

Conservation reserve sign-up now DEQ gives environmental okay to Weed Avenue site

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced, in January, that the next general sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is underway and will continue through April 15. This is the second consecutive year that United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has offered a general CRP sign-up.

"Over the past 25 years, support for CRP has grown thanks to strong backing from farmers, ranchers, conservationists, hunters, fishermen and other outdoor sports enthusiasts," said Vilsack. "Not only has CRP contributed to the national effort to improve water and air quality, it has preserved habitat for wildlife, and prevented soil erosion by protecting the most sensitive areas including those prone to flash flooding and runoff. This announcement continues the Obama Administration's effort to conserve sensitive areas and improve wildlife habitat."

Through CRP, eligible landowners receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving covers on eligible farmland. Land can be enrolled for a period of up to 15 years. During the general sign-up period, farmers and ranchers may offer eligible land at their county Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. Land currently not enrolled in CRP may be offered in this sign-up provided all eligibility requirements are met. Additionally, current CRP participants and contracts expiring this fall may make new contract offers. Contracts awarded under this sign-up are scheduled to become effective October 1, 2011. The general sign-up for CRP will not affect cropped acres for this growing season.

To help ensure that interested farmers and ranchers are aware of the sign-up period, USDA has signed partnership

Slightly fewer jobless in Columbia County

Columbia County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was to 11.6 percent in February, essentially unchanged from the previous month (12.0%) but lower than the year before (12.6%). February's unemployment rate was the lowest in two years and the first month it has been below 12.0 percent in two years. The rate

agreements with several conservation and wildlife organizations that will play an active role in USDA's 2011 CRP outreach efforts. They include: Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, National Association of State Foresters, Playa Lakes Joint Venture (Lesser Prairie Chicken/Sage Grouse), and the Longleaf Incorporated Bobwhite Conservation Initiative.

The FSA implements CRP on behalf of Commodity Credit Corporation. FSA will evaluate and rank eligible CRP offers using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) that shows the environmental benefits to be gained from enrolling the land in CRP. The EBI includes five environmental factors (wildlife, water, soil, air and enduring benefits) and cost. Decisions on the EBI cutoff will be made after the sign-up ends and after analyzing all of the offers.

In addition to the general sign-up, CRP's continuous sign-up program will be ongoing. Continuous acres represent the most environmentally desirable and sensitive land. For more information, visit <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp>.

CRP protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the Nation's natural resources. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP protects groundwater and helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams. Acreage enrolled in the CRP is planted to resource-conserving vegetative covers, making the program a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country. Through the 2008 Farm Bill, CRP is authorized for a maximum enrollment of 32 million acres. USDA estimates that contracts on 3.3 million to 6.5 million acres are scheduled to expire annually between now and 2014.

was above the statewide rate (10.2%) and the national rate (8.9%). Total employment climbed by 90 to 21,752 and the number of unemployed people dipped by 5 to 3,149. Total employment this February was 518 more than one year before and there were 279 fewer people unemployed this year.

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has determined that current environmental conditions at the former Vernonia Tank Farm & Warehouse site will allow for future use as a non-residential senior center and food pantry. The City of Vernonia and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are working together to relocate facilities, like Vernonia's senior center, that were damaged by the devastating 2007 floods.

After reviewing the results of environmental investigations at the site in 2009 and 2010, DEQ concluded that the property does not pose a risk to human health and the environment and that no environmental cleanup is needed.

The Vernonia Tank Farm & Warehouse site is located south of Vernonia City Hall and northwest of the intersection of Umatilla Street and Weed Avenue.

From 1931 to 1960, Shell Oil Company owned the site and operated it as a small bulk oil storage facility also called a tank farm. The property was re-

Jobless benefits extended by state

portedly vacant when the Oregon Department of Transportation purchased it in 1974.

Since that time, the Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation purchased the property and is transferring it to the City of Vernonia for future use as a senior center and food pantry. Those facilities were damaged by previous flooding events in 2007. This relocation is part of a joint effort by the city and FEMA to relocate residences, schools, businesses, and community services impacted by the devastating

On March 24, Governor Kitzhaber signed two pieces of legislation that will extend unemployment benefits up to 26 weeks for Oregonians who have exhausted all other options.

"Although we are on the path to economic recovery, there are thousands of Oregonians who are still struggling," said Governor Kitzhaber. "Extending unemployment benefits is a life line to people in need right now."

Senate Bill 637, passed with overwhelming support, allows Oregon to use \$225 million in federal funds to extend unemployment benefits for 20 weeks. Nearly 50,000 Oregonians will be eligible to receive the additional benefits by the end of the year.

Senate Bill 638 will use \$26 million from the State Unemployment Trust Fund to extend benefits for six weeks. This money will go to an estimated 17,500 Oregon workers whose benefits would otherwise expire in April.

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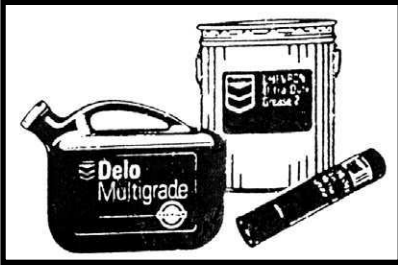
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floods. DEQ recommends that the city develop a health and safety plan before site redevelopment activities. If, during site redevelopment, the city encounters contamination, it should handle the materials according to all applicable regulations.

DEQ recommends the three off-site monitoring wells on Weed Avenue be kept in place to monitor if there is any pollution in the soil around the property.

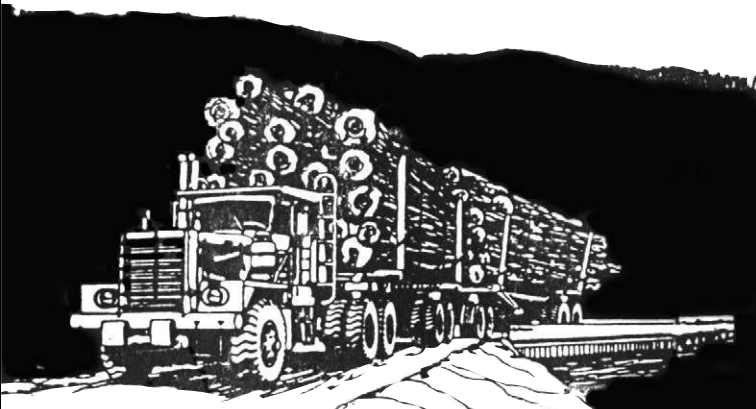
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