Grants Pass Daily Courier

WEDNESDAY

Shelters will offer relief from the heat in Ashland, **Grants Pass**

By Susan Hiland

of the Daily Courier

Cooling shelters will be opening in Grants Pass and Ashland for a triple-digit

heat wave expected to hit the Rogue Valley starting Thursday.

The Mobile Integrative Navigation
Team in Grants Pass will be providing cooling services from Thursday to Sunday at its new Parker Place site, 218 Redwood Highway adjacent to Bi-Mart.

Hours are from 2-8 p.m. The opening of the shelter was made

possible by an emergency heat declaration triggered by the National Weather Service's issuance of an excessive heat warn-The city does not operate severe event

shelters but does assist groups that can operate such shelters when severe heat or cold temperatures blanket the area.

In Ashland, the severe weather shelter at 2200 Ashland St. will be open from noon to 7 p.m. each day beginning Thursday and continuing Sunday. There is limited space available at the location.

The shelter may remain open a few days more, depending on the heat wave and volunteer availability to staff the shel-

The situation is less certain in Medford. City Hall said staff are working with the service provider ACCESS to open a cooling shelter but that ACCESS is understaffed at the moment. A shelter might be open by Friday.

In Medford, the Salvation Army will provide two temporary places to cool off.

The first place open is 304 Beatty St. from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. but will be closed Thursday for the Fourth of July holiday and on Friday. That location will provide water and a place to rest for 30

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Oregon expands free Medicaid to tens of thousands more people

By Lynne Terry

Oregon Capital Chronicle

After two years of planning, Oregon is officially expanding its Medicaid program to give tens of thousands of more people access to the free health insurance pro-

The Oregon Health Authority announced Monday the launch of its OHP Bridge Plan to those who earn more than the federal limits for traditional Medicaid. The Oregon Health Plan, the state's version of Medicaid, currently covers 1.4 million Oregonians who earn up to 138% of the federal poverty level, or nearly \$21,000 a year for one person or more than \$43,000 a year for a family of four.

The OHP Bridge is extending Medicaid benefits to those who earn up to 200% of the federal poverty level. That means that individuals who earn about \$30,000 a year or families of four who earn \$62,400 a year

Oregon Health Authority officials expect the plan to cover 100,000 Oregonians by

Dr. Sejal Hathi, director of the health authority, said in a news conference the plan marks a "significant milestone" in Oregon and will help eliminate health inequities, a health authority goal.

"We know that these higher rates of

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Hot weather triggers worries about fireworks across region

By Vickie Aldous

of the Daily Courier

The National Weather Service doesn't expect to issue a red flag warning for fire danger on the Fourth of July, but city officials in Grants Pass and Medford are still urging residents to be extra careful with fireworks as an excessive heat warning takes effect on Thursday.

The excessive heat warning lasts from the Fourth of July through

July 8, with high temperatures forecast to hit 105 degrees on Independence Day and peak at 112 degrees Saturday in the Grants Pass area. High temperatures will remain

above 100 degrees into next week, the National Weather Service pre-

Forecasters also predict a high of 97 degrees on the Fourth of July in the Medford area, with the heat wave peaking at 104 degrees Satur-

Grants Pass and Medford likely won't see a red flag warning for fire danger on the holiday, said Brad Schaaf, lead meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in

Red flag warnings for fire danger are triggered when the forecast calls for humidity of less than 15%, plus sustained winds of at least 10 mph or gusts of 20 mph or more for at least two hours, Schaaf said.

"Even though we're not going to

have a red flag warning, the very, very dry humidity will be problemat-ic. Fires can still start from activi-

ties like fireworks," he said. As of Tuesday afternoon, humidity in the Grants Pass area was at 18% — but that's expected to drop to 12% on the Fourth of July, Schaaf said.

Relatively light winds of 5-7 mph will likely keep the combined weather

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Dam removal restores Evans Creek flow



A gravelly riffle has replaced the demolished Williams-Whalen Dam on Evans Creek northeast of Wimer. At 150 feet across and 6 feet high, the dam was listed on the 2019 Statewide Fish Passage Barrier Priority List by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as being in need of removal.



Two excavators assist in the removal of the Williams-Whalen Dam on Evans Creek last month. The dam stood for 128 years before it was demolished to allow for the natural movement once again of salmon, steelhead and other fish.

By Susan Hiland

of the Daily Courier

WIMER — A work crew last week moved logs into place along the edge of Evans Creek, creating new nabitat for small critters to hide and eat in.

Just days before, the spot was the site of the old Williams-Whalen Dam, which stood for 128 years before it was demolished to allow for the natural movement once again of salmon, steelhead and other

Recreating habitat was the last finishing touch of a two-year project that made Williams-Whalen the third fish-impeding dam to be removed from the creek in the Evans Valley area of eastern Jackson County.

"This was not an insignificant dam," said John Speece, project manager for the Rogue River Watershed Council.

Said Melanie Klym, a senior engineer from River Design Group who helped on the project, "This went from being a hot bathtub to a flowing stream." At 150 feet across and 6 feet high, the dam was list-

ed on the 2019 Statewide Fish Passage Barrier Priority List by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as being in need of removal.

Demolition of the dam was part of a larger collaborative effort to restore access to habitat for native salmon and steelhead in Evans Creek, a key spawning tributary of the Rogue River.

"It had been over 50 years ago that the dam was

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Some Oregon Democrats join GOP in calling for changes to camping laws

By Dirk VanderHart Oregon Public Broadcasting

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled last week that cities are free to outlaw homeless encampments, Republicans in Oregon wasted no time calling for changes to a state law they say hamstrings local governments from cleaning camps.

Now some Democrats have begun

to join that call, potentially heightening the chance state lawmakers will act when they meet next year.

Two centrist Democratic lawmakers — Sen. Mark Meek of Gladstone and Rep. Paul Evans of Monmouth are signaling they want to roll back a 2021 law that created vague limits on how cities can regulate camping on public property. They expect to be joined by even more Democrats in a

letter they plan to send to senior members of their party.

"Communities should have clarity, and we may need to rewrite the law, Evans said Monday. "Or because of this decision, the law may in effect be moot."

The hand-wringing over state policy comes after the court ruled an anticamping law in Grants Pass did not violate constitutional protections

against cruel and unusual punishment upending lower-court rulings that had limited regulation of homeless camping across much of the western

The state law receiving renewed attention in light of that ruling was passed as House Bill 3115 in 2021. Championed by Gov. Tina Kotek when she served as House speaker, it requires that any local regulations on

where people can sleep be "objectively reasonable." The law allows homeless people to sue if they believe city policies don't meet that standard, which remains undefined.

"The intent behind House Bill 3115 was to affirm that cities choosing to regulate survival activities, like sitting, lying, sleeping, or keeping warm

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Buckle up **OVERNIGHT**

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Part of the problem with the Williams-Whalen Dam, seen here before its demolition, was that it did not have a fish ladder, which would have helped fish travel past the dam and further up Evans Creek.

Dam From 1A

used with water rights," Speece said. "It served no legal purpose today. Once it went down, the fish can flow more freely."

The \$500,000 project was part of an ongoing effort in the Rogue Basin that has identified dozens of dams and some 3,000 culverts and other barriers that inhibit fish movement.

Since 2004, more than two dozen barriers have been removed and a dozen more improved for fish passage.

Some, like Savage Rapids Dam in 2009, Gold Ray Dam in 2010, and Fielder Dam on Evans Creek in 2015, were huge, multi-million-dollar demolition projects.

Others, like Harbolt Dam in 2021 and Lovelace Dam in 2023, both on Slate Creek in the Wilderville area southwest of Grants Pass, were smaller affairs. Pomeroy Dam in Cave Junction, listed for years as the No. 1 obstruction on the priority list for the Rogue Basin, is

Part of the problem with the Williams-Whalen Dam was that it did not have a fish ladder, which would have helped more fish get past the dam and further up the creek.

"The older larger fish could get over the dam but the little ones would flip over and not be able to manage it," Speece said "They died."

Biologists say the removal of the Williams-Whalen Dam is going to improve 37 miles of spawning and rearing habitat for salmon and steelhead while also replacing invasive streamside blackberry on the cooperating landowners' properties with native vegetation and riparian fencing.

We got the cooperation from the two landowners where the dam was located on their property," said Speece

"We are placing log structures along the creek edge to facilitate a new habitat for the smaller fish to live, hunt and hide," he said. "Using wood in creeks is a good thing because it creates structure for the habitat.

They also placed more wood along the edge to keep the river from flowing back down the old

Before work started on the dismantling, the U.S. Fish and



Red-side shiners gather in a pool upstream of where the Williams-Whalen Dam was removed. The shiners are a non-native species that have been in the creek for years.



SCOTT STODDARD / Daily Courier

Evans Creek flows freely through the one-time site of the Williams-Whalen Dam northeast of Wimer. The nonprofit group WaterWatch of Oregon partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Rogue Basin Partnership to secure funding for the dam removal project.

Wildlife Service led fish salvage operations at the site, assisted by staff from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Bureau of Land Management as well as local volun-

"This is great news for salmon and steelhead, and the many people who love the Rogue River," said Jim McCarthy, Southern Oregon

program director for Water-Watch of Oregon, the fish enhancement group that has been instrumental in the removal of dams.

For the owners of the land, it will be a release of liability for them," McCarthy said. "The owners did not use it.

State and federal agencies identified Evans Creek as a place that could help improve access to quality fish habitat in its upper reaches by taking out the dams.

It is as important to the recovery of Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast coho salmon, listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, according to

Many types of fish use the creek, including coho and chinook salmon, summer and winter steelhead, cutthroat trout, Klamath small-scale suckers, and Pacific lamprey.

WaterWatch previously secured dam removal agreements from the two private landowners, which ensured removal at no cost to them, McCarthy said.

The nonprofit group partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Rogue Basin Partnership to secure funding for the project.

The state provided \$472,000 in grant funding, the feds provided \$25,000, Rogue Basin Partnership provided \$6,144, and PacifiCorp provided \$4,000, according to WaterWatch.

Reach reporter Susan Hiland at 707-810-6756 or shiland@thedailycourier.com.

Shelters From 1A

The second location is at 922 N. Central Ave. It also will be closed on Thursday. The hours Friday will be from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1-3 p.m. Snacks and water will be available.

People can also drop into the thrift store around the other side of the building, where staff will have water from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. It too will be closed Thursday.

Libraries will be closed on Thursday for the Fourth of July holiday but available dur-

ing regular business hours the rest of the week in Ashland, Medford and Grants

The National Weather Service has issued an excessive heat warning for the region from Thursday through at

least Monday. Temperatures are forecast to easily exceed 100 degrees, with highs in Medford on Friday and Saturday of 110 or more, and the same in Grants Pass on Saturday and Sun-

Reach reporter Susan Hiland at 707-810-6756 or shiland@thedailycourier.com.

Changes From 1A

and dry, must develop laws that are reasonable and take into account the resources available to individuals experiencing homelessness," Kotek said last week.

At the time of its passage, HB 3115 was seen as a way to partially enshrine a standard that had already been set by federal court rulings: that cities should not punish people for sleeping outside unless there is shelter space available as an alternative. But with Friday's decision, the Supreme Court has now reversed those rulings.

Now Meek and Evans not to mention many of their Republican counterparts — say Oregon's law is heaping confusion and difficulty on local officials. The two lawmakers, along with Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, are the only Democrats still serving in the Legislature who voted against HB 3115.

"Our communities deserve streets that are safe and clean, not only for residents but also for businesses that drive our economy," Meek said in a statement Friday. "We must reform restrictive laws, such as HB 3115, which I voted against in 2021, so that local communities can maintain public safety."
Evans and Meek said Mon-

day they planned to send a letter alongside other lawmakers calling for the law to be revisited — either via a bill or some other mechanism.

"Cities right now have been given so many different competing guidelines that there is a significant amount of uncertainty," Evans said, suggesting the state provide a "clarified grant of authority."

But it's not clear how many Democratic colleagues agree. Two Democrats with some of the most sway in state housing law, Rep. Pam Marsh of Ashland and Sen. Kayse Jama from Portland, said prior to the Supreme Court ruling that they didn't expect major changes to state law.

The 2021 law "struck a good balance confirming that cities can implement time, place and manner restrictions while ensuring that regulations are reasonable and homeless people have options," said Marsh, chair of the House Housing and Homelessness Committee. "From my vantage point in southern Oregon, that guidance has worked well.

Marsh told Oregon Public Broadcasting on Monday that, in order to take up changes to the law in her committee, "I would have to be convinced that there was either a significant problem with the law or there was a way to improve it in a substantive way.

Meanwhile, League of Oregon Cities officials say they are analyzing the Supreme Court opinion, and will ask the group's members whether they support pressing for a

change to the law.

And advocates for the homeless have said Oregon's statute is now a vital tool for guarding people's rights, promising to sue cities who overstep their bounds.

"It prevents Grants Pass and any other city in Oregon from doing what Grants Pass wants to do, which is make it illegal on every inch of property 24 hours a day, for people to use as little as a blanket to try and stay warm and dry," Ed Johnson, director of litigation at the Oregon Law Center, said during a news conference Friday. "We intend to use that law, which is more important than ever to protect homeless people in the state of Oregon.'

The state's most powerful lawmakers have so far been mum on the Supreme Court ruling and whether they would support changes to state law.

Senate President Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, is out of town and would not provide comment, a spokesperson said. A representative for House Speaker Julie Fahey, D-Eugene, did not answer a question about her stance. Kotek's office did not immediately respond when asked if the governor would be open to changing the law she championed.

Senate Majority Leader Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, said Monday that lawmakers need more clarity from legislative attorneys about what the Supreme Court decision means before deciding what to

do.
"What I can say is that Oregonians are clear that homelessness must remain a top priority for the legislature, and we should be doing everything in our power to make sure every person in our state has a safe place to call home," Taylor said in a statement.

All three leaders will likely hear plenty from their Republican counterparts on the matter — both ahead of the November election and when lawmakers convene next year.

"Democrats' 'Right to Camp' law will continue to hamper local governments' ability to address homelessness effectively," Senate Minority Leader Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, said in a statement last week. "The Legislature should immediately provide clarity to our local governments as they work to reduce homelessness in their communities by taking action on HB 3115."

Will Lathrop, a Republican running for attorney general this year, went so far as to suggest last week that Oregon would become a magnet for houseless people if the law is not changed. "Not only will Oregon be unable to address our state's widespread homelessness crisis — as other states start cleaning up their streets — I fear that we will see an influx of homeless populations flooding to Oregon where there is no accountability," Lathrop said.

Worries From 1A

conditions from triggering a red flag warning, he said.

Humidity levels of 22% in the Medford area on Tuesday afternoon will likely drop to 10% on the Fourth, with 4-6 mph winds, Schaaf said. In Grants Pass, fireworks

are allowed only from 6-11 p.m. on the Fourth of July outside wildfire hazard zones, city parks and school property.

All fireworks use in the city including the official public fireworks show — is banned if a red flag warning for fire danger is in effect.

The public fireworks show is planned at 10 p.m. Thursday at Reinhart Volunteer Park. 1690 S.W. Webster Road, Grants Pass.

At a meeting this week, Grants Pass City Councilor Brian DeLaGrange floated the idea of banning the personal use of fireworks while letting the official show go on.

"I wouldn't have brought this up if risky situations weren't predicted for that day. Whether or not it reaches a red flag warning is another question.

But if it's over 100 degrees and we have some wind, those are risky conditions," DeLaGrange

Councilor Vanessa Ogier said she has long supported a ban on people using fireworks within the city limits.

"I think it's absolutely insane to celebrate our freedom and potentially burn our city down. We know we live in a tinderbox," she said.

But other councilors weren't on board with pulling the plug on fireworks use in town.

"Whereas I respect your opinion, I vehemently disagree," said Councilor DJ Faszer. "I'm not even willing to entertain a ban on fireworks on the Fourth of July. You've got to be kidding me.'

Grants Pass Fire Rescue issued a press release Tuesday urging the public to exercise extreme caution when using fireworks.

"Dry humidity and typical afternoon breezes are expected throughout the weekend, increasing the potential for fire growth," firefighters said.

The city of Medford issued a message reminding residents fireworks are legal within city

limits from July 1-6, except along the Bear Creek Greenway, on park or school land, or in wildfire hazard areas such as foothills on the east side of town.

Unlike in Grants Pass, a red flag warning for fire doesn't trigger a fireworks ban in Medford, according to Jayda McClendon, communications coordinator for the city of Medford.

If personal use of fireworks causes a fire, a person can be held liable for property damage, fire suppression costs and negligence claims, even with legal fireworks, according to Medford Fire-Rescue.

Using illegal fireworks can trigger additional fines and penalties, the fire department said.

The largest public fireworks show in Jackson County is scheduled to kick off after dark during the Boomfest celebration from 7-11 p.m. at the Jackson County Expo, 1 Peninger Road, Central Point.

In western Josephine County, including in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area, the National Weather Service has issued a red flag warning for fire danger from 11 p.m. tonight

through 8 a.m. Thursday. That area could see 20-30

mph winds, with gusts up to 45 mph, the National Weather Service said. "Any fires that develop will

likely spread rapidly, even at

night," the National Weather Service said. The Kalmiopsis Wilderness

has seen multiple massive fires over the past few decades, including the nearly 500,000acre Biscuit Fire in 2002, the 191,125-acre Chetco Bar Fire in 2017, and the 175,258-acre Klondike Fire in 2018.

In Ashland, almost all personal use of fireworks is banned, except for smoke bombs, snakes and party poppers.

The Ashland Chamber of Commerce said it's no longer putting on a public fireworks show because of fire risk, high insurance costs and fireworks companies not being available

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to put on shows in small towns. In areas of the Rogue Valley where fireworks are allowed and weather conditions permit, firefighters offered the following safety tips:

 Never allow young children to play with fireworks.

• Always provide close adult

supervision to older children. Never have any portion of your body over fireworks when lighting them.

· Always keep a bucket of water or hose nearby.

• Never attempt to reignite a malfunctioning firework. Soak it in water.

• Keep pets inside and stay away from people, animals and buildings when lighting fire-

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