

# Press Release

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## **Cook Memorial Library Shelves Overdue Fines**

(LA GRANDE, OREGON, MARCH 5, 2021) On Wednesday evening, March 3, Cook Memorial Library joined the more than 200 public libraries across the country that have gone fine-free when the La Grande City Council passed a resolution abolishing library overdue fines. Effective April 1, the Library will no longer assess overdue fines on any library materials and will forgive all outstanding overdue fines that may have accrued on patron library accounts.

By eliminating overdue fines, the Library aims to employ more effective methods to encourage the return of items, re-engage patrons who may have stopped using the Library due to outstanding overdue fines, and use staff time and resources in ways that better serves Library patrons and the La Grande community.

Cook Memorial Library Director Kip Roberson is overjoyed to see the new policy implemented. "The Library is committed to providing equal access to every member of our community and eliminating fines offers all of our patrons a fresh start to re-discover the library and all that it has to offer. By eliminating fines, the library is removing barriers and making access easy, equitable and enjoyable for everyone."

Overdue fines have never about collecting revenue, but instead were meant to encourage patrons to return materials in a reasonable amount of time so that everyone could enjoy them. Libraries have found that overdue fines can have the opposite effect, however, discouraging people from returning overdue items (to avoid paying mounting fines), which ultimately can discourage them from using the library at all. Libraries therefore risk losing the fine, the unreturned item, and the patron. Even more unfortunate, overdue fines tend to disproportionately affect people who benefit greatly from library access, including children, teens, and low-income individuals.

These unfortunate side effects were additional motivation for the Library staff and the Library Advisory Commission to recommend that City Council rescind the existing

overdue fines resolution. “Removing overdue fines and offering forgiveness of overdue debt relieves barriers to library use and access, with the goal of getting people to come back to the Library,” said Director Roberson. “Eliminating overdue fines will also result in more positive patron interactions and will allow staff to focus on creativity and exceptional service, as well as freeing up staff time to work on other projects.”

The Library’s current three and one week checkout periods will remain but overdue fines will not accrue if items are not returned on time. The Library has added the convenience of two automatic renewals for most items; however, if an item is on hold for another patron, it will not be renewed and the patron will be asked to return it. The elimination of overdue fines does not include charges - past or future - for lost or damaged items; patrons with lost or damaged fees on their account will either need to return the item(s) or pay for their replacement or face possible collection attempts.

Cook Memorial Library joins more than 200 libraries across Oregon and the nation that have embraced a fine free model. Upon going fine free, these libraries have found an increase in circulation, an increase in library card registrations, and an increase in materials being returned that were previously thought lost. In addition, these libraries have not reported any increase in materials not being returned because of the fine-free policy.

Cook Memorial Library is committed to sharing information and resources with all members of our community. Along with over 35,000 books, the Library also has DVDs, audiobooks, WiFi hotspots and laptops, STEM kits, garden seeds, and many other items that patrons can check out. The Library also has multiple digital services offering streaming movies and TV shows, eBooks, eAudiobooks, and digital magazines that patrons can access. “Now that the Library is fine-free, we look forward to welcoming all patrons into the Library again,” Roberson stated.

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READ, LEARN, DISCOVER @ Cook Memorial Library, 2006 4<sup>th</sup> St., La Grande, OR 97850  
Call 541.962.1339 or visit the library online at [www.cookmemoriallibrary.org](http://www.cookmemoriallibrary.org).