

Marion County TODAY from Your Commissioners



OREGON

APRIL 2021

Message from the Board of Commissioners



Without a doubt the last year has been marked by adversity for Marion County residents and businesses. We are inspired by the resolute determination of our communities to carry on. Thank you for continuing to support family and friends alike who have been overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, fall wildfires or recent ice storm.

We want to thank our employees and community members who have made such a difference during this difficult year. From COVID-19 to wildfire response, county employees, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals have stepped up in countless ways to serve our community and respond to pressing needs.

We want to acknowledge the brave men and women of the Marion County Sheriff's Office who drove into the fire to alert Santiam Canyon residents of the imminent danger. These deputies responded at great personal risk to themselves to go door-to-door as wildfires grew. They have continued as part of the recovery effort coordinating the removal of boats from Detroit Lake marinas and continuing enhanced patrols to protect property.

We thank the health champions of Marion County Health and Human Services who have worked tirelessly in response to COVID-19. They poured over data to ensure we understood how and where the virus was spreading in our community so that we could direct resources where they were most needed. They mobilized community partners to ensure access to both testing and vaccine distribution events. Most importantly, they always kept our most vulnerable residents at the forefront of planning efforts.

Thank you to county Public Works crews who worked day and night to remove hazard trees and clear roadways in the aftermath of February's ice storm. They worked alongside power utility crews as they worked to restore power to county residents. Search and rescue volunteers and patrol deputies joined the Oregon National Guard to complete welfare checks for residents who were without power for an extended time. This was the third major disaster in a 12-month period and once again our employees met the challenge commendably.

We are honored to serve as your Board of Commissioners and look forward to working alongside our residents as our county recovers and rebuilds. We welcome your comments and feedback. Please contact us anytime at commissioners@co.marion.or.us or call (503) 588-5212.

Sincerely,
Kevin Cameron, *Chair*
Danielle Bethell, *Commissioner*
Colm Willis, *Commissioner*

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Wildfire Recovery

On Sept. 7-8, 2020, unprecedented wildfires swept through Oregon including Marion County's North Santiam Canyon. Near Detroit, the Beachie Creek and Lionshead fires converged – devastating cities and surrounding forest areas throughout the canyon. In Marion County 700 residential properties and 85 commercial properties were damaged or destroyed, in addition to more than 190,000 acres of public and private forest lands.



- **Evacuation Shelter & Resource Center**

The wildfires prompted the late night evacuation of families and individuals from the Santiam Canyon. Marion County swiftly responded to meet the immediate needs of wildfire evacuees and established an evacuation shelter for people and livestock in cooperation with the Oregon State Fairgrounds, Red Cross, and numerous nonprofits and businesses.

- **Short term shelter**

Marion County quickly amended the room block agreement with the Super 8 Motel in Woodburn to allow use of the facility as a wildfire evacuee shelter. Over the next two months more than 270 wildfire evacuees were housed at the hotel by the Red Cross.

- **Property Tax Relief**

The Board of Commissioners is working in partnership with local legislators on SB464 to provide property tax relief for residents whose primary homes were destroyed by wildfires. The bill is currently under consideration at the Oregon Legislature.

- **Building and Septic Permit Fee Waivers**

The Board of Commissioners approved an order waiving building and septic permit fees for primary and secondary dwellings damaged or destroyed by wildfire.

- **Long term recovery**

The county has set aside \$500,000 in economic development and general fund resources to help canyon communities through the recovery process. Wildfire recovery support includes the addition of a Disaster Recovery Manager to coordinate needs in the Santiam Canyon for the next three to five years and providing support to cities for on-going recovery efforts.

What's next for Santiam Canyon parks?

Six county parks were impacted by the Beachie Creek Fire. In total 165 acres of county parkland was destroyed in the fires. Niagara, Salmon Falls, and Bear Creek Campground suffered 100 percent tree loss with 85 percent tree loss at North Fork Park, and 80 percent loss at Minto and Packsaddle Parks. In addition to tree loss, there was a complete loss of vegetation and most park amenities.

First on the list for redevelopment is Packsaddle Park off Hwy. 22 near Gates. The park provides access to the North Santiam River and is used regularly to launch watercraft. Rebuilding of county parks will take two to three years depending on the level of damage. However, Marion County is aiming for reopening river access at Packsaddle by mid-summer 2021, pending approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Before rebuilding can begin parks will first be cleared of hazard trees, ash, and debris. The cost to fully rebuild Santiam Canyon parks is approximately \$7.3 million. Marion County has applied for FEMA public assistance funding to recover and rebuild from the loss.



Beachie Creek Wildfire photos courtesy of Ron Cooper

Ice Blankets County

On February 13, 2021, Marion County was among nine Oregon counties overwhelmed by a winter storm that brought freezing temperatures, snow, and ice to our communities. The storm left more than 100,000 county customers without power. Many residents experienced extended power outages leaving some without power for more than 10 days.

Many areas saw an inch and a half of ice on wires and trees, creating hazardous conditions throughout the region. Numerous roads remained inaccessible for days with downed trees and power lines. The county declared its third state of emergency in less than a year due to impacts of the severe weather.

Marion County Emergency Management worked closely with cities on urgent needs such as fuel for generators and emergency services, temporary cellular towers, and resources for residents with medical needs. Community partners quickly mobilized to provide resource and warming centers for those without power. The Marion County Sheriff's Office worked collaboratively with the Oregon National Guard to conduct welfare checks for residents who remained without power.

The cost of cleanup and damage to public infrastructure is estimated at \$12.3 million. Marion County has collected more than 70,000 yards of storm debris from cities, roads, and private property.





COVID-19 Response

Response to the COVID-19 global pandemic has dominated county operations for more than a year. From identification of cases in our community to testing and now vaccine distribution, the Board of Commissioners has played a leadership role as the Local Public Health Authority. Marion County was the first Oregon County to establish a community vaccine clinic in January 2021.

• Impacts to county operations/departments

The Board of Commissioners made every effort to minimize impacts to county services in order to continue to meet the needs of county residents. Many services remain accessible online, by phone, or email.

Marion County quickly established a temporary COVID-19 social distancing policy and made modifications to workspaces, adjusted employee work schedules, and made work from home provisions for the health and safety of employees and visitors to county buildings. As our positivity rate continues to decline, we look forward to adding more in-person services.

• Business relief grants

Marion County was among the first of Oregon's counties to institute a business relief grant program in the spring of 2020 distributing \$850,000 to local businesses. As additional funds became available in the fall of 2020, the commissioners authorized additional business relief grants focusing on hospitality businesses and businesses with fewer than 25 employees. The county distributed \$3.4 million to local businesses as part of this program.

• Re-opening Marion County

The Board of Commissioners and the Health and Human Services department work closely to understand how and where the coronavirus has spread in our community in order to direct resources such as increased testing and vaccine distribution to the most vulnerable of our residents.

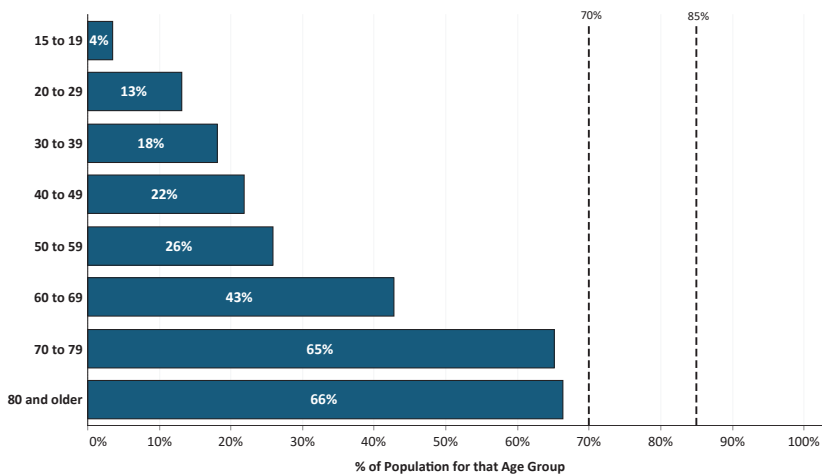


Safety Corridor Established

Marion County became the first Oregon county to designate a local safety corridor establishing the McKay/Yergen/Ehlen Safety Corridor. For several years the McKay/Yergen/Ehlen area has been a priority for Marion County due to higher than expected crash rates and people driving at excessive speeds in the area.

Over the last three years Marion County Public Works has installed several safety enhancements with future enhancements such as flashing red beacons at stop signs, increased intersection lighting, and driver feedback signs planned. The safety corridor designation allows traffic fines to double in the designated area which is located between OR-219 and Interstate 5.

Completed Vaccinations by Age Group (As of April 18, 2021)



Marion County welcomes new commissioner

In November 2020, Commissioner Danielle Bethell was elected to the Board of Commissioners following the retirement of longtime Commissioner Sam Brentano. Commissioner Bethell was sworn in on Jan. 4, 2021, and has hit the ground running. She is longtime community advocate and most recently served as the Executive Director of the Keizer Chamber of Commerce. She additionally serves as vice-chair on the Salem-Keizer Public Schools Board of Directors.

Commissioner Bethell's policy interests include children and youth issues, housing, and economic development. She and her family live in Keizer.



Marion County Board of Commissioners Office

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Weekly Board Sessions

Opportunity for public comment

Wednesdays at 9 a.m.

555 Court Street NE | Senator Hearing Room | Salem, OR

Board sessions stream live at www.facebook.com/MarionCountyOR



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Board of Commissioners and Chief Administrative Officer



Kevin Cameron
Chair



Danielle Bethell
Commissioner



Colm Willis
Commissioner



Jan Fritz
*Chief Administrative
Officer*