

LOCAL, STATE & REGION

Most Oregonians who applied for disaster aid denied

The Associated Press

SALEM — More than 24,000 Oregonians applied for federal disaster assistance after the catastrophic 2020 wildfires and about 57% of them were denied.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports that nearly 14,000 Oregonians have been denied aid, according to data provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Oregon's high rates of denial are on par with previous natural disasters. FEMA denied about 60% of Puerto Rican disaster assistance applicants after Hurricane Maria. A study by Texas

Hausers, a housing nonprofit, found that FEMA denied a quarter of disaster applicants after Hurricane Harvey hit there.

Many of the people who have been denied assistance are low-income. Among Hurricane Harvey applicants, people whose annual incomes were below \$15,000 had a 46% denial rate. People with annual incomes exceeding \$70,000 had a 10% denial rate.

Following Oregon's wildfires, FEMA issued press releases encouraging people to appeal. They said the appeals process could be as simple as correcting a typo or providing a missing

document.

OPB reports that disaster-victim advocates and legal-aid attorneys say appealing FEMA's denials is anything but simple; and that by denying so many people the first time, the agency is using a complex bureaucratic process to weed out people who likely need the most help.

"People who've been affected by a disaster are dealing with trauma," said attorney Tracy Figueroa with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid. "They're trying to pull the documents together, and just hearing 'no' from one entity or another can shut

things down. They don't know how to navigate the bureaucracy. They're just done."

FEMA's denial letters aren't always clear about how applicants can amend their applications.

For example, several Oregon applicants said they were denied assistance because they have homeowners insurance, a common misunderstanding, since FEMA often lists homeowners insurance as a reason for denial.

Rather, FEMA can help people with homeowners insurance, but those applicants need to follow a few other steps first.



Chris Tuite/imageSPACE/MediaPunch/IPX

Talent Mobile Estates 81 was gutted during the Almeda Fire and sprayed with colorful fire retardant. The state says more than 2,300 homes were destroyed in Jackson County in September's wildfires.

Permits

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The plan received some early public criticism due to the fees, which were later dropped, although a processing fee does remain.

Nelson-Dean called the system a "thoughtful and fair method" that will allow continued access to the wilderness areas while also helping to preserve them for future generations.

"The balance of moving some of our high use onto other trails or areas will allow people to have new experiences and to also experience popular trails with more solitude and less trash and resource damage," said Nelson-Dean.

In the Three Sisters Wilderness, the trailheads include: Scott, Obsidian, Sisters Mirror, Devil's Lake/Wickiup, Green Lake/Soda Creek, Todd Lake, Crater Ditch, Broken Top, Tam McArthur Rim and Lava Camp.

In the Mount Jefferson Wilderness, the trailheads include: Pacific Crest Trail Breitenbush, South Breitenbush, Pamela Lake, Marion Lake, Duffy Lake and Jack Lake.

The affected trailheads in the Mount Washington Wilderness include Pacific Crest Trail McKenzie Pass, and Benson/Tenas.

The permitting system covers trails in the Deschutes and Willamette national forests.

Rick Creekmore, the store manager of the REI in Bend, said the permitting system is a positive step forward insofar as it will help resource protection.

"The big issue is overuse in some trailheads, and I think it will help to have that kind of system in place," said Creekmore. "I



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin file

A group of backpackers hike together while making their way along a trail in the Three Sisters Wilderness near South Sister and Broken Top.

used to live in Washington, and they had that kind of system in place, and it seemed to work really well in terms of protecting the resource and giving folks a chance to get out and enjoy the outdoors."

Creekmore, 60, said he has personally witnessed some of the negative effects of trail overuse in the Cascades, especially on popular routes such as the Green Lakes Trail.

"Impromptu campsites get set up, and too many visitors make parking difficult because it's so

busy on those summer weekends," said Creekmore. "Trash and human waste is also an issue."

But Karl Findling, a member of the Oregon Hunters Association, worries that not everyone will follow the rules.

"The wilderness permit system will just be an inconvenience and annoyance to some, who will disregard big government and bypass getting a permit in many cases," said Findling, who owns Oregon Pack Works, an outdoor gear company.

Still, he holds out hope that

high traffic areas off Century Drive, including Green Lakes, will benefit from the system, and trail users will have access to cleaner and better-maintained facilities.

Hikers can purchase a permit through the website www.recreation.gov or by calling 877-444-6777. Reservations for permits will open up on April 6 at 7 a.m. Permits are also available from the Deschutes National Forest office. But due to COVID-19, offices may be closed, so officials recommend calling ahead first.

Purchasers of the permits must

pay a \$1 per individual for day use-permits and \$6 per overnight-use permit for a trip up to 14 days. Up to 12 people can be included on a single overnight permit.

A portion of the permits for the entire season will be available for purchase on April 6. Some permits will also be available on a seven-day rolling basis. This system prevents a situation where all permits could sell out early in the summer.

Reporter: 541-617-7818, mkohm@bendbulletin.com

Lawsuit

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The claims echo those filed a week ago by fired 19-year Redmond officer Donald "Ryan" Fraker, who alleges in a separate lawsuit he was subjected to a campaign to destroy his career after he reported officer misconduct to supervisors. Copeland's case also shares claims with those made by former officer Craig McClure, who sued in 2019 for age discrimination and other claims alleging that as a 42-year-old rookie he was bullied severely by other officers. His case settled out of court last year.

The three lawsuits were filed

by Portland civil attorney Dan Thenell.

Hired by Redmond in 2000, Copeland has enjoyed a successful career that includes receiving the department's Officer of the Year award in 2016 and a reputation as one of the region's best domestic violence investigators, according to her lawsuit.

"(Copeland) had to work harder than some of her peers to achieve success as a female police officer in a male dominated field," reads the lawsuit.

In 2016, she was awarded "acting in charge" status, meaning she would be in charge if no patrol sergeant was on duty.

Around this time, Cope-

land began developing concerns over Beckwith's conduct and favorable treatment for his friends, specifically fellow members of the SWAT team and the members of the five-person elected board of the Redmond officers' union.

The lawsuit states that as Beckwith was promoted, first to sergeant then to lieutenant, he became increasingly bold in his abuse and wielded his authority to "prevent challenge or dissent."

Beckwith allegedly bragged about past instances of bullying, relaying stories about hazing fellow classmates at Idaho State University.

"Beckwith is a charismatic

speaker and would include many details in his stories, which made (Copeland) extremely uncomfortable," the lawsuit claims. "One such story involved Beckwith using saran wrap to wrap a special needs student to their bed."

Copeland states that among the officers singled out for severe bullying and mistreatment was McClure.

After McClure sued in 2019, she met with representatives of the city's insurer, Citycounty Insurance Service, and provided "significant" details about mistreatment she witnessed. In a separate meeting with her union representative, union President Derek Hicks

at one point paused the recording to take Copeland outside the room to admonish her that she was "opening doors that should remain shut."

After this, Beckwith's demeanor toward Copeland noticeably changed, she states. He would regularly work in close proximity to her and attempt to discuss the McClure case in an effort to make her feel remorse for her disclosures, according to the suit.

Following her deposition, Copeland was stripped of her "acting in charge" status in retaliation, and, she says, she was also felt forced to resign her position as a defensive tactics instructor in the depart-

ment, to stay out of proximity of Beckwith, who supervised training programs.

Copeland is asking for \$250,000 in damages.

Beckwith moved to the area to work as a sports reporter for The Bulletin before transitioning to law enforcement in 2007. As an officer, he can be seen in several widely viewed online videos interrogating murderer Edwin Lara, after his arrest in 2016 in the high-profile killing of Central Oregon Community College student Kaylee Ann Sawyer.

Reporter: 541-383-0325, gandrews@bendbulletin.com

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