

# Oregon, Idaho governors view snow damage in Treasure Valley

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

PAYETTE, Idaho — Idaho Gov. Butch Otter and Oregon Gov. Kate Brown flew in a Black Hawk helicopter together Feb. 10 to get a close-up view of the damage caused by this winter's heavy snowfall.

The governors earlier attended town hall meetings in their respective states where they heard from people affected by this winter's heavy snowfall, which has resulted in the collapse of at least 50 onion storage buildings and packing sheds, in addition to several hundred other structures in the region.

The governors were shocked by the extent of the damage, which is estimated



Capital Press/Sean Ellis

From left, Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little, Idaho Gov. Butch Otter and Oregon Gov. Kate Brown exit an Idaho National Guard Black Hawk helicopter Feb. 10 following a tour of the damage in both states caused by an unusually large amount of snowfall this winter.

at about \$100 million to the region's onion industry alone.

"We saw a lot of devastation and we heard about a lot of devastation (today)," Otter said during a joint press conference. "We're going to work

to recover just as fast as we can."

Brown, who earlier in the day was provided a vehicle tour of some of the dozens of collapsed onion buildings, was stunned by what she saw.

"It looks like a tornado disaster. It's just awful," she said during a town hall meeting in Ontario. "Thank you for sharing your stories. I think it will help us craft a solution for the community and region."

Brown pledged to do "everything I can to help you all get through this and move into recovery mode."

Both governors said agencies from the two states would work together to try to expedite recovery as quickly as possible and find assistance for those affected by the damage.

They brought with them cabinet members as well as the directors of their respective state agriculture departments, emergency management officials and National Guard leaders.

During the Ontario town hall event, farmers and other local business owners stressed how important it was to help the local agricultural economy recover.

"Without the farmers,

ranchers and processors, this community goes fallow," said John Kerby, who owns a retail business in Ontario. "To say we are in crisis, in peril, is understating what is happening here."

The immediacy of the need for assistance was also stressed.

"We have unfolding a disaster of epic proportions and we need to have a response that matches the challenges we face," said Oregon Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day.

The governors said both states are actively working to obtain federal assistance for the area.

Otter, a Republican, and Brown, a Democrat, both promised that help is on the way.

# Oregon, Idaho looking for ways to dispose of 200 million pounds of onions

### The onions were ruined when dozens of storage sheds collapsed

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

PAYETTE, Idaho — The Idaho-Oregon onion industry, which was hit hard by the collapse of dozens of storage and packing buildings in the Treasure Valley area this winter, faces another large challenge.

Upward of 200 million pounds of onions that were ruined when the buildings collapsed under the weight of snow and ice have to be disposed of in the next two months.

But both states have special requirements for the disposal of



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

An excavator removes hundreds of thousands of pounds of onions that were ruined when a storage facility in Nyssa, Ore., collapsed under the weight of snow and ice. About 200 million pounds of damaged onions in Idaho and Oregon have to be properly disposed of by April 15.

cull onions to prevent an outbreak of onion maggot, which can devastate onion and other vegetable crops.

Because of the level of dev-

astation caused by the building collapses, both states have moved the deadline for disposal of cull onions from March 15 to April 15.

But getting rid of that many onions will be no easy task, said Jack Yarbrough of Idaho Waste Systems, which operates a landfill in Mountain Home, Idaho.

"This is a major problem and people need to get moving on it," he said. "Something needs to be done and it needs to be done quickly."

As much as 200 million pounds of onions may have been destroyed in southwestern Idaho and Malheur County, Ore.

Because of the environmental requirements involved in the burial of cull onions, many landfills in the region aren't set up to handle onion disposal, Yarbrough said.

IWS is accepting onions but that landfill is 80 miles from Malheur County and can't handle all of the onions.

The landfill near Payette is also accepting onions but they have to be separated from debris and that landfill is small, Yarbrough said.

The Lytle Boulevard landfill in Malheur County is expected to receive a special permit to dig a trench where onions can be buried, Gov. Kate Brown said Feb. 10 during a press conference in Payette.

But that pit will handle only about 30 million pounds, or an estimated one-third of the ruined onions on the Oregon side, she added.

"We're going back to the drawing board to figure out how we can get the people power and the resources to expand that pit so that we can bury everything that we need to in a really rapid manner," Brown said.

Idaho Gov. Butch Otter said

state officials are addressing the problem but also want to make sure to avoid an outbreak of onion maggot, which resulted in an epidemic in the 1960s that devastated onion and other vegetable crops.

He said the state needs to "make sure that our disposal is that kind of disposal that can protect our industry but we also know that we're going to have to be just a little bit flexible with some of the things we do."

Idaho State Department of Agriculture Communications Director Chanel Tewalt said the department, health districts, environmental regulators, county commissioners and emergency management officials have been meeting to address the issue.

"There's been a pretty big group effort to look at what the options are," she said.

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