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Photos by Dick Mason/The Observer

Retired Maj. Gen. Dennis Klein, left, prepares to present the Seven Seals Award to representatives of La Grande's National Guard unit, commander Lt. Col. Seth Musgrove, center, and Command Sgt. Maj. Mike Walker, on Saturday, Aug. 6, 2022, at the Blue Mountain Conference Center.

## Officials support map reversal

Map was part of \$220 million bill to prepare Oregon for worsening, climate change-fueled wildfires

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Oregon Department of Forestry's decision to pull back and revise its wildfire risk map was a wise move, according to a number of Union County officials.

"It was a step which had to be taken. They needed to start over again," said Donna Beverage, a member of the Union County Board of Commissioners, of the decision announced on Thursday, Aug. 4.

Created with help from Oregon State University, the Oregon Wildfire Risk Explorer map was part of a state push to protect Oregonians against wildfires. The map showed the wildfire risk of 2 million tax lots across the state, categorizing them in five categories: no, low, moderate, high or extreme risk. About 80,000 property owners were found to be in high or extreme risk areas, and received letters from the Forestry Department telling them that they could be subject to fire-resistant building codes that are being developed.

The map created backlash during its brief existence. Many people argued that it incorrectly listed homeowners in high risk areas when they may not have been in part because they were not given credit for taking steps to make their homes fire resistant. Others complained that the map resulted in insurance companies raising premiums significantly and lowering property value.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, said the rollout of the map and ensuing letters to property owners about fire risk was not han-

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Andrew Cutler/The Observer

The state of Oregon has withdrawn a map showing the fire risk of individual land parcels, drawing the praise of Union County officials who said it was a step that had to be taken.

## Tremendous honor

Seven Seals Award presented to 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry for support provided to employers of citizen soldiers

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — An awards ceremony with a noteworthy twist was conducted at the Blue Mountain Conference Center over the weekend.

La Grande's National Guard unit, the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry, was presented with the prestigious Seven Seals Award on Saturday, Aug. 6. The award recognizes the 3-116th for the support it gives to the employers its soldiers work for, plus the assistance the unit gives to its citizen soldiers.

"This is such a tremendous honor," said Lt. Col. Seth Musgrove, commander of the 3-116th.

The award was presented by retired Maj. Gen. Dennis Klein, the chair of the Oregon Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program.

The Seven Seals Award traditionally recognizes employers and their managers whose help make it possible for people to be employed and serve in the



Members of La Grande's 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry stand at attention during a ceremony on Saturday, Aug. 6, 2022, where the unit received the Seven Seals Award at the Blue Mountain Conference Center.

National Guard or another reserve branch of the Armed Forces.

The tables were turned with La Grande's National Guard unit being the award recipient.

"This is unusual," said Klein, who selected the 3-116th for the Seven Seals Award.

The Seven Seals award salutes La Grande's National Guard unit for steps it takes to reach out to employers, including providing employers with opportunities to attend training sessions at the Orchard Combat Training Center near Boise, Idaho, Klein said. Members of the 3-116th go sev-

eral times a year, including weekends.

Employers are provided with transportation to the training center.

"We want to help provide context to our employers who provide such wonderful support," Musgrove said.

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## Oregon spending more on its college students

Report shows 2021 per-student spending highest since 2001, but still lags behind the national average

By SAMI EDGE  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon has clawed its way out of the bottom of state rankings for higher education spending, but is still far from reaching national averages for per-student funding, according to a national report.

The latest State Higher Education Finance report, released in June, shows that Oregon's state and local governments appropriated \$7,395 higher education dol-

lars per student in fiscal year 2021, the state's highest per-student spending since 2001. That marks a 10% increase in per-student spending from 2020. Oregon is among a minority of states where spending has rebounded to pre-Great Recession levels.

But those numbers come with a big caveat, said Ben Cannon, director of the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission, during a Hunt Institute panel on July 26. Student enrollment is way down, Cannon said, which skews

per-student funding and is undermining school budgets.

Oregon also still lags far behind the national average of \$9,327 in per-student spending, spends less on financial aid per student than the national average and relies on students to shoulder an above-average share of higher education revenue.

"This is the story of mild gain, but a long way to go," Cannon told The Oregonian. "When we look at those increasing investments, we see enormous remaining need."

The COVID-19 pandemic upended typical higher education budget predictions, the State Higher Education Finance report

confirmed. Typically, more students go to college during recessions and states tighten budgets and slash higher education funding. However, a different trend played out during the brief pandemic recession. Full-time enrollment plummeted a record 3% nationwide, wounding community colleges most. State lawmakers, expected to cut higher education funding, instead increased funding in college systems using federal stimulus dollars.

"Many states were committed to higher education by choosing to put stimulus funds, or their own

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68 LOW  
A stray t-shower

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