

How to become part of the snow survey

David Hill
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If you don't live in it, it can be easy to ignore snow. Tire chains, snow shovels, down jackets...all someone else's problems. But in Oregon, even if you don't live in it, snow is an essential and unavoidable part of our water resources. Snowpack stores water, and slowly releases it to downstream locations in the springtime. Stream ecology, agriculture, and thirsty people all benefit. And, before it melts, let's not forget the incredible recreational resource that snow provides to Oregon. Understanding the distribution and evolution of our snowpack is therefore important, but it can be difficult for many reasons. It's cold, the days are short, and it's hard to get to it to measure it.

Fortunately, Oregon has a large community of backcountry skiers, split-boarders, snowshoers, and snowmobilers that don't mind the cold and who can help! There is a project called Community Snow Observations (CSO), funded by NASA and National Geographic, that seeks to blend the activities of scientists and recreationists to improve our understanding of snow and our ability to predict its behavior. This crowdsourcing approach to science, or 'citizen science' is the ultimate win-win scenario. For the scientists, it is a case of many hands making light work. A large and active backcountry community can collect much more data from many more locations than a small scientific team. For the participants, they increase their understanding of science, and they actually get to help guide the science. With this particular project, you can help NASA without your feet ever leaving the ground!

Getting involved with CSO is easy. You'll want to start by visiting their website (communitysnowobs.org) where you can sign up, view tutorials, and find links to the smartphone app you will need. Next, you will need a measuring device. Many backcountry users already carry an avalanche probe, which is a key piece of safety gear. If you don't have a probe, a measuring tape or a meter stick can work. Finally, you will need to get out into the snow and start submitting data. It's important to measure in undisturbed locations where the snow has not been trampled or compacted. With a bare minimum of training and practice, you'll be able to record and submit a measurement in just a minute or two. You don't need to worry about the lack of cell service in the mountains. Your phone still knows where you are and will upload the data later.

All of the project data are freely available and can be viewed on the CSO website. The project team incorporates the data into their computer simulations and they have shown that citizen scientist involvement leads to dramatic improvements. In the end, there is no crowdsourcing without the crowd, and CSO hopes to see more and more citizen scientists out in the snow this season. Follow the project at @communitysnowobs on Instagram and Twitter to learn about data collection contests and prize giveaways. Snow is a winter playground for many but an important water resource for all. Lend CSO a little bit of your time and turn your winter fun into data for science.

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Bills

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"fix" a portion of the state's new corporate activity tax with respect to pharmacies.

Moore-Green said that due to contracts with pharmacy benefit managers, pharmacies will not be able to pass along the tax on prescription drugs sold at retail.

Pharmacy benefit managers are individuals who contract with pharmacies on behalf of an insurer, a third party administrator or the Oregon Prescription Drug Program. They are responsible for administering drug benefits and services for the vast majority of customers in Oregon, Moore-Green said.

Her second bill would honor the 100-year anniversary of Oregon ratifying the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which granted women the right to vote.

Committee bills focus for Evans

Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, said his priorities this session will be advocating on behalf of two committee bills from the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness.

Evans is the committee chair. The first bill would create a series of reforms to the structures and systems within the Oregon Office of Emergency Management. The second would create incentives for small business investments focused on resiliency and deployment in the event of a disaster.

Conversations around emergency preparedness in Oregon frequently center around the possibility of a powerful

earthquake from the Cascadia subduction zone. Scientists believe that such an event could be catastrophic for the Pacific Northwest.

"We are not ready for the disasters that we know will happen in the future — and we must take concrete steps to optimize existing capacities even as we work to expand capabilities throughout the state of Oregon," Evans said.

Class sizes in collective bargaining

For the third consecutive session, Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, is pushing for class size in schools to be a mandatory subject of collective bargaining.

His proposal passed the House in 2018, but didn't clear the Senate. It wasn't included in the massive Student Success Act in 2019.

The bill would essentially require school districts to consider class size alongside issues like salaries and benefits when making budget decisions.

Opponents of the bill, including the Oregon School Boards Association, have said this proposal would end up costing districts more money that could be going to benefit students. Supporters contend that large class sizes can exacerbate other top issues including absenteeism, low teacher retention and poor graduation rates.

Clem is also prioritizing a \$3.7 million funding proposal that would help provide a semi-permanent warming shelter for the homeless in Salem.

Task force for underrepresented students

In an attempt to lessen the disparity in access to post-secondary education along socioeconomic lines, Rep. Teresa

Alonso Leon, D-Woodburn, has a bill proposing a task force to investigate the issue.

The task force would have until December 2020 to come up with a series of policy proposals focused on increasing the likelihood of post-secondary success in students who come from underrepresented populations.

Eight lawmakers would sit on the task force — four from each chamber — and it would travel the state holding listening sessions. Similar statewide meetings occurred in the months leading up to the creation of the Student Success Act and 2017's multi-billion-dollar transportation package.

Her second bill would expand Regional Health Equity Coalitions and fully fund all six existing programs. The coalitions aim to reduce local health disparities experienced by people in under-served communities.

Removing short sessions

Using the short session to try to kill the short session, Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, is attempting to pass a bill that would allow Oregonians to vote on if they want to keep the 35-day, even-year session.

Before 2012, Oregon only held sessions in the odd years, though they would be frequently called back to Salem for special sessions.

Voters decided in 2010 to amend the constitution and give Oregon annual sessions with short sessions in even years. The short session was to be used for budget adjustments and small policy fixes.

Thatcher believes that the session has strayed far away from what voters approved, with lawmakers — particularly Democrats — trying to push through large pieces of legislation.

"It's turned into a version of the long session, just really compressed," Thatcher said.

She said voters should get an opportunity to reaffirm that the current legislative structure is what they want.

Kratom sale restrictions

In an attempt to regulate Kratom in Oregon, Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, is introducing a bill that would limit sales of the product to individuals 22 years old and over. It also would require that all Kratom be inspected by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Other states have already banned the substance, which some use for therapeutic purposes. There are concerns about its safety and what is actually in the product, Post said.

"I am not a 'ban guy' so this is how I want to deal with what is potentially a dangerous for some, substance," Post said.

He also is proposing a bill that would clarify the relationship between the courts and local government when resolving property line disputes. It also would allow property owners to train dogs within barns or other agricultural buildings without fear of reprisals from county government.

Assistance for NORPAC

NORPAC Foods is in the midst of a Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceeding and informed the state that it may lay off more than 1,400 employees. Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, is proposing a bill this session to provide those workers with unemployment benefits and training.

Layoffs have already occurred at the Stayton facility.

He said the bankruptcy has caused a tremendous impact in communities in his district where the loss of dozens of jobs can impact an entire town.

The NORPAC plants in Brooks and Salem are set to close Jan. 12, according to filings with the state.

According to court filings, the company owes more than \$165 million to more than 5,000 creditors.

Increased penalty for crime of riot

Rep. Sherrie Sprenger, R-Scio, has already announced that she will not seek re-election to her seat this year. With her two bills in what might be her final session, Sprenger is taking on auto insurers and people convicted of riot crimes.

The latter bill would increase the penalties for committing the crime of riot while wearing a mask and directs the courts to consider face concealment to be an aggravating factor in a riot case.

Her other bill would require auto insurers to inform policyholders at least 30 days in advance before the cancellation of their policy.

Sprenger said that a constituent informed her of a gap in consumer protections that allows auto insurance companies to cancel new policies without advanced notice.

Incentives for multi-family homes

Rep. Rick Lewis, R-Silverton, is again proposing a pair of bills that died last session.

The first would provide tools and incentives for developers to build affordable multi-family housing in rural areas. Participating communities would waive System Development Charges to developers in exchange for an agreement that rents would stay at or below the state's affordable housing threshold for at least a decade.

Lewis said that it lacked Democratic support and died after a courtesy hearing in committee.

The other bill would allow families of formerly Missing in Action service members to apply directly to the Oregon Department of Transportation for a roadside sign honoring that individual.

There are currently seven former MIA service members who have been identified and returned home for burial, Lewis said.

The Statesman Journal also reached out to Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, and Rep. Mike Nearman, R-Independence. They did not respond.

Contact reporter Connor Radnovich at cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich



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