

Stimulus act providing Oregon jobs

One year into the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Pacific Northwest environmental projects are moving ahead, creating jobs and boosting the economy. Projects funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) totaling \$318 million in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington are yielding cleaner air, water and land, and new green jobs.

An example of this success can be found in the City of Woodburn Safe Water Expansion. This project, using \$2.8 million in Recovery Act funds, will provide safe drinking water to residents of three modular home communities which currently receive water that exceeds EPA established safe threshold for arsenic. The safe drinking water will be provided by extending City of Woodburn water supply to these communities.

"It's been a year since President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Clearly, we are seeing positive results in green jobs," said Acting EPA Region-

al Administrator Michelle Pirzadeh. "Many projects are already changing the employment figures, and as construction season begins, we expect to see even more people back on job sites."

On Feb. 17, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, providing more than \$7 billion nationwide for environmental projects.

Oregon allocations of Recovery Act Funds:

- Clean Water Projects: \$44.7 million
- Drinking Water Projects: \$28.5 million
- Clean Diesel Projects: \$4.3 million
- Leaking Underground Storage Tank Projects: \$2.7 million
- Brownfields Projects: \$657,000
- TOTAL: \$80.9 MILLION

When the president signed the act, he directed that it be implemented with transparency and accountability. Now, anyone can visit www.recovery.gov to see how every dollar is being invested.

Grant is vital to rural fire district

From Page 1

It is difficult for Rural Fire Protection Districts to find money to replace apparatus. When the only available way is to increase the tax load of an already struggling community, capital replacement of equipment takes a back seat to local economics. Occasionally, grant opportunities like the Assistance to Firefighters Grant become available, making it possible to replace old, unreliable, unsafe equipment. It is almost the only way most rural districts are able to obtain a new engine or water tender.

The 33 year-old apparatus that is being replaced was originally owned by Don Soderback as a dump truck. It had

more than 210,000 miles on it in 1990, when it was purchased by the fire district for conversion to a water tender. The Mallory Company did the conversion work and, in 1991, it was placed in service. For more than 19 years it served the community, keeping fire engines supplied with water. Over the years, the cost of maintenance increased dramatically. More importantly, it became unsafe to drive. The opportunity to replace it is a real blessing. Our firefighters will operate more safely, the district will be better served, and surrounding emergency service providers who depend on our help will get it faster and more efficiently.

Public invited to join in potluck banquet for Chamber of Commerce, community awards

The Vernonia Area Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet and Community Collaborations will be held March 10, starting at 6:00 p.m. at the middle school cafeteria.

This is a potluck event where the public, business owners and civic organizations are in-

vited to attend. Many civic organizations recognize their volunteers at this event and the Chamber will present their Business of the Year Award.

Come learn more about what is happening in your community at this community event.

Many still need help because of economic distress

January figures released today by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) show demand for food and cash assistance continued to rise in the first month of the new year. In January, enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) rose by more than 7,800 people. Enrollment in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which provides cash assistance for low-income families with children, rose by 484 families.

Overall, Oregonians receiving SNAP benefits rose to 683,661, a 27.8 percent increase over a year ago. Similarly, families enrolled in TANF totaled 26,153, a 15.7 increase from January 2009. In the past two years SNAP households have increased by more than 53 percent and TANF by more than 37 percent, reflecting the impact of the recession.

"This economic downturn has made it more difficult than ever for Oregonians and their families to be self-sufficient," said Erinn Kelley-Siel, director of the DHS Children, Adults and Families Division. "SNAP and TANF help provide a safety net for people - helping fam-

ilies maintain stability while they find and keep jobs, protecting the health and well-being of low-income children, and supporting local economies."

To be eligible for SNAP benefits, households must earn less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level and meet other criteria. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale. For a family of four, the income limit is less than \$3,400 per month, with a maximum benefit for the same household of \$684 per month. The overall average SNAP household benefit is approximately \$243 per month. As its name implies, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits are intended to supplement a family's overall food budget, not to cover it en-

tirely.

TANF cash assistance is available only to families with children age 18 or younger. Most participants are unemployed or underemployed, or the primary wage earner is incapacitated; therefore the program provides opportunities for job preparation and on-the-job training to build personal responsibility and self-reliance. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale. A two-parent family with two children and no other income and who meet specific criteria would receive a maximum monthly TANF benefit of \$647.

To learn if you might be eligible for SNAP benefits, TANF, the Oregon Health Plan or other

See Help on Page 6

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