

# News Release

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## **Lane County 2020 wildfire survivors achieve major recovery milestone enabling closure of the Oregon Department of Human Services' long-term shelter program**

(Salem) – Since December 31, 2020, through its Office of Resilience and Emergency Management, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) has been providing shelter and meals in Lane County to survivors of the 2020 Labor Day wildfires. With the support of multiple organizations, on April 28, 2023, the last of these survivors were able to move out of ODHS shelter into either long-term or permanent housing. In total, 423 individuals were sheltered, and 193,080 meals were provided in Lane County.

“Receiving notice that the last Holiday Farm Fire survivor in shelter has transitioned to either long-term or permanent housing is an important step in the recovery effort and worth celebrating,” said Lane County Commissioner Heather Buch (she/her). “We know the recovery process is far from over for many survivors and Lane County will continue, along with our partners at OHCS and other agencies, to support the rebuilding and recovery work happening in the McKenzie River Valley.”

Lane County was the last of all wildfire impacted counties with residents in emergency wildfire shelters. As of April 28, all Oregon residents have exited ODHS wildfire shelters and have moved into either long-term or permanent housing.

[Oregon's Emergency Operations Plan](#) gives ODHS the responsibility of supporting the food and shelter needs of people in Oregon during large-scale emergencies and recovery from disasters.

Due to the Covid pandemic, sheltering 2020 Labor Day wildfire survivors was unlike other previous sheltering efforts because congregate shelters could not be used. Instead, sheltering was done in hotels.

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, the American Red Cross began providing food and shelter in eight impacted counties. ODHS took over the feeding work on October 17, 2020, and took over the sheltering work on December 31, 2020.

From 12/31/20 until 4/28/23 when ODHS' sheltering work ended, a total of 4,457 people were sheltered by ODHS.

In late summer 2021, assisted by a grant from FEMA, ODHS' disaster case management program was able to begin working with fire survivors. Disaster case managers help people with wrap around services to support their recovery.

Every survivor's circumstances were different. Some people were well insured and needed little to no help. Others did not have those kinds of resources or understanding of the system and requirements to rebuild and recover. ODHS, along with disaster case management partner agencies, served a total of 3,928 families statewide.

Disaster case managers assisted 1,244 people statewide to move from a wildfire shelter into long-term permanent housing.

In Lane County, 405 families received disaster case management services. DevNW was one of the first partners brought on to help with this work. "It has been an honor and privilege to work with 2020 Holiday Farm fire survivors. The resilience of this community is inspiring. The partnerships forged between Oregon Department of Human Services Office of Resilience and Emergency Management, Catholic Charities of Oregon, The McKenzie Valley Long-Term Recovery Group, Cascade Relief Team, and many more, made this work possible. We are incredibly grateful to have been a part of the efforts to support these resilient and amazing people on their recovery journey and we wish them only the best in their journeys ahead" said Micole Olivas-Leyva (she/her/ella) Asset Preservation and Recovery Manager for DevNW.

While this is an important milestone, the state and Oregonians are still recovering from the 2020 wildfires. ODHS was able to close hotel sheltering work, but not everyone has moved into a permanent home. 333 families continue to receive disaster case management and will until they have fully recovered.

"This was an unprecedented effort for our agency. With the support of our leadership, the Legislature and our partners, over the last 31 months this state came together to shelter more than 4,457 people and serve more than 2 million meals for wildfire survivors. Additionally, to date ODHS has provided over \$10.5 million to local community-based organizations to provide case management services and monetary support to survivors," said Ed Flick (he/him), director of the ODHS Office of Resilience and Emergency Management. "We have learned a lot since September 2020 and are in an even better position today to serve our state."

## **About the ODHS Office of Resilience and Emergency Management**

ODHS holds three distinct roles through its Office of Resilience and Emergency Management, all of which reduce the impact of disasters on people. In its most

foundational role, OREM staff work every day with ODHS programs, offices and affiliated agencies, to ensure the safety of the people served by our programs, and our staff. The second role is as the lead agency for cooling, warming and cleaner air centers to protect the public from life-threatening weather and related events. The third role is as the primary agency for mass care and social services recovery, as outlined in Oregon’s comprehensive emergency operations and recovery plans. In this role, ODHS supports the evacuation, sheltering, feeding, emergency assistance, family reunification, distribution of emergency supplies and human services needs of people impacted by disasters.

Across all these roles, ODHS develops and relies on partnerships and coordination with public and private organizations at the local and regional levels and with our state and Tribal Nation partners.

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