

Cuts will hurt state, DEQ official asserts

By Kathy Smith
Of the Emerald

A proposed 10-percent cut in the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's budget would mean "Oregonians will have to live with dirtier air and water," says Mark Fritzier, a DEQ representative.

And that is a slap at what makes Oregon Oregon, he says.

Budget cuts created by the 1980 special session and the 1981 regular session of the state Legislature already have reduced the DEQ budget to levels established during the 1975-77 biennium.

With an \$8.1 million budget for 1981-83, DEQ is operating at 85-percent of the previous biennium's funding. A 10-percent cut, combined with a massive reduction in federal funds, will bring about serious effects on the Oregon environment, Fritzier says.

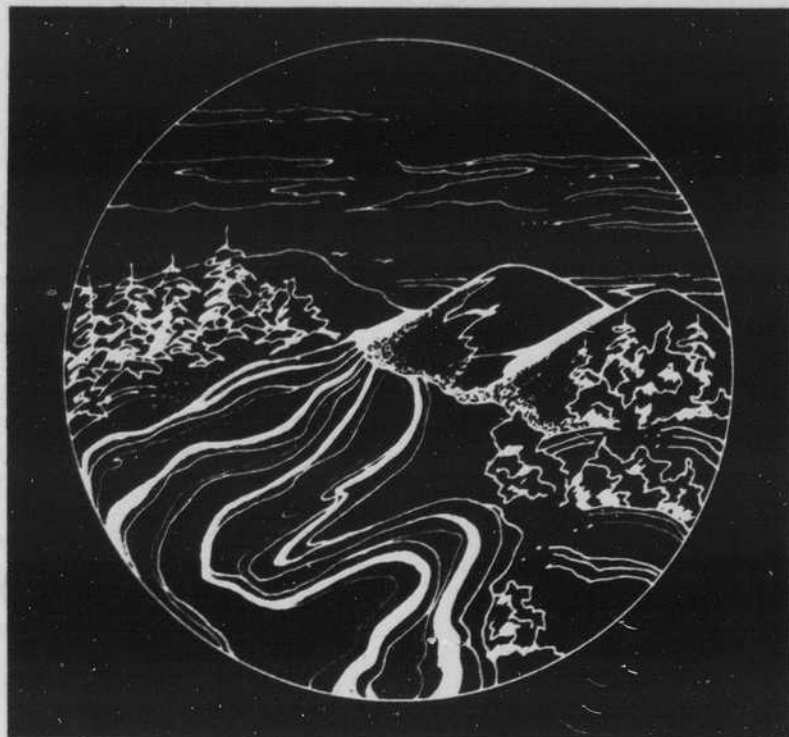
Gov. Vic Atiyeh is proposing the most recent cut as part of a budget-balancing act designed to rid the state of a projected \$239 million deficit.

Reductions in state funds will result in the loss of 12 positions and related services, Fritzier says. Many services will be limited to the Portland-Medford corridor, and several monitoring stations will be closed. Technical assistance to small communities also will be limited.

"We will have to be reactive rather than active," Fritzier says.

The effects of a reduced DEQ budget could include:

- A reduction in air quality monitoring. "The air program will have to rely on self-monitoring by industrial sources," Fritzier says.
- A 50-percent reduction in DEQ's ability to analyze industrial waste water discharges.
- A reduction in technical assistance for sewage treatment systems. This would affect planning and design



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review, and possibly lead to more breakdowns, growth problems, and increased taxes or user charges.

- A major reduction in public information programs on recycling. DEQ would lose half its financial ability to develop and disseminate information.
- An almost total destruction of noise pollution programs. Noise pollution control is at the top of the budget-cutting list.

In a recent report to Atiyeh, Fritzier outlined a few long-term consequences that — although they are hard to predict — "can be expected with some assurance." Possible long-term consequences include:

- More public health closures of popular swimming and boating areas on the Willamette, Clackamas, Santiam, and Rogue rivers and other public waters. The closures would be due to the entrance of raw sewage, as assistance to small communities is reduced, and sewage treatment plants reach capacity.
- A reduction in salmon and steelhead runs due to

water pollution.

- A regression in the 40-year struggle to restore the Willamette River.
- Increased air pollution that would aggravate respiratory problems, block views of Oregon mountains and countryside, and adversely affect forest and wilderness areas.
- Deterioration of well-water quality and contamination of groundwater from un-noticed sewage and water discharges.

While Atiyeh is proposing a 10-percent reduction in the DEQ budget, the Joint Ways and Means Committee is suggesting a less damaging 2.5-percent cut. Fritzier refuses to bet on the passage of the 2.5-percent cut, however, calling that bet "poor poker."

The possible state budget cuts, combined with almost assured federal cuts, could mean a grim future for Oregon's famous clean environment, Fritzier says.

"Oregon will no longer reflect the kind of livability so many people sought in coming here, and were proud of in living here."

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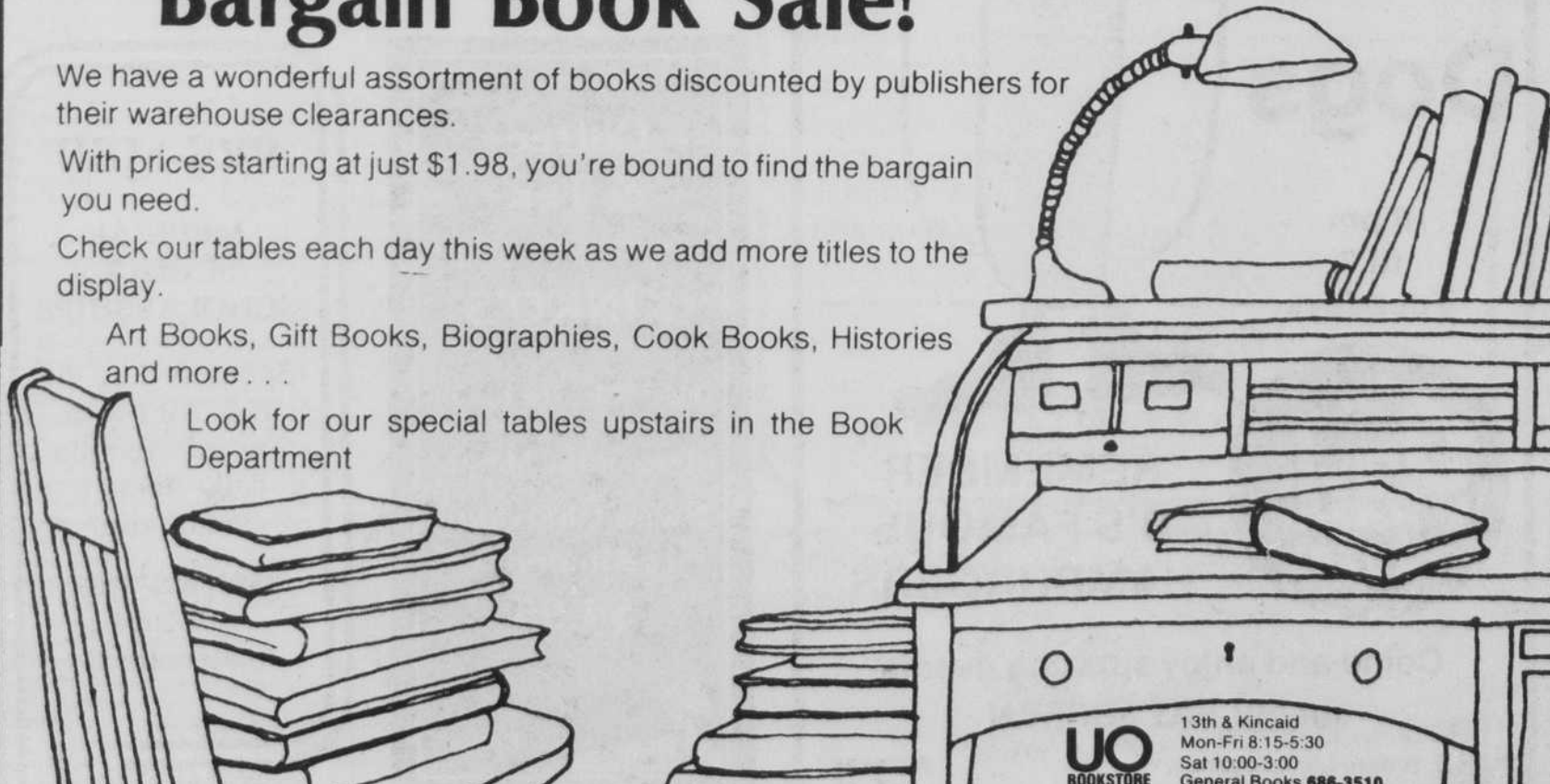
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