

Prairie City sawmill to reopen in July

Prairie Wood Products mill previously closed amid market crash

BY STEVEN MITCHELL

Blue Mountain Eagle

PRAIRIE CITY — The parent company of the Prairie Wood Products sawmill in Prairie City intends to reopen the facility in early July and plans on hiring roughly 50 employees.

The D.R. Johnson Lumber Co., Prairie Wood's parent company, announced in a press release that the sawmill will host a job fair at Chester's Thriftway in John Day on Monday and Tuesday, June 13 and 14, from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. According to the press release, the company is looking to fill a variety of jobs, from maintenance and production to management roles in human resources.

The wages, the press release states, will be "highly competitive" with a "robust" benefits package.

The Prairie City mill was purchased in 1976 by the D.R. Johnson Lumber Co. Two years later, the family-owned company added a stud mill and planer. Then, in the late 1980s, the company installed a co-generation power plant at the Prairie Wood Products mill.

The sawmill, which operated successfully in Prairie City for more than 30 years and employed upward of 100 people who worked two different shifts, shuttered in 2008 amid a housing market crash that led to a lack of available sawlogs.

DR Johnson restarted the mill in early 2009 but shut it down permanently by the end of the year. The cleanup of the mill, which sits at the west end of Prairie City, concluded in 2019. Since then, much of the mill equipment has remained, along with the co-gen plant.

In the mill's heyday, Don (D.R.) Johnson expanded the facility's capacity by adding a computerized stud mill in 1981. In the late 1980s, Johnson followed that up by installing the co-gen power plant at the mill.



Richard Hanners/Blue Mountain Eagle, File

The Prairie Wood Products sawmill in Prairie City closed in 2008. The company announced it plans to reopen in early July 2022.

Wolves kill two sheep in Umatilla County ODFW also confirms a second attack in Grant County

East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Wolves with the Ukiah Pack killed two sheep in late May on private land in Coyote Canyon, a ravine tributary to McKay Creek, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) reported.

A shepherd found a dead 180-pound ewe and 70-pound lamb in a 5,000-acre pasture about 1 mile from his camp on May 30. The sheep had bedded down for the night in the private pasture.

The ewe had been mostly consumed, while the lamb was entirely intact. ODFW estimated both sheep died no earlier than the evening of May 29 or the morning of May 30.

ODFW personnel shaved, skinned and examined the carcasses. Both sheep suffered multiple bite punctures and pre-mortem hemorrhaging, indicating a predator attack.

The ewe had pre-mortem tooth punctures up to 5/16-inch diameter on the neck, with pre-mortem hemorrhaging in the remaining muscle tissue, according to the ODFW report.

The lamb had numerous ¼-inch pre-mortem bite punctures and multiple tears in the hide on the neck, throat and left hindquarter above the hock. Trauma to the neck penetrated to the bone on both sides and dislocated the neck. Pre-mortem hemorrhage on the left hindquarter was up to 1.5 inches deep.

According to ODFW, the severity and location of injuries to the sheep are consistent with wolf attacks.

Second confirmed depredation in Grant County

ODFW have also confirmed another attack on cattle by wolves from the Desolation pack.

On June 1, biologists examined a six-month-old, 350-pound calf in a private, 1,200-acre pasture along the Middle Fork John Day River in Grant County. The calf had a healing open wound measuring six inches by three inches on its hindquarters above the udder.

This is the same pasture where ODFW concluded that wolves from the Desolation pack had killed two calves on May 19.

Oregon botched drug treatment plan tied to decriminalization

BY ANDREW SELSKY

Associated Press

SALEM — Efforts to get millions of dollars in funding to treatment centers and related services as part of Oregon's pioneering drug decriminalization have been botched even as drug addictions and overdoses increase, state officials and lawmakers said on Thursday, June 2.

Oregonians passed Ballot Measure 110 in 2020 decriminalizing possession of personal amounts of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and other drugs — the first in the nation to do so. A person found with drugs receives a citation, like a traffic ticket, with the maximum \$100 fine waived if they call a hotline for a health assessment.

But in the first year after the new approach took effect in February 2021, only 1% of people who received citations for possessing controlled substances asked for help via the new hotline.

The ballot measure redirected millions of dollars in

tax revenue from the state's legal marijuana industry to treatment. But applications for funding stacked up after state officials underestimated the work required to vet them and get the money out the door, officials testified Thursday before the House Interim Committee on Behavioral Health.

"So clearly, if we were to do it over again, I would have asked for many more staff much quicker in the process," said state Behavioral Health Director Steve Allen. "We were just under-resourced to be able to support this effort, underestimated the work that was involved in supporting something that looked like this and partly we didn't fully understand it until we were in the middle of it."

Allen, who works for the Oregon Health Authority, told lawmakers in the remote hearing that this \$300 million project has never been done before.

Rep. Lily Morgan, a Republican from the south-

western Oregon town of Grants Pass, said lives are being lost while the state waits for the ballot measure to have a positive effect.

"Director, you've mentioned a couple of times that you're waiting to see, and yet we have overdoses increasing at drastic rates, in my community a 700% increase in overdoses and a 120% increase in deaths," Morgan told Allen. "How long do we wait before we have an impact that we're saving lives?"

Secretary of State Shemia Fagan appeared before the committee, and described her own mother's struggles with heroin and methamphetamine addiction. Fagan said Oregon remains in a drug abuse crisis, despite the ballot measure.

"When the voters of Oregon passed Measure 110, we did so because it was a change of policy in Oregon to improve the lives of people, to improve our communities," Fagan said. "And in the years since, we haven't seen that play out. ... In-

stead, in many communities in Oregon, we've seen the problem with drug addiction get worse."

Allen acknowledged there has been a "dramatic" increase in overdoses and overdose deaths statewide and attributed much of the cause to the recent arrival of methamphetamine laced with fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is so powerful that a tiny amount can kill, and illicit pills containing fentanyl.

That adds urgency to the effort to provide treatment services and harm reduction, like medication to treat overdoses and needle exchanges, that the measure also pays for, he said. Advocates point out that the services are available to anyone in Oregon, not just those who were cited for possession.

"Getting these resources out to the community is incredibly important ... not just the harm reduction resources, but people who can support folks who are at risk for overdose," Allen said. "So time is of the essence."

Ian Green, an audits manager for Fagan, said the text of the ballot measure lacked clarity around roles and responsibilities of the health authority and the Oversight and Accountability Council that the measure established.

That "contributed to delays, confusions and strained relations," Green said. He also blamed the health authority for not always providing adequate support to the accountability council.

Council co-chair Ron Williams said most of the available funds still haven't been released.

"I feel these challenges can be overcome and corrected with deliberate, intentional, focused effort and courageous, solution-oriented conversations," Williams said.

The health authority said it has offered a three-month extension to grantees through Oct. 1, who will receive a prorated amount based on their prior award and bringing the total funds disbursed to \$40 million.

Oregon dropping algorithm used in child abuse cases

Investigation showed similar system disproportionately affected Black children

BY SALLY HO AND

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Associated Press

Child welfare officials in Oregon will stop using an algorithm to help decide which families are investigated by social workers, opting instead for a new process that officials say will make better, more racially equitable decisions.

The move comes weeks after an Associated Press review of a separate algorithmic tool in Pennsylvania that had originally inspired Oregon officials to develop their model, and was found to have flagged a disproportionate number of Black children for "mandatory" neglect investigations when it first was in place.

Oregon's Department of Human Services announced to staff via email last month that after "extensive analysis" the agency's hotline workers would stop using the algorithm at the end of June to reduce disparities concerning which families are investigated for child abuse and neglect by child protective services.

"We are committed to continuous quality improvement

and equity," Lacey Andresen, the agency's deputy director, said in the May 19 email.

Jake Sunderland, a department spokesman, said the existing algorithm would "no longer be necessary," since it can't be used with the state's new screening process. He declined to provide further details about why Oregon decided to replace the algorithm and would not elaborate on any related disparities that influenced the policy change.

Hotline workers' decisions about reports of child abuse and neglect mark a critical moment in the investigations process, when social workers first decide if families should face state intervention. The stakes are high — not attending to an allegation could end with a child's death, but scrutinizing a family's life could set them up for separation.

From California to Colorado and Pennsylvania, as child welfare agencies use or consider implementing algorithms, an AP review identified concerns about transparency, reliability and racial disparities in the use of the technology, including their

potential to harden bias in the child welfare system.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said he had long been concerned about the algorithms used by his state's child welfare system and reached out to the department again following the AP story to ask questions about racial bias — a prevailing concern with the growing use of artificial intelligence tools in child protective services.

"Making decisions about what should happen to children and families is far too important a task to give untested algorithms," Wyden said in a statement. "I'm glad the Oregon Department of Human Services is taking the concerns I raised about racial bias seriously and is pausing the use of its screening tool."

Sunderland said Oregon child welfare officials had long been considering changing their investigations process before making the announcement last month.

He added that the state decided recently that the algorithm would be completely replaced by its new program, called the Structured Decision Making model, which aligns with many other child welfare jurisdictions across the country.

Oregon's Safety at Screening Tool was inspired by the influential Allegheny Fam-

ily Screening Tool, which is named for the county surrounding Pittsburgh, and is aimed at predicting the risk that children face of winding up in foster care or being investigated in the future.

It was first implemented in 2018. Social workers view the numerical risk scores the algorithm generates — the higher the number, the greater the risk — as they decide if a different social worker should go out to investigate the family.

But Oregon officials tweaked their original algorithm to only draw from internal child welfare data in calculating a family's risk, and tried to deliberately address racial bias in its design with a "fairness correction."

In response to Carnegie Mellon University researchers' findings that Allegheny County's algorithm initially flagged a disproportionate number of Black families for "mandatory" child neglect investigations, county officials called the research "hypothetical" and noted that social workers can always override the tool, which was never intended to be used on its own.

Wyden is a chief sponsor of a bill that seeks to establish transparency and national oversight of software, algorithms and other automated systems.

"With the livelihoods and safety of children and families at stake, technology used by the state must be equitable — and I will continue to watchdog," Wyden said.

The second tool that Oregon developed — an algorithm to help decide when foster care children can be reunified with their families — remains on hiatus as researchers rework the model. Sunderland said the pilot was paused months ago due to inadequate data but that there is "no expectation that it will be unpaused soon."

In recent years while under scrutiny by a crisis oversight board ordered by the governor, the state agency — currently preparing to hire its eighth new child welfare director in six years — considered three additional algorithms, including predictive models that sought to assess a child's risk for death and severe injury, whether children should be placed in foster care, and if so, where. Sunderland said the child welfare department never built those tools, however.

■ This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, is part of an ongoing Associated Press series, "Tracked," that investigates the power and consequences of decisions driven by algorithms on people's everyday lives.