

## Stakeholder Update

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## A Firsthand Look at Bar Pilot Helicopter Operations

**From Len Tumbarello, Executive Director of the Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots (OBMP)**

In April, I had the privilege of observing Columbia River Bar Pilot helicopter operations firsthand.

The flight offered truly spectacular views of Astoria, the Columbia River entrance, surrounding coastal communities, and the Pacific Ocean. Seeing this region from the air provided a unique perspective of the geography, waterways, and operating environment in which Oregon bar pilots work every day. For those who may not be familiar with their role, bar pilots are highly trained mariners responsible for safely guiding large commercial ships across the Columbia River Bar—one of the most challenging and hazardous stretches of water in the world.



OBMP Executive Director Len Tumbarello (right) stands with Columbia River Bar helicopter pilot Mike Tomlinson



Pilot being hoisted down to the deck of the inbound ship

The most impressive part of the day was witnessing a live pilot-transfer operation. We watched the helicopter crew retrieve a pilot from a roll-on/roll-off (RORO) vessel transiting the Columbia River, then safely transport and hoist that same pilot onto another RORO vessel carrying automobiles

offshore in the Pacific Ocean. These transfers allow bar pilots to board or depart ships when sea conditions make boat transfers unsafe or impractical. Watching this evolution in real time reinforced the extraordinary coordination, precision, and trust required between the pilots, flight crew, and vessel personnel.

The professionalism of the helicopter crew was exceptional. Their communication, discipline, safety focus, and flawless execution were evident throughout every phase of the mission. These are highly skilled professionals conducting complex operations in a demanding maritime environment, and they represented Oregon’s pilotage system with distinction. All of us should be thankful for

these aviation & maritime Pilots and their crews for their work protecting human life, safeguarding the marine environment, and ensuring the safe movement of maritime commerce. It is important to note, that the Columbia River Bar Pilots completed 4,455 vessel movements in 2025 with zero reportable accidents--a testament to their training, professionalism, and commitment to safety.

I feel strongly that experiences like this are invaluable in helping me better understand the tools, people, and operational excellence



*The flight crew on the way to meet the ship*

that support safe, reliable and efficient pilotage on Oregon waters. Seeing and being a part of the operation myself aid greatly in my management and leadership of the Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots.

My next step is to fly by helicopter, be hoisted down to a ship after conducting the necessary training, and then ride the ship with the pilot. I'm looking forward to it!

### **About OBMP**

Learn more about the work of the [Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots](#), which oversees and regulates maritime pilotage to ensure the safe, reliable, and efficient movement of vessels in Oregon's waterways. You can also view a previous article on [what maritime pilots do](#) from the perspective of the pilots.

### **OBMP-PUC Connection**

The Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots operates under the authority of the Oregon Public Utility Commission, which provides administrative and regulatory oversight to support safe, reliable, and efficient pilotage on Oregon's waterways.

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## **Wildfire Preparedness**

### **From Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM)**

With counties across the state already [declaring drought emergencies](#), we are heading into what will be one of the driest seasons in more than a decade. As a result, OEM is asking you to get ready now:

#### **Pack Your Go-bags**

A go-bag contains essential items you may need to take with you in a hurry. Each household member (human and animal) should have an easy-to-carry emergency bag:

- ◆ Water: one gallon per person, per day (3-day supply for evacuation)
- ◆ Food: non-perishable, easy-to-prepare items (3-day supply for evacuation)

#### **In individual backpacks:**

- ◆ Large bottle of water
- ◆ Non-perishable snacks or meals ready to eat (MREs)
- ◆ 7-day supply of medications (if possible)
- ◆ A basic [first aid kit](#)
- ◆ Flashlight (hand-cranked or with extra batteries)
- ◆ Back-up power cell (for charging your phone and electronics)
- ◆ Extra charging cables
- ◆ Battery-powered or [hand-crank radio](#) (NOAA Weather Radio, if possible)
- ◆ Extra clothing and personal items
- ◆ Digital or printed copies of personal documents (medication lists, proof of address, deed/lease, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies, etc.)
- ◆ Multi-purpose tool
- ◆ Sanitation and personal hygiene items
- ◆ Printed copy of family and emergency contact information
- ◆ If possible, extra cash
- ◆ [Emergency blanket](#)
- ◆ Printed map(s) of the area

### **Know Your Evacuation Routes – Have a Plan**

Create an evacuation plan and make sure everyone in the family is informed. Visit OEM’s [Be2WeeksReady](#) page to find tips on how to prepare for evacuation or shelter in place. OEM also offers a wild-fire evacuation checklist at [wildfire.oregon.gov/prepare](http://wildfire.oregon.gov/prepare).

#### **Your plan should include:**

- ◆ A list of emergency contacts (printed and in every go-bag)
- ◆ A safe meeting place in case family members get separated
- ◆ Multiple evacuation routes from home, work, or school
- ◆ Transportation arrangements, including pets and livestock
- ◆ A discussion with loved ones, friends and neighbors to ensure everyone understands the plan.

Individuals with disabilities should plan ahead for transportation, equipment and service animal needs. Visit the [Red Cross](#) for tailored resources. If you have special medical needs, make sheltering arrangements some place that can accommodate your needs, as not all standard shelters can.

For pet and livestock evacuation planning, visit [Ready.gov/pets](http://Ready.gov/pets). Prepare a pet emergency kit with essentials like food, water, medications, identification and medical records. Livestock owners should arrange transportation and shelter options in advance—resources are available at [Oregon Department of Agriculture](#).

### **Sign-up for Emergency Alerts**

Visit [ORAlert.gov](http://ORAlert.gov) to sign-up to receive alerts based on your zip code. If you're already registered, take a moment to log in and up-

date your contact information. Also, check your phone settings to [ensure wireless emergency alerts](#) are enabled.

Know where to find local emergency information, such as your county’s emergency management website and [TripCheck.com](#). Follow local emergency services on social media, including the sheriff’s office, fire agencies and city or county pages.

### Be Prepared If Cell Service Goes Down

Have a back-up plan for how you will communicate if cell towers burn in your area. Developing a family PACE plan (Primary, Alternate, Contingency, Emergency) is key to staying connected during a disaster.

#### Example PACE plan for your family:

Primary: Cell Phones

Alternate: Starlink service on your cell phone. Many cell providers offer a Starlink add-on for a nominal fee, which allows your cell phone to access the internet and make web-based phone calls and texts, or send Facebook and WhatsApp messages even if unable to connect to a cell tower.

Contingency: Satellite communicators, separate from the satellite function on your phone (which prioritizes first-responder traffic)

Emergency: Short-range communication radios for talking to family, and a hand-cranked NOAA weather radio to receive alerts.

### Know Evacuation Levels in Oregon

**Level One – BE READY:** Stay aware of the wildfire threat and get prepared. Pack your go-kit, check emergency contacts, and ensure those in vulnerable situations (older adults, children, individuals with disabilities, and livestock owners) are ready to evacuate if needed.

**Level Two – BE SET:** Be prepared to leave at any moment. This indicates significant wildfire danger. Voluntary evacuation is encouraged—especially for those needing extra time to relocate safely.

**Level Three – GO NOW!:** Evacuate immediately! This means extreme danger is present, and it is unsafe to remain in place. Emergency responders may not be able to assist further. Leave immediately without gathering belongings and check [TripCheck.com](#) or call 511 for evacuation routes.



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After evacuating, do not return until officials declare it safe.

### **Make Sure You're Insured – Have a Recovery Plan**

Whether you rent or own, make sure you have wildfire insurance and enough coverage to replace your house/belongings.

- ◆ [Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety – Wildfire Ready](#)
- ◆ [Division of Financial Regulation – Wildfires Insurance Resources](#)

You can find additional wildfire preparedness resources at [wildfire.oregon.gov](http://wildfire.oregon.gov).

## **BizApps Replacement Update**

The Valence Project (Docketing and Discovery systems replacement) is continuing to make progress. The first round of User Acceptance Testing (UAT) is complete. Thank you to everyone who participated. Your time and thoughtful feedback were essential in evaluating the new system and identifying areas that still need work to effectively support our day-to-day work.

Following the conclusion of UAT, the vendor has been reviewing the issues, recommendations, and enhancement requests we provided. They are actively working through the required changes and configuration adjustments needed to ensure the system meets our

needs.

This next phase of UAT, expected this fall, will give users an opportunity to verify completed fixes, test updated functionality, and ensure the system is ready for production.

More details about the schedule, training opportunities, and transition support will be shared as we approach the launch window.

Thank you again for your continued support as we move toward final implementation of the Valence system. Your engagement is critical to helping us deliver a stable and effective tool for the agency staff and stakeholders.

Our mission is to ensure Oregonians have access to safe, reliable and fairly priced utility services that advance state policy and promote the public interest. We use an inclusive process to evaluate differing viewpoints and visions of the public interest and arrive at balanced, well-reasoned, independent decisions supported by fact and law. [Visit our website for more information.](#)

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