

MELT

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supplies and leave farmers and agricultural industries dry.

Last year's heat wave depleted water supplies and caused some farms in Oregon to run out of water entirely by late June 2021, weeks ahead of schedule. In one instance, Plantworks, a nursery in Cove, had to purchase new water storage containers and fill them with city water in order to keep their crops alive.

"Essentially, folks that rely on irrigation water will have less available, and there will probably be some restrictions applied depending upon where they get their water and their water rights," Oviatt said. "There will be less available surface water for instream flows to support things. There will be less available ground-water storage because we're not recharging our system with our ground soil moisture and because we've been in a long-term drought and we didn't really recover from that over this winter."

Union County water-master Shad Hattan agrees, stating that if the area doesn't get significant spring rain, "it will be hard on everything. Agriculture, stream flows. If we don't get moisture for April and May, that's (going to be) hard on everybody."

One silver lining to the early melt off and continuation of the drought? Fire season might be milder compared to last year.

"The biggest thing is how fast the snow we have right now comes off," said Trevor Lewis, assistant fire management officer with the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. "If we lose our snow real quick, and it dries out fairly quickly then our grass growth isn't as high, so we generally see lower rates of spread with our fires, even if we do have significant fuel moistures that are dryer. It really depends on how this snow comes off."

Lewis said that last year's slow runoff allowed for above average grass and brush growth — primary fuels for wildfires that were primed by the heat wave that pushed temperatures to record highs in most of Oregon. That grass growth meant that fires spread more rapidly, and in the case of the Bootleg Fire resulted in one of the nation's largest wildfires for 2021.

"It's kind of a catch-22 for us," Lewis said. "Does it come quickly and we have a drought? Or does it come off slow and we end up getting the grass growth?"

Despite being a La Nina year, the Eastern Oregon snowpack wasn't enough to start turning around the drought conditions in the area. As of March 31, most of Eastern Oregon remains in severe or moderate drought, and conditions are expected to worsen over the summer.

"In order to recover from that long-term drought we need successive years and we need excessive amounts of precipitation, and we're just not getting it," Oviatt said. "It's not going to happen this year, we're going to have to make some sacrifices in terms of surface water and available water."



Ignite! Reading/Contributed Photo
A student at Quinsigamond Elementary School in Worcester, Massachusetts, takes part in an Ignite! Reading session on Wednesday, March 23, 2022. The program, which is partnering with the Eastern Oregon University College of Education, pairs tutors with students in 15-minute, one-on-one sessions to improve literary skills.

IGNITE

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hands-on experience throughout a 10-week training and tutoring program this spring semester. The program focuses on giving future teachers a one-on-one tutoring experience, building a productive relationship between teacher and student.

The partnership, which is the first between Ignite! Reading and a university, was initiated when Sliwerski's interests aligned with those of Eastern Oregon University's Ronda Fritz. The associate professor at EOU's College of Education has been an advocate for bringing the "science of reading" curriculum to rural Oregon schools to improve reading skills. Fritz

noted that the partnership with Ignite! Reading allows Eastern students to have a positive impact on students locally and across the country.

"Ronda and I had this brain meld around marrying Ignite! Reading with EOU's intentionality of ensuring that their teachers leave EOU, step into the classroom and are completely prepared to ensure their kids learn how to read," Sliwerski said. "That was the spark."

According to The Nation's Report Card national achievement-level results, roughly 65% of fourth grade students in the United States read at an efficiency below their grade level. Sliwerski's vision with Ignite! Reading is to close that gap and give students foundational skills and the confidence to



Ignite! Reading/Contributed Photo
A student at Coney Island Prep in New York City, New York, participates in an Ignite! Reading session on Monday, March 21, 2022. A partnership between Eastern Oregon University and Ignite! Reading will allow education students to have a positive impact on young readers across the country.

thrive in the classroom.

"We are trying to stamp out a statistic right now that is utterly heartbreaking," Sliwerski said.

Students at Eastern will participate in the 10-week program that consists of training using evidence-based curriculum. The Ignite! Reading program includes daily tutoring with students from kindergarten through fifth grade, both locally and nationwide. Fritz noted that the virtual format of the training and tutoring sessions allows for both the grade school students and teachers to make adjustments and improvements as

they go along.

"Because it's delivered on Zoom, we can keep track of how they're doing and help them hone their teaching skill," Fritz said. "It has the possibility to help struggling readers make huge gains."

The partnership between Eastern and Ignite! Reading carries a shared mission, bettering child literacy and improving the methods teachers use to teach the skill.

As the university looks to build on the new partnership in years to come, "the possibilities are endless," Fritz said.



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