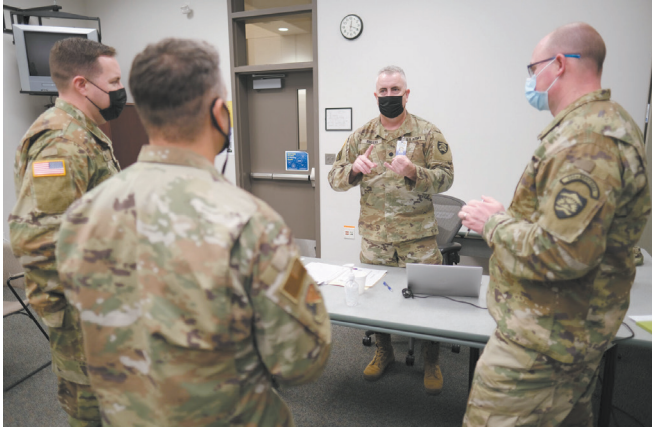


National Guard returns to Eastern Oregon hospitals

Six guard members expected for Good Shepherd in Hermiston

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group



Oregon National Guard Public Affairs/Contributed Photo

Lt. Col. Seth Rogers, hospital relief mission joint task force commander, briefs senior staff members on administrative procedures at the Anderson Readiness Center in Salem on Jan. 12, 2022.

Eastern Oregon will see a return of National Guard members to beleaguered hospitals as yet another wave of the COVID-19 virus sweeps through the nation.

Gov. Kate Brown ordered a second relief mission earlier this month in support of Oregon's hospitals. Nearly 1,200 service members across 40 hospitals were requested by the Oregon Health Authority.

The expected deployment date was anticipated by no later than Tuesday, Jan. 18. The deployment is expected to continue until April.

Hospitals set to receive aid from the National Guard include Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande; Good Shepherd Health Care System, Hermiston; Blue Mountain Hospital District, John Day; and Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Enterprise.

"Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics is extremely grateful for the guard members we will be receiving here to help us with staffing shortages in several of our key support services that have been severely impacted by the current labor market," Mardi Ford, director of communications and marketing, said. "GRH is, and always has been, proud and supportive of our military."

As before, the soldiers will be serving in nonclinical support roles, such as material handlers, equipment runners, COVID-19

testing support, custodial services and other logistical services.

"(Hospitals) were reporting that they were understaffed," said Maj. Chris Clyne with the Oregon National Guard. "The nurses and doctors — you know, the clinical care providers — were having to take out the trash and do these menial tasks, and it was getting in the way of them providing the care to patients. That way they're streamlined and they can just focus 100% on caring for the patients."

According to Clyne, each hospital in Eastern Oregon would receive an average of five citizen-soldiers.

"We have been told that Blue Mountain Hospital District is set to receive five members of the Oregon National Guard next week," Derek Daly, chief executive officer of Blue Mountain Hospital District, said. "We are thankful for these staffing resources and the support from the National Guard. We plan to utilize these team members to help in non-clinical positions, such as environmental services, across our campuses."

Caitlin Cozad, marketing and communications director with Good Shepherd in Hermiston, said the hospital is expecting six guard members to support the hospital.

Wallowa Memorial Hospital welcomed five soldiers on Jan. 17.

"Wallowa Memorial Hospital was grateful to welcome five National Guard members," said Brooke Pace, director of communications and public relations at Wallowa Memorial Hospital. "We plan to utilize this additional personnel in various departments, from Envi-

ronmental Services to hospital and clinic screening. The presence of five additional staff members helps ensure that we will continue to provide premier care to the people of Wallowa County in the face of yet another COVID-19 surge."

Close to home

But as to why the Oregon National Guard deploys soldiers to support and logistical assignments at the hospitals instead of ones with medical training has a surprising reason behind it, according to guard officials. Medical staff in the Oregon National Guard often hold positions at local hospitals for their non-military job, Clyne said.

Many citizen-soldiers will be deployed to the communities in which they live, according to Clyne.

"One of the efforts that we've been making is to try to get (soldiers) in the location where they live," Clyne said. "One of the things that we pride ourselves in is that we serve in the communities where we live. That's one of the efforts and priorities that leadership has made, (to give guard members) that chance to serve as close to

home as possible."

The omicron variant has been rapidly spreading across Oregon and the nation, driving record-breaking infection rates and leading to shortages of testing kits and long lines at drive-thru testing clinics. According to OHA data, it is the prevailing variant in Oregon as of Jan. 2, accounting for nearly all new infections. At least one sequenced infection has been traced to Eastern Oregon, according to the OHA.

Data shows hospitalizations from the new circulating variant are lower, but the higher number of people infected has led to hospitalization levels similar to the previous delta variant.

The number of hospitalized patients at Oregon hospitals due to COVID-19 is 811 and climbing, as of Jan. 14, according to OHA data. The previous peak in hospitalization was Sept. 1, 2021, with 1,178 patients hospitalized due to the delta variant.

The Oregon National Guard was called in last August to help understaffed hospitals during the delta variant surge. Those soldiers remained at the hospitals until mid-December.

USDA: Northwest wheat stocks down 43%, winter wheat planting up 3%

By MATTHEW WEAVER
EO Media Group

Pacific Northwest wheat stocks are down about 43% compared to the same time last year, according to the USDA. Regional wheat industry representatives say that's to be expected.

"The overall decline of 43% is about on par with the fact that we had a 47% drop in production," said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission. "There is just less wheat out there to start with so the decline in

stocks is not unexpected."

According to the USDA, Washington wheat stocks totaled 82.6 million bushels, down from 147 million bushels the previous year, nearly a 44% decline.

Idaho wheat stocks totaled 48.8 million bushels, down from 84.7 million bushels the year before, a 42% decline.

Oregon wheat stocks totaled 21.1 million bushels, down from 38.2 million bushels the previous year, nearly a 45% decline.

"We did not come into the year with a lot in the

bins carried over," said Amanda Hoey, CEO of Oregon Wheat. "The 2021 crop suffered due to combined drought and heat. With the lowered production levels last year, the reduced stocks on and off farm are to be expected."

Nationally, wheat stored in all positions totaled 1.39 billion bushels, down from 1.70 billion bushels a year ago, an 18% decline.

Washington winter wheat growers seeded an estimated 1.80 million acres of winter wheat for harvest in 2022, up 3% from 1.75 million acres

seeded in 2021 but the same as 2020.

"The increase in Washington winter wheat acreage is not a big surprise given much higher prices," Squires said.

Soft white wheat this week ranged from \$10.20 to \$11.25 per bushel on the Portland market.

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service occasionally adjusts seeded acreage numbers later in the year, Squires noted.

"For spring wheat, we will have to wait and see," he said. "There are quite a few

variables ... rotations, other crops and their prices and the wheat price itself. Certainly we are hoping that moisture continues to come."

Idaho growers seeded 760,000 acres of winter wheat for the 2022 crop, up 7% from 710,000 acres in 2021, and 6% above 720,000 acres in 2020 crop.

Oregon farmers planted 730,000 acres, up 1% from 720,000 acres in 2021 but down 1% from 740,000 acres in 2020.

Based on seed sales, Hoey expected to see planted acreage increase in Oregon this

year, but anticipated acres closer to the 740,000 acre range, not lower than 2020.

"The increase in planted acreage over last year was expected, in part due to response to price but also largely in response to the concerns stemming from extreme drought conditions last year," Hoey said. "For irrigated areas, wheat is a low water intensity crop option, so (it is) a good alternative for a rotation year in which producers may be concerned about the impacts from the drought to water supply."



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