

Oregon

Oregon water regulators seek \$3M Additional funds will pay for 11 new positions

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon's water regulators are seeking more than \$3 million to better handle problems with groundwater depletion and water rights enforcement.

In its 2017-2019 budget proposal, the Oregon Water Resources Department wants state lawmakers to pay for 11 new positions while increasing the pay and duties of several existing positions.

The agency will ask for three funding "packages" to be included in Gov. Kate Brown's recommended budget for the next biennium.

Concerns about water have grown in recent years due to drought as well as increased public scrutiny.

Last year, groundwater depletion concerns in Southeast Oregon's Harney Basin prompted OWRD to suspend drilling of most new agricultural wells.

In August, the Oregonian newspaper also ran a package of articles, "Draining Oregon," claiming the agency had allowed over-pumping by farmers.

"In some locations throughout the state, groundwater aquifers are no longer capable of sustaining additional development," OWRD acknowledges in its "budget narrative" for the three funding proposals.

- Groundwater studies: Scientists from OWRD require about five to six years to finish a groundwater study within a single basin, such as the current Harney Basin study.

Without more staff, though, the agency can only conduct one basin study at a time.

To allow OWRD to undertake two studies at once, the agency has proposed hiring five new employees — a hydrologist, two hydrographers and two hydrogeologists — at a cost of more than \$1.8 million.

- Water rights enforcement: Drought and new water demands have also saddled regional watermasters, who enforce water rights, with greater workloads at a time financial support from county governments has dwindled.

Aside from causing "delays in regulation" and "excessive overtime," the workload has reduced watermasters' visibility in the field, which is needed to deter illegal water usage, according to OWRD.

To alleviate this burden, the agency proposes hiring five new regional assistant watermasters and a new hydrologic technician to help with water monitoring.

The \$1 million funding package would also raise the status of five existing hydrologic technicians so they could take on additional duties while receiving higher pay.

- Well inspection: Groundwater supplies are at risk from "misconstructed, poorly maintained and improperly abandoned" wells, according to OWRD's budget narrative.

To ensure wells are properly built and kept up, OWRD relies on well inspectors. Though it's authorized to employ six well inspectors, the agency only has enough income for four.

OWRD wants to hire two new well inspectors and upgrade the status of all six positions, which would entail more responsibilities and higher pay, with about \$337,000 from the general fund.

Under this proposal, the agency would also generate revenues by imposing new and larger fees.

Landowners are allowed to drill their own wells, but they require more intense oversight and assistance from OWRD well inspectors than do licensed well drillers.

To help offset these costs, the agency proposes increasing the landowner permit application fee from \$25 to \$500, raising about \$20,000 a year.

Mohnen new president of Oregon hay organization

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

BEND, Ore. — Greg Mohnen, a longtime Central Oregon hay grower, took on the role of agricultural educator earlier this year.

Mohnen, 64, is the manager of the McGinnis Ranch, a hay and cattle operation that lies between Bend and Sisters. But now in addition, he is the president of both the Central Oregon Hay Growers Association and the Oregon Hay and Forage Association.

He said his goal as president of the two associations is to educate the public on what is involved in putting up hay and how that commodity is key to the food chain.

"So many people out there think it is so simple, that you don't have to worry about the weather, about the moisture," Mohnen said. "Food has to come from some place and hay is part of the process."

Mohnen had been vice president of the state association. He succeeded Scott Pierson of Silver Lake, Ore., as president. Pierson became the vice president.

"I think Greg will be an exceptional president," Pierson said. "I'm excited to have



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Greg Mohnen, manager of the McGinnis Ranch near Bend, Ore., is president of the Oregon Hay and Forage Association.

him come with a new perspective for the association. He's a leader in the Central Oregon association and he's proven to

be a man of solid integrity. "The hay he produces is outstanding and he should be an example to the rest of

us hay growers on using the innovations that are available and being dedicated to producing high quality grass hay," Pierson said.

At the 2015 Oregon Hay King Contest in Klamath Falls, Ore., Mohnen's first and second cuttings of grass hay earned the highest scores and his third cutting grass hay earned the second highest score. Mohnen and McGinnis Ranch have 11 entries from its grass/legume, grass and timothy hay in the Oregon Hay King Hall of Fame over the last 12 years.

Mohnen has been working in hay fields and with livestock since he was a youngster growing up on a South Dakota ranch that produced prairie grass hay, alfalfa and corn, and had cattle and pigs.

He and his wife moved to Oregon in 1984 and after he worked for a couple Central Oregon ranches he has worked for Tim McGinnis, the owner of McGinnis Ranch, since 2000.

"Tim supports me being the state president," Mohnen said. "He allows me the time to do that job."

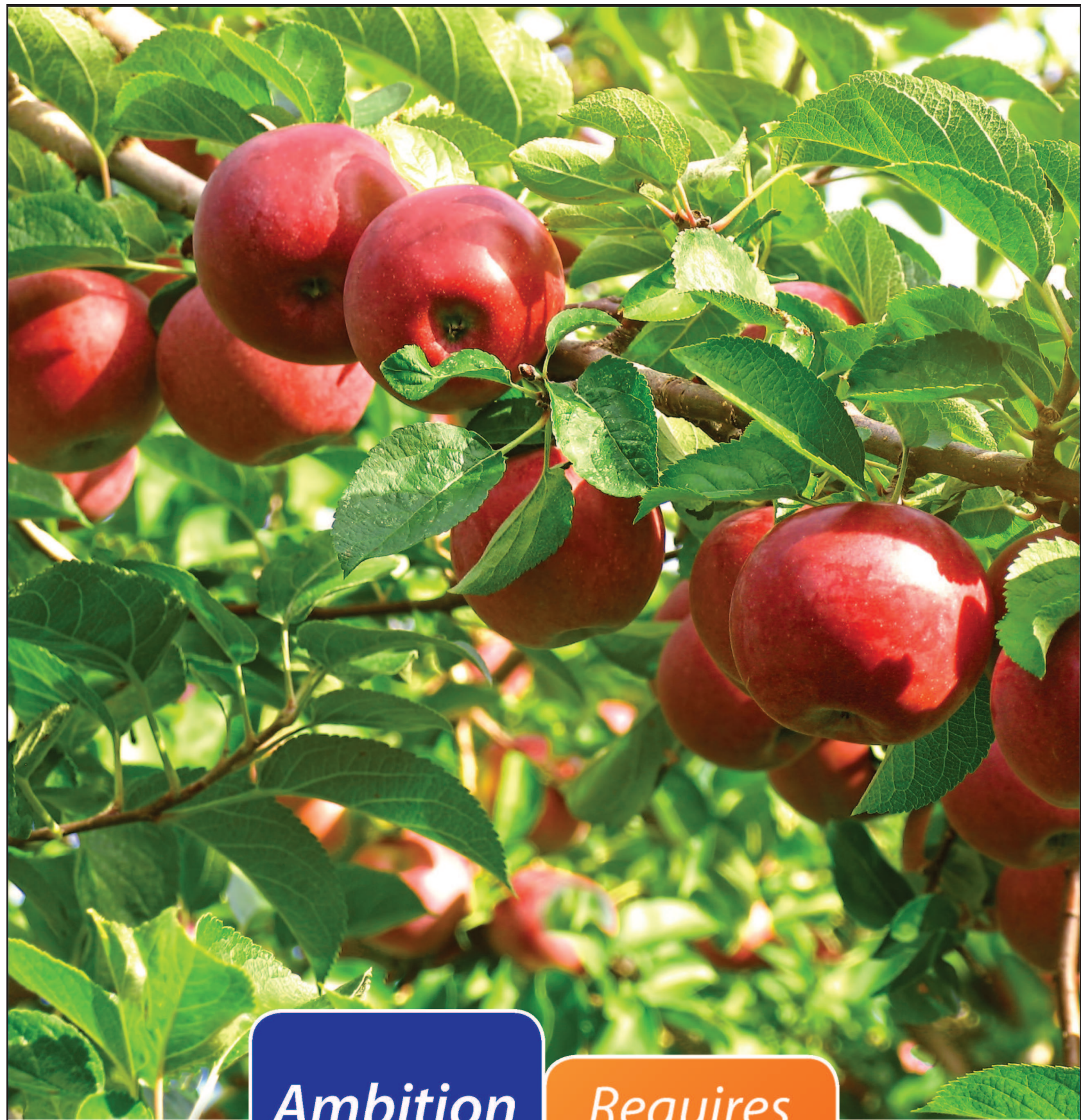
Mohnen said water is the biggest issue facing hay growers.

"If we weren't so efficient with our water, we wouldn't have anything," he said.

This year's Oregon Hay King Contest is scheduled for Nov. 19 at Ag West Supply in Madras, Ore. Mohnen said there'll be plenty of educational opportunities. He said Mylen Bohle of the Oregon State University Extension Service will speak on soil ingredients and how they impact hay tonnage; an Oregon Department of Agriculture official will speak on new chemicals; there'll be a presentation on low-pressure irrigation; and he hoped to have a speaker explain the use of cabbage for gopher control and a speaker from the University of California-Davis.

"We want to encourage growers to improve their efficiency," Pierson said. "We want growers and consumers to utilize our extension agents and other available resources in our state to make their production more efficient."

"There's always something to learn no matter what," Mohnen said of the information that will be available at the Hay King Contest. "There's never a dumb question."



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