

Weather

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to February storms that impacted the north but not the southern half of the state.

Snowpack in the Cascade Mountains from Mount Hood to the Three Sisters and Diamond Peak is 123 to 135 percent of normal, and it's even better in the mountains of northeast Oregon.

"The good part about March was that even though it was dry, it was still fairly cool so the snowpack isn't rapidly melting off," Bryant said.

Precipitation across the north isn't too bad either. Since Oct. 1 — the start of the water year — Salem has gotten 29.9

inches of rain, which is just below the normal of 31.6 inches.

The problem is that most of that rain fell during the winter, and the spring has been dry so far. March recorded about half the rainfall it normally would in Salem. April has also started out dry and remains likely to stay that way.

That's led to Willamette Valley reservoirs such as Detroit Lake, which relies on spring rainfall, being pretty far below where they should be this time of year.

Detroit Lake is currently 1,522 feet above sea level, while it should be around 1,544 feet.

That can impact everything from recreation to streamflow to irrigation in the Santiam Canyon.

"As it stands, we're looking at an insufficient water year," said Tom Con-

ning, spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages 13 reservoirs in the Willamette Valley. "Forecasted rain in March and April didn't materialize. We need steady precipitation up to June to have a good water year."

The snowpack is decent, at 124% but only really helps us out in keeping reservoir elevations up in the summer as the snowmelt, if it lasts, matches outflows. We're working regularly with our federal, state and local partners to inform our decisions. We're holding weekly meetings and reduced mainstem flows for the first week of April.

In general, this year isn't looking too bad across northern Oregon. But if dry conditions continue, it will mean the forest below snow level dries out earlier

in the season than it should, building up the possibility for increased wildfire danger.

Currently, above-normal wildfire danger is projected for Central and South central Oregon in June and July, while the rest of the state is classified as normal.

"Overall, we're in much better shape in northwest Oregon the rest of the state," Bryant said. "But it's something we have to watch."

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Levies

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Ballots in Marion County are scheduled to be mailed April 28 for the May 18 election.

Stayton's recreation levy, for parks and pools, asks property owners to pay 50 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value for five years to raise a total of \$1,359,927. A separate library levy is asking for 40 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value for five years to raise a total of \$1,699,909.

In the past two elections, Stayton had a 70 cents per \$1,000 levy fail 52% to 47% and a 65 cents per \$1,000 fail by a 50% to 49% margin. The current four-year operations levy, which taxes property owners at 60 cents per \$1,000, expires June 30.

The Stayton Public Library has been closed to patrons since March 2020, though it has offered curbside pickup and remote services since the start of the pandemic.

Stayton City Manager Keith Campbell said after the levy failed in November, the library laid off three staff members and limited work hours for two more, cut 15 hours of operation per week and stopped buying new books and other library materials.

If the library levy fails, the library will make more staff cuts and some programs will be eliminated.

"I don't think people would understand the value of these things until they're gone," said Lauren Mulligan, a member of the Keep Stayton Livable PAC.

For years, the Kiwanis Club of Stayton has offered low-cost swim lessons at the pool. There also have been programs to teach children in nearby elementary schools to swim at no cost.

With the pool in Stayton closed, the closest venues swimmers have are in Salem and Silverton. That would be permanent if the levy fails.

"It would be a huge loss for the community if they were forced to close," Waggar said.

Cascade School District

The district, which serves students in Turner, Aumsville and surrounding areas, has an ambitious \$56.4 million bond on the ballot.

It is asking voters to approve a 92 cents per \$1,000 increase in property taxes, which would raise the total to \$2.13 per \$1,000 with a previous bond from 2005. When the previous bond is paid off in 2026, the new bond will continue at the \$2.13 per \$1,000 rate through 2045.

The district has been awarded a \$4 million grant from the state to make building improvements, but it will lose that money if a new bond is not approved by voters.

The Cascade School District is the fastest-growing rural school district in the state.

The district has grown to 2,500 children, up from 2,100 in the 2014-2015



A possible site of new classrooms, if the levy passes, at Turner Elementary School in Turner, Oregon on March 30.

BRIAN HAYES/STATESMAN JOURNAL



If the library levy fails, the Stayton Public Library will make more staff cuts and eliminate some programs.

JANNA MOSER/SPECIAL TO THE STAYTON MAIL

school year. It was one of the few to not experience a significant enrollment drop during the pandemic. And as new housing continues to be built at a fast pace in Turner and Aumsville, it is facing capacity limits.

While it previously welcomed students from other districts, most of the schools have had to put caps on the size of classes.

"I attribute it to how well we're doing," Cascade Superintendent Darin Drill said. "Matt (Thatcher) is the Oregon High School Principal of the Year this year. We have a 93% graduation rate, 94% last year. We cracked the top 10. Our on-track rate is way high, 97%."

The 2005 bond funded improvements at nearly every school in the district, including building a new gym and weight room at Cascade High School.

If this bond is passed, it would build 10 new classrooms in Aumsville Elementary, six at Turner Elementary, six at Cloverdale Elementary, four at Cascade Junior High and four at Cascade High School.

It would also fund improvements to existing buildings, including security entrances and cameras, fire safety systems, air quality improvements, expanded vocational learning spaces, upgrades to the technology infrastructure, updates to the electrical and HVAC systems, and replacing or repairing roofs, plumbing and flooring.

If the new bond fails, the district will have to stretch its maintenance budget and increase capacity one portable unit

at a time.

"We either stay running behind for years to come or we get ahead of it," Drill said. "It's not like we're saying we need a whole brand new high school. We're saying each one of these areas needs something."

Lyons-Mehama Water District

For years, the district has been trying to find funding to replace its aging infrastructure.

One of the old water storage tanks, which was made of wood, leaked and was taken out of use. There are still wood water distribution pipes in some locations in the district.

The district, which has about 880 customers between Marion (Mehama) and Linn (Lyons) counties, is asking voters to pass a bond for \$1.10 per \$1,000 of assessed value for 31 years.

That would fund \$5,260,000 in bonds to replace its reservoirs, includ-

ing a 1.3 million gallon tank, fund site improvements and replace aging water mains for water delivery.

"We're getting to the point where we're just about at a crisis on our water," said Dick Voltin, board chair of the district. "Everybody thinks they move in here and we've got cheap water. When you look at it, people are paying more for their smartphones than their water bills."

"We haven't done any maintenance for 20 years on our water system."

The district asked for a \$1.15 per \$1,000 of assessed value bond in 2019, but that failed 54% to 45%. In 2020, \$3 million in grant money was earmarked for the district by the Oregon Legislature, but the bill it was attached to died with the Republican walkout.

So now it's back to asking voters for money again this year.

During September's wildfires, some

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