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ODOT Workforce Alliance seeks to expand job opportunities in construction trades

PENDLETON, Ore. - The Oregon Department of Transportation's eastern region formed an active Regional Workforce Alliance designed to boost the numbers of minorities and women in the highway construction trades. The first meeting was Feb. 21 at the Wild Horse Resort and Casino in Pendleton.

Eastern Oregon Workforce Alliance is part of ODOT's Workforce Development Plan. ODOT's plan has three critical elements: increase diversity in employment. Increase apprenticeship participation. Provide more training resources and opportunities for highway construction careers.

The Pendleton launch is the second alliance to implement the Workforce Development Plan at the local level. Key partners in the formation of this alliance are the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

At its first meeting, the group will establish a formal Workforce Alliance advisory committee made up of representatives from state, county, and city agencies; local service providers; women and minority groups; contractors; construction firms; and unions. The group will begin working on ways to make the best use of existing programs to build a qualified labor pool for the growing number of highway construction jobs.

ODOT's highway and bridge construction projects will reach record levels in the next seven to 10 years. At the same time, Oregon is facing a shortage of qualified highway workers at the apprentice and skilled journey levels.

"The ultimate goal of the Workforce Development Plan is to provide Oregonians with the skills to maintain well-paying, sustainable careers," said ODOT Diversity Manager Michael Cobb.

The Workforce Development Plan implementation is a two-year pilot project. During this phase, all Oregon Transportation Investment Act III projects statewide will use the new increased apprenticeship and training goals, and women and minority aspirational targets. The new goals and targets also apply to all ODOT construction projects in Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. Following the two-year trial, and pending Federal Highway Administration approval, ODOT will determine whether to include the new increased training goals and aspirational targets on all ODOT projects statewide.