



Wheeler County Reopening & Preparedness Plan



Prepared and respectfully submitted based on guidance from
Governor Kate Brown's
Public Health Framework for Reopening Oregon



Purpose

This document is intended to provide guidance for those involved in the process of reopening Wheeler County. It will present information to inform and support implementation of their individual plans.

This is a living document, meant to be handled as an adaptive management plan. As new information is made available regarding acceptable techniques/strategies for effective management of the COVID-19 pandemic it shall be reviewed and incorporated into this plan as soon as possible.

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Section 1 - Situational Awareness

1.1 - Population, Demographics & COVID-19

Wheeler County is located in sunny North Central Oregon; with an estimated 1332 residents in July 2019¹ it is the least populated county in the state. There are three incorporated cities, Fossil, Mitchell and Spray. Residents of these cities make up 52.87% of the population while the remaining 47.13% reside within unincorporated areas of the county.

The population is relatively widely dispersed within the 1715 square miles that comprise the county. This “natural social distancing” as well as distance from larger population centers in other jurisdictions is likely to be partially responsible for the current lack of confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 within Wheeler County.

Wheeler County has an oversized percentage of high risk residents due to a population which is 56% individuals over the age of 60² who suffer from age related health conditions at an average rate.

1.2 - Economy & COVID-19

Median household income is \$33,400³. This is derived from two primary sectors: agriculture (primarily cattle ranching) and natural resource tourism. On average our residents are less economically secure than most of our fellow Oregonians and therefore the financial impacts of COVID-19 response, including lost wages and revenues, are felt even more acutely.

Tourism and recreation is a growth industry in the county as evidenced by a 36% increase in direct travel spending over the time period from 2000 to 2017⁴. This has acted as a double edged sword under the current state of emergency around COVID-19. The regular tourist season is now in full effect we are beginning to see an influx of travelers. Under normal circumstances these folks are welcomed by the community. However, given the COVID-19 pandemic they are seen by many within the community as a threat of virus transmission.

These travelers are drawn to our jurisdiction by geographic features many of which are often largely beyond the reach of local regulation and/or restrictions. This dynamic is discussed further below.

1.3 - Geography, Land Ownership & COVID-19

¹ US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/wheelercountyoregon>

² US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2012 - 2016, 5 year estimate updated annually. Released 2017

³ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 year estimate updated annually. Released 2017

⁴Dean Runyan Associates, Oregon Travel Impacts, 1991-2017

Wheeler County's terrain varies widely from sagebrush, juniper, and rim rock to thick stands of pine and fir. Portions of two national forests lie within its boundaries with forest lands covering nearly one-third of the county.

The area is known as an outstanding depository of prehistoric fossils. The Painted Hills and Clarno units of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument are located in the county.

Additionally, a large portion of the navigable section of the John Day River, which provides excellent bass and seasonal salmon fishing as well as popular rafting and boating recreational opportunities, runs through our county. Much of the river and large tracts of undeveloped land in Wheeler County are managed by the Bureau of Land Management. In fact, the vast majority of travelers visiting Wheeler County do so in order to recreate on the 26.7% of publicly held land within our jurisdiction.

While we appreciate the actions of our state and federal partners in restricting access to developed facilities and campgrounds, many of these lands are open and have continued to draw significant numbers of travelers despite the Governor's Executive Order 20-12 banning non-essential travel.

Local officials often lack the jurisdictional authority and/or resources to make decisions and take enforcement actions on these lands.

1.4 - Community & COVID-19

Wheeler County residents have performed admirably under the stresses of COVID-19 response efforts. People have socially distanced while strengthening social ties and community solidarity through a shared experience. They have largely done so with a smile and a stoic determination to protect our most vulnerable regardless of the cost.

Nevertheless, this situation is fluid. Economic stressors are beginning to weigh heavily on business owners and workers who have experienced varied levels of success in accessing relief funds. As tourist season comes into full effect and the inability to stem this tide is observed, frustrations are mounting. In order maintain community buy in on reasonable restriction measures as we move forward together, we must attempt to strike a balance between all of these factors.

For these reasons, the Incident Command Team respectfully submits this plan for a phased reopening of Wheeler County which should begin as soon as possible under state guidelines.

Section 2 - Gating Criteria & Preparedness

Prerequisites for Phased Reopening of Wheeler County

Note: State level guidance as to prerequisites for entering Phase 1 of reopening is presented in standard text. Statements as to Wheeler County's current status in regard to these prerequisites is presented in *italicized* text.

2.1 – Declining prevalence of COVID-19

- a. The percentage of emergency department visits for COVID-19-like illnesses (CLI) are less than the historic average for flu at the same time of year.
- b. A 14-day decline in COVID-19 hospital admissions.

Because this metric only applies to counties with more than 5 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and Wheeler County currently has neither confirmed cases nor any hospitals, the jurisdiction has met this prerequisite by default.

2.2 – Minimum Testing Regimen

This metric is measured at the Health Region level, not at the county level.

An individual county cannot move into phase one if regional hospital capacity is beneath the indicated level.

- a. Regions must be able to administer COVID-19 testing at a rate of 30 per 10,000 per week. Regions must implement a testing regimen that prioritizes symptomatic persons and individuals who came into contact with a known COVID-positive person and includes testing of all people in congregate settings when there is a positive test. This includes long-term care facilities and county jails among other facility types. The plan must include frequent tests of frontline and essential workers and industries where workers may not be able to practice optimal physical distancing (e.g. agricultural processing, meat packing).

Wheeler County is part of Health Region 7 along with Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath and Lake Counties. On May 5, 2020 OHA announced through its Health Security, Preparedness and Response Program that Health Region 7 has met this metric. On May 7, 2020 a formal attestation thereof was submitted to the Governor's Office (Please refer to Appendix A).

- b. Regions must maintain an appropriate number of testing sites to accommodate its population and must fully advertise where and how people can get tested. The region must work with local public

health and OHA to use the collected data to track the spread of the virus. Testing must be accessible to low-income and underserved communities.

Wheeler County is part of Health Region 7 along with Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath and Lake Counties. On May 5, 2020 OHA announced through its Health Security, Preparedness and Response Program that Health Region 7 has met this metric. On May 7, 2020 a formal attestation thereof was submitted to the Governor's Office (Please refer to Appendix A).

Further, Wheeler County has received and appreciates the COVID-19 Strategic Testing Plan for Oregon which indicates that OHA will prioritize counties with the lowest testing rates, highest case numbers without testing available in their counties, or counties that have other barriers to testing in a timely manner. This will support more testing in regions in Oregon that need the most help, including rural and frontier areas of the state.

As of May 1st, 2020 approximately 0.82% of Wheeler County residents have been tested for COVID-19 which is the second lowest rate in Health Region 7. This is partly due to challenges that include logistical problems, stemming from our County's remoteness, in delivering samples to labs according to manufacturer guidelines while maintaining essential day to day functions.

We are gratified to report that, thanks to the efforts of Wheeler County Public Health as well as our state and federal partners, Point of Care testing is now available in Wheeler County at the Asher Community Health Center. This development will ensure that our communities will receive adequate and equitable access to COVID-19 testing.

2.3 – Contact Tracing System

- a. Counties must have a minimum of 15 contact tracers for every 100,000 people. Every county must be prepared to contact trace 95% of all new cases within 24 hours, with OHA certifying a county's readiness. The contact tracing workforce must be reflective of the region and be able to conduct tracing activities in a culturally appropriate way and in multiple languages as appropriate for the population.

Assuming that this requirement conceptualizes "contact tracer" as Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees, meaning that they work 40

hours per week, it follows that Wheeler County would require one 0.25 FTE employee who can dedicate at least 10 hours of contact tracing per week in order to meet this requirement. It is possible that Wheeler County could share one of the 600 contact tracing professionals who are proposed to be hired and deployed to counties with one or more neighboring jurisdictions.

Alternatively, our Public Health Coordinator is capable of fulfilling this need. If necessary, she will have the full support of Wheeler County Emergency Management and the Wheeler County Sheriff's Office. Wheeler County is prepared to contact trace 95% of all new cases within 24 hours of a positive diagnosis. Public Health will meet with representatives from OHA in order to certify these capabilities on May 12, 2020.

This potential contact tracing workforce is absolutely reflective of the region and is able to conduct tracing activities in a culturally appropriate way based on long term residency in Wheeler County which has led to a level of understanding of cultural norms and community specific techniques for effective communication which is only possible through lived experience.

Less than 1% of Wheeler County's households are considered to be limited English Speaking households (wherein no one over the age of 14 resides who can speak English fluently).⁵ Spanish fluent contact tracing support is available locally if necessary.

2.4 – Isolation Facilities

- a. Counties must have hotel rooms available for people who test positive for COVID-19 and who cannot self-isolate. The Department of Public health and the Oregon Health Authority will provide support to local public health to identify needs and help with resources.

Wheeler County has an unsheltered population that, when existent, hovers near the singular⁶. However, in some households, providing a private room for an infected member in order to self-isolate at home may not be feasible.

While it is statistically likely that any infected residents will be able to self-isolate at home, in order to accommodate the rare case(s) where this may not be possible, Wheeler County Public Health has reached out to local lodging facilities and obtained commitments to

⁵ US Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Communities Survey

⁶ Estimates of the homeless population by county, Oregon, 2017, Public Health Division, Oregon Health Authority

provide rooms for COVID-19 positive cases who cannot self-isolate. We will coordinate with the Department of Public Health and OHA to identify needs and request resources as necessary.

- b. Counties provide a narrative of how they will respond to three different outbreak situations in the county (e.g. nursing home, jail, food processing facility, farmworker housing, or other group living situation).

Scenario #1: Haven House Retirement and Assisted Living Center

Wheeler County has one Long Term Care Facility, Haven House Retirement Center in Fossil Oregon which is the only group living situation in the county. There are currently 15 residents and 15 staff members. Mitigation of infection risk at this facility has been regarded by Wheeler County Public Health and Emergency Management as being of utmost import since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Communication between the Director of Haven House, Public Health and Emergency Management has been robust and ongoing. Staff have been offered priority access testing in order to give Public Health the necessary information to catch and deal with a potential outbreak at the earliest possible stage.

Should such an event occur, Wheeler County Public Health and Wheeler County Emergency Management will work closely with the Director and medical staff. WCPH will contact OHA in order to get an outbreak number and in collaboration with Emergency Management source additional resources as dictated by the situation. Testing supplies will be provided for residents and staff. WCPH will work in coordination with Asher Public Health Center to provide local point of care testing. WCPH will work with Haven House LTCF to ensure that all infection prevention control measures are in place to help mitigate further transmission in the facility based on OHA LTCF COVID-19 Tool Kit guidelines.

Scenario #2: Infection in the Unsheltered Population

Should an individual or family that is experiencing homelessness contract COVID-19, WCPH will activate existing agreements to provide the effected individual(s) with accommodation at a local hotel in order to self-isolate. Funding for this lodging will be supplied through the Wheeler County Emergency Management program. Additionally, WCPH will coordinate with OHA to provide the effected individual(s) with the necessities of daily living, food,

laundry, and medications while in isolation. They will be connected with housing, food assistance programs, and other services as needed.

While under isolation the individual will be monitored daily. Utilizing the tool outlined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Wheeler County Public Health and its partners would work to ensure available resources and services can be accessed and utilized.

Scenario #3: The Tourist Outbreak

Wheeler County has unique outdoor recreational opportunities which draw significant numbers of tourists, especially during the summer season. The lands which contain these natural resource attractions are largely under the management of state and federal agencies. On May 1st, 2020 the Oregon State Marine Board lifted the ban on boating on the John Day River. On May 5th, 2020 Governor Brown opened additional state managed outdoor recreational opportunities. As various land managers begin to open up to increased activity, contact between community members and travelers will increase. Because many of the individuals in the latter category are traveling from areas of verified community spread to recreate in Wheeler County the risk of a potential outbreak in this jurisdiction will necessarily be increased thereby.

Whether they come to float the John Day River, camp in the Umatilla National Forest or hunt turkeys on the BLM lands, natural resource tourists come into contact with our community members. This occurs when they stock up on provisions at the local stores rather than while they are out recreating in the wild expanses of our frontier county. The venues that offer these amenities serve both locals and tourists, bringing these groups into direct contact. Therefore, despite following all applicable operational guidance, a local grocery store is the most likely setting for the first sign of such an outbreak in Wheeler County.

Without these businesses in operation our communities cease to function. It is also important to understand that each of the three incorporated cities in Wheeler County has only one small store wherein essentials can be purchased locally. Also of import is the recognition that given the limitations inherent in the local labor market, one or two employees becoming infected with COVID-19 cannot be readily replaced. Even such a low level outbreak could conceivably necessitate closure beyond the time required to decontaminate the facility.

Were such an event to occur Wheeler County Emergency Management would reach out to the owner of the effected establishment in order to establish a delivery system for essential goods to residents in cooperation with Wheeler County Transportation. The initial groundwork thereof has been undertaken.

The contact tracing required in such an event would likely necessitate the assistance of Wheeler County Sheriff's Office and/or state level assistance due to the comparatively high rate of community interaction within these establishments. Wheeler County Public Health will assess this need and in coordination with Wheeler County Emergency Management will source the requisite resources.

2.5 – Finalized Statewide Sector Guidelines

- a. Each sector must adhere to Oregon Health Authority statewide guidelines to protect employees and consumers, make the physical work space safer and implement processes that lower the risk of infection.

Links to sector specific guidelines are presented in Section 3 and will be promulgated amongst Wheeler County businesses. Enforcement of these guidelines will be the purview of the Wheeler County Sheriff's Office. A policy of education with a goal of voluntary compliance shall be pursued as the initial enforcement action. If this strategy fails to gain compliance from local businesses additional enforcement actions as permitted under state law may be taken.

It is also important to note the personal responsibility that each individual must take for their own health and that of their fellow community members as we enter into the phased reopening process. A person who finds themselves in a situation wherein the physical distancing and other precautionary measures are being ignored should immediately remove themselves from the dangerous situation. Further, while helping to hold businesses and patrons accountable by following the proper channels is important, an individual's primary responsibility is to themselves and their family/loved ones. Enforcement actions should be undertaken only by those entities which are charged with and trained for the execution of these tasks.

2.6 – Sufficient Health Care Capacity

This metric is measured at the Health Region level, not at the county level. An individual county cannot move into phase one if regional hospital capacity is beneath the indicated level.

- a. To maintain the phased re-opening plan, each region must be able to accommodate a 20% increase in suspected or confirmed COVID-19 hospitalizations compared to the number of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 hospitalizations in the region at the time Executive Order No. 20-22 was issued.

Wheeler County is part of Health Region 7 along with Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath and Lake Counties. On May 5, 2020 OHA announced through its Health Security, Preparedness and Response Program that Health Region 7 has met this metric. On May 7, 2020 a formal attestation thereof was submitted to the Governor's Office (Please refer to Appendix A).

2.7 – Sufficient PPE Supply

- a. All hospitals in the health region must report PPE supply daily to OHA's Hospital Capacity system. Large hospitals and health systems in the region must attest to a 30-day supply of PPE, and rural hospitals must have a 14-day supply. This metric is measured at the Health Region level, not at the county level.

Wheeler County is part of Health Region 7 along with Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath and Lake Counties. On May 5, 2020 OHA announced through its Health Security, Preparedness and Response Program that Health Region 7 has met this metric. On May 7, 2020 a formal attestation thereof was submitted to the Governor's Office (Please refer to Appendix A).

- b. **Counties must attest to sufficient PPE supply for first responders in the county.**

All first responders in Wheeler County rolling maintain inventories of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). These providers are in triweekly communication with Wheeler County Emergency Management which manages PPE distributions received from our state and federal partners. Assuming that the current burn rate remains stable there are sufficient supplies of PPE within Wheeler County to ensure continued first responder operations for more than 30 days.

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Additionally, on May 2nd, 2020 Asher Community Health Center registered as a user of the Battelle Critical Care Decontamination System. This will allow for safe decontamination and reuse of N95 masks in order to help maintain a sufficient supply. Until such time as the supply chain for these essential items normalizes, optimization and reuse strategies will be employed by all first responders in Wheeler County.

Taking into account this information, the Incident Command Team, informed by input from Wheeler County Public Health and applicable agencies/entities, hereby attests that this constitutes a sufficient PPE supply for first responders in the county to enter into Phase One of reopening. This criteria will be continually monitored at the provider level. If at any point, first responders are unable to maintain a 14 day minimum supply of PPE, the Incident Command Team will put a hold, as defined in Section 3, on phased reopening until such time as a sufficient supply of PPE can be obtained.

Section 3 – Phased Reopening of Wheeler County

Phase One

The health and safety of its residents shall remain the highest priority as Wheeler County moves into Phase One reopening. To this end, individuals and businesses should strictly adhere to all applicable state level guidance. Sector specific and general guidance documents can be found at <https://govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19> under the expandable tab labeled **OHA Guidance, Signage and Rules**. Knowing and following these carefully crafted rules and recommendations is the best way to help ensure the continued safety of our community and is the responsibility of each individual/business.

The endeavor to chart a safe course toward normalcy of operations will be primarily informed by input from Wheeler County Public health and the Oregon Health Authority. The Incident Command Team will assess this information along with considerations from Economic Development professionals, the local business community and other stakeholders.

In the event of a COVID-19 positive case Public Health will employ contact tracing and compile a risk assessment for each case in accordance with current best practices. Based upon these assessments the Incident Command Team will determine if the phased reopening must be put on hold or reduced.

For the purposes of this plan a hold is defined as a resetting of the 21 day waiting period between phases to allow for time to pursue subsequent tracing, testing and isolation actions as appropriate. A reduction is defined as the rolling back of certain previously loosened restrictions in order to mitigate risk to our communities given new inputs. For example, a reduction action within Phase One could look like reducing seating capacity in restaurants from 50% to 25%. Each instance will be evaluated by the Incident Command Team and a decision driven by input from Public Health will be made as to appropriate hold or reduction actions.

Once Wheeler County enters Phase One of the reopening process the Incident Command Team and Wheeler County Public Health, in consultation with Economic Development professionals and representatives from the local business community, will closely monitor the situation. If this coalition recommends after a mandatory 21 day period that no hold or reduction activities are necessary, Wheeler County will consider a request to move into Phase Two of the Reopening process.

Phase Two Reopening: TBD

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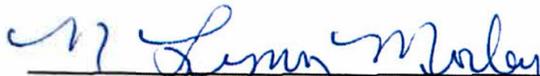
APPENDIX A - ATTESTATIONS

We the undersigned hereby attest that to the best of our knowledge this document accurately reflects the readiness and desire of Wheeler County to move into Phase One of the Reopening Process.



Dr. Robert Boss, Wheeler County Public Health Officer

Date: 5/8/20



N. Lynn Morley, Wheeler County Judge

Date: 5-8-20



Mike Smith, Wheeler County Sheriff

Date: 5/11/2020



Mitch Elliott, Wheeler County Emergency Manager

Date: 5/11/2020

Oregon Region 7 Healthcare Coalition Attestation

May 7, 2020

Dear Governor Brown,

We, the undersigned steering committee members of the **Oregon Region 7 Healthcare Coalition** on behalf of health and medical partners in the counties of Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, and Wheeler attest to having met the following regional metrics established as Prerequisites for Phased Reopening of Oregon.

Minimum Testing Regimen:

Region is able to administer testing at a rate of 30 per 10,000 per week

Region maintains sufficient testing sites accessible to underserved

communities. Sufficient Healthcare Capacity:

Region is able to accommodate a 20% increase in suspected or confirmed COVID-19

hospitalizations. Sufficient PPE Supply:

Hospitals in region are reporting PPE supply daily through HOSCAP

Hospitals in region must have a 14- or 30-day supply of PPE, depending on their size and whether they are a rural hospital.

X Digitally Signed 05/07/2020 2:13 PM

Andrea Kidder, St. Charles Health System
Region 7 HCC Steering Committee
Health Care Representative

X Digitally Signed 05/07/2020 12:12 PM

Perrilyn Wells, Harney District Hospital
Region 7 HCC Steering Committee
Health Care Representative

X Digitally Signed 05/07/2020 11:27 AM

Mike Ryan, Crook County Sheriff's Office
Region 7 HCC Steering Committee
County Emergency Management Representative

X Digitally Signed 05/07/2020 12:39 PM

Emily Wegener, Jefferson County Public Health
Region 7 HCC Steering Committee
Local Public Health Authority Representative

X Digitally Signed 05/07/2020 3:25 PM

Doug Kelly, Redmond Fire and Rescue
Region 7 HCC Steering Committee
Emergency Medical Services Representative

Questions about this attestation should be directed to:

Kattaryna Stiles

Oregon Health Authority Liaison to Oregon Region 7 Healthcare Coalition

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