

The loss of more than \$1 million in anticipated revenue from Jail Bed Boarding fees has put the Columbia County Sheriff's Office in crisis mode.

A decision by the U.S. Marshal in Portland to divert a large portion of the current bed usage in Columbia County to Multnomah County means that Columbia County Sheriff Jeff Dickerson must deal with a \$1.2 million dollar shortfall in expected revenue.

"The combination of a 17 percent cut in general fund spending from last year and the anticipated reduction in federal prisoners' boarding fees spells disaster for our Enforcement Division," Sheriff Jeff Dickerson said.

The combined cuts and reduction in revenue will mean the Sheriff will lose 14 positions – four in the jail and ten on the road and on the river. Three additional part-time positions will be eliminated. Also included in the reductions is the elimination of the Columbia County Marine Patrol program, a school resource officer position, and a contract position with the state fish and wildlife department to provide law enforcement services on Sauvie Island.

"We will place a greater burden on our corrections deputies," Dickerson said, "to cover for the loss of the technicians who currently run our control room in the jail. But the skeleton crew we will have left to patrol our county will not be able to handle the call load.

"We will be forced to prioritize our responses. Only the most serious of crimes will generally be investigated. Our ability to respond to emergencies as they happen has been fatally compromised."

The budget nightmare began for the Sheriff's Office this spring when the Sheriff was given a

budget significantly lower than that which was approved last year. The county's general fund had 5 percent less this year from last year, but the Sheriff's Office share of the budget cutting was set at over 17 percent.

The sheriff pinned the agency's hope to avoid layoffs on a forecast of \$1.8 million in federal jail boarding fees after the agency secured a 20% increase in those fees. The Sheriff said the jail will bring in approximately \$1.5 million from boarding fees in the current fiscal year.

Next year's boarding fees were looked to as a salve for the Sheriff's funding wounds, but a perfect storm was brewing on the horizon that now has left CCSO in deep trouble. The combination of a reduction in federal arrests, the breaking of a log jam in getting federal detainees to other facilities around the country, and the inking of a deal between the U.S. Marshals Service and Multnomah County to increase the boarding numbers for federal detainees has brought Columbia County to the precipice.

"We housed about 60 federal detainees per day in the last year, Dickerson said. "I have been assured by a representative of the Marshals that those numbers are going to fall dramatically."

A total of 14 Columbia County Sheriff's Office employees received notice today of the pending layoffs, which are set to take effect August 1. Sheriff Dickerson said the layoffs are one of the hardest things he has ever had to do.

"I believe citizens expect their sheriff to provide the public safety services I have had to cut today," he said. "State law requires that I staff the jail, attend to the directions of the courts, process civil papers and provide search and rescue capabilities in the county. With all the cuts from the county and the federal government, the only real place I could cut was in the very services many constituents expect me to deliver first.

“I will continue to look to the future and a possible funding source to provide dedicated funding to the sheriff’s office. In these economic times, that solution still seems out there a ways. For now, these are very dark days for our county.”