that have long been underfunded and understaffed. From New England to New Mexico to Wisconsin, states are struggling to keep public defender services running.

Maine this month earmarked nearly \$1 million to hire that state's first five public defenders, with a focus on rural counties, after relying entirely on contracts with private attorneys until now.

In New Mexico, a recent report found the state was short 600 full-time public defenders. In New Hampshire, where an estimated 800 defendants were without attorneys, state lawmakers in March approved more than \$2 million to raise public defenders' salaries. And in Wisconsin, where starting pay for public defenders is \$27 an hour, there's a shortage of 60 attorney positions statewide.

"This is America's dirty little secret: Thousands of people in courtrooms all across the country go to jail every single day without having talked to a lawyer," said Jon Mosher, deputy director of the nonprofit Sixth Amendment Center.

An American Bar Association report released in January found Oregon has 31% of the public defenders it

needs. Every existing attorney would have to work more than 26 hours each week day to cover the caseload, the authors found.

"It's horrifying. I don't want to mince words about this. I am not going to make excuses for this," said state Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, who co-chairs the state Legislature's Ways and Means committee. "That being said, we can't manufacture attorneys out of thin air."

For victims, the situation is devastating and it's hurting the most vulnerable.

Cassie Trahan, co-founder and executive director of an Oregon nonprofit that works with teen and young adult victims of sex trafficking, said trust in the judicial system is fading, especially in minority and immigrant communities. Victims no longer want to come forward when they see cases being dismissed or ending in weak plea bargains to relieve pressure on the courts.

One such victim in a pending trafficking case "lives in constant fear that it's going to be dismissed," Trahan said.

Prosecutors can get an indictment from a grand jury when cases are dismissed for lack of a public defender and police will re-arrest the alleged perpetrator — but that's small consolation to victims.

"In her mind, it's like, 'Now I've outed myself, now I've talked against him and what's

going to happen if he gets off?'" Trahan said of the victim. "That's what we're seeing more of, especially in communities of color and groups that don't trust the judicial system anyway."

The Legislature recently approved \$12.8 million in one-time funding for the four hardest-hit counties, as well as a suite of legislative reforms. New contracts coming this summer will institute lower attorney case caps. And lawmakers are withholding \$100 million from the agency's budget until it shows good faith on numerous reforms, including restructuring, financial audits and performance metrics.

A working group of all three government branches will convene this month to begin tackling a "comprehensive and structural modernization" of the system.

Autumn Shreve, government relations manager for the state Office of Public Defense Services, said the pandemic finally forced the hand of state lawmakers who haven't taken a close look at public defenders in nearly 20 years.

"It's been a rag tag group of people trying to cover the case-loads year-to-year and because of that there's been a lot of past

papering over of problems," she said.

Meanwhile, the situation in the state's courtrooms is dire.

Often those going without attorneys are charged with heinous crimes that come with hefty prison sentences if convicted, making it even harder to find public defenders qualified to handle such complex cases. And those who handle misdemeanors are often young attorneys carrying 100 cases or more at a time.

"You can't keep everything in your head when you have that many clients at the same time. Even things like, you know, 'What's your current plea offer?' I can't remember that for 100 people. Or I can't remember, 'What exactly does the police report say?'" said Drew Flood, a public defender at Metropolitan Public Defender.

"This is the scariest thing they have going on in their life," he said.

Other public defender services, including private investigators and legal advisors, have also reached a breaking point.

Renardo Mitchell, who is jailed on attempted murder charges, chose to represent himself after he said he didn't hear from his public defender

for five months. The legal advisor assigned by the court to help him hire expert witnesses and file motions died suddenly in February and he's been without legal counsel since then.

Two years after his arrest, he still hasn't seen all the discovery in his case, said Mitchell, 37. His public private investigator — Mitchell's only connection to his proceedings — recently had to petition the court to get more paid hours developing evidence for his defense.

"We're all innocent until proven guilty. Nothing has been proven yet — I haven't been found guilty," said Mitchell, who faces more than 22 years in prison if convicted. "Even if I did those things that they allege, I still have a right to due process of law."

The chief prosecutor in Portland has become an outspoken advocate of public defender reform for that very reason.

"The most important thing is everybody has a right to an attorney, it's a constitutional right," said Multnomah County District Attorney Michael Schmidt.

"It's an ecosystem, like a coral reef. If you take away one aspect of this system, then all the other aspects fall apart."

Recommended candidates by the Baker County Republican Executive Committee

Baker City Precincts

Precinct #1 (Vote for 5)

Sharon Bass
Brandy Bruce
Chuck Chase
Bradley Golar
Duane Morris

Precinct #2 (Vote for 6)

Nora Bass
Michael Bennett
Sue Holtz
Megan Langan
Marilyn Shollenberger
Johnny Waggoner Sr.

Precinct #3 (Vote for 6)

Tisha Bass
Bill Brown
Debbie Brown
Joanna Dixon
Ray Dixon
Jodi Furtney

Precinct #4 (Vote for 7)

Doni Bruland
John Beatty
Shelly Cutler
Ed Hardt
Rebekka Hughes
Candis Lee
Kerry McQuisten

Precinct #5 (Vote for 7)

Janice Burchard
Donn Christy
Terrie Evarts
Kimberly Hughes
Thomas Hughes
Justin Langan
Samantha Tugman

Precinct #13 - Baker County (Vote for 4)

Mike Miller
Shannon Black
Whitney Black
Tom Van Diepen

Precinct #17 - Haines (Vote for 3)

David Sherman
Kathleen Sherman
Connie Pound Lewis

Precinct #18 - Hereford (Vote for 2)

Keith L. Jones
Suzan Ellis Jones

Precinct #22 Halfway (Vote for 1)

Kathryn Grace

Precinct #24 - Pocoming (Vote for 4)

LeeAnn Haberle
Peggie Longwell
Jeff Nelson
Joshua Slack

Precinct #25 Sumpter (Vote for 1)

Jullie McKinney

Precinct #28 Unity (Vote for 2)

Patty Trost
Jim Juhola



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