



BUYING A HOME

MILLENNIALS USE CREATIVITY AND PATIENCE • BUSINESS, A5

The Bulletin

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COVID-19 in Central Oregon

BEND RESIDENTS ADJUST TO LIFE WITHOUT MASKS



Visitors stroll along Brooks Alley on Wednesday during the Bend Farmers Market.

Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

BY KYLE SPURR • The Bulletin

At Bend's Riverbend Park this week, Kira Lacin enjoyed leaving her mask at home. The Bend accountant, who moved in December from Upstate New York, would have worn a mask a few months ago as she sat in the park surrounded by joggers, bicyclists and people walking together or with their dogs. Some in the passing crowd wore masks, others did not.

But after a week of rain and cloudy weather, the sun felt nice on Lacin's face. She was comfortable without a mask as she sat on a blanket and read a book on her tablet.

"We've all been through a lot," she said. "It does feel good. As

long as people keep doing what they need to do to stay safe."

For many Bend residents, this Memorial Day Weekend feels much different than it did last year, when the pandemic was in its early stages. People feel more comfortable spending time out-

doors and many have adjusted to the social distancing and mask wearing guidelines indoors.

But those rules have changed constantly in recent weeks, which has left as much confusion as excitement. Customers at grocery stores have grown frustrated

and visitors don't know if Bend has the same mask rules as their hometowns.

"It's a very confusing time," Lacin said. "If you go into a store, you're not sure. But you kind of assume you should wear a mask."

See **Pandemic** / A7

To wear or not to wear? Mask rules leave some folks confused

BY MICHAEL KOHN
The Bulletin

Even after months of COVID-19 vaccinations, living in the pandemic is still confusing for Central Oregonians when going out to shops, restaurants, events, and everywhere in between. When buying milk at the grocery store or hiking on a local

trail, do you still need to wear a mask? You may have found yourself asking store workers this question or checking business windows for mask policy updates. We asked around to learn more about where you still need to mask up and where it's OK to leave the darn thing in your pocket.

See **Masks** / A7



Visitors fill the sidewalk along Wall Street in Bend.

Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Merkley: Money needed to avert wildfires

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley says he's hoping to use his new subcommittee chairmanship to direct federal money toward protecting and improving the nation's vast public forests.

Given the 2020 Labor Day wildfires that ravaged Oregon, and the future prospect of a drier climate in the Northwest and elsewhere, Merkley said there's plenty of work to be funded.

"We know that these more aggressively destructive fire seasons are going to keep coming our way," he told reporters on a conference call Thursday. "Fire seasons are getting longer, forests are getting drier, so we have to do a lot more at the front end to try to reduce the ferocity of those blazes. That means a lot more forest management and prescribed burns — and a lot of good jobs."

The Oregon Democrat spoke the day after he convened a hearing of the Senate appropriations subcommittee that oversees budgets for the Interior Department and related agencies, including the Forest Service, which is part of the Agriculture Department. Among the witnesses was Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen.

Merkley took over as subcommittee chairman four months ago, when Democrats became the Senate's majority party with the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris. He sits on five other appropriations subcommittees, including agriculture.

"I took the chairmanship to make the case for much more substantial investments in forest management, to support and increase fire resilience, and to have the best policies possible for the forests in fighting climate chaos," he said.

Funding priorities

Among his priorities are boosting spending on forest collaboratives and work to reduce wildfire threats, such as forest thinning and prescribed burning.

Merkley secured a doubling of spending authority, from \$40 million to \$80 million annually, in the 2018 farm bill for collaboratives. They draw together disparate interests — timber industry and environmental groups — to find ways to restore forests. But Merkley said his next goal is to get Congress to approve full funding for them in the federal budget for the coming year.

Merkley said he wants to boost spending on forest management by \$1 billion annually through work, such as thinning and prescribed burning, to reduce the prospects of catastrophic wildfires.

See **Wildfires** / A4

South Redmond Water Facility construction on time, budget

Bulletin staff report

Construction on the \$16 million South Redmond Water Facility is on-time and on-budget, according to Josh Wedding, water utilities manager for the city.

When finished in May 2022, the facility will contain a four-million gallon reservoir and the city's second booster pump, providing tap water for homes and businesses across the city. It will more than double Redmond's system reservoir capacity, Wedding said.

Although Central Oregon irrigators are concerned about drought conditions, and the new facility will draw from the Deschutes Basin Aquifer, the aquifer has enough water to support the new reservoir, Wedding said.

Only 2% of water from the aquifer goes to municipal use, like city water facilities, he said.

Still, locals should try to be more efficient with their water use, Wedding said.

"Let's do more with what we have," he said.



The interior of the 4-million gallon reservoir at the South Redmond Water Facility, shown here on Wednesday, will be fed by a 983-foot-deep well.

Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

