

Oregon governor declares drought in Klamath County

Snowpack lingers at just 45 percent of normal in basin

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**
Capital Press

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Tuesday signed a drought declaration for Klamath County, directing the state Department of Agriculture and Water Resources Department to coordinate assistance for water users including farmers and ranchers.

"We know 2018 is shaping up to be a very difficult year for the Klamath Basin, and we're closely monitoring drought conditions here and statewide," Brown said in a prepared statement. "I am committed to doing everything possible to make state resources available to provide immediate relief and assistance to water users through-

out Klamath County."

Snowpack is just 45 percent of normal so far this winter in the Klamath Basin, according to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The U.S. Drought Monitor lists most of south-central Oregon in "moderate drought," and conditions are likely expected to worsen heading into summer.

Klamath County commissioners declared a drought emergency on Feb. 20 due to low snowpack, low precipitation, low stream flows and higher-than-normal temperatures. Between threats to agriculture, livestock, natural resources and recreation, officials predict conditions could result in economic losses exceeding \$557 million and impacting 4,500 jobs.

The Oregon Drought Readiness Council then met and recommended the governor sign a state drought declaration to assist the county.



Capital Press File

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has signed a drought declaration for Klamath County. Snowpack remains at just 45 percent of normal so far this winter in the Klamath Basin, according to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

A drought declaration gives the state Water Resources Department a few additional tools at its disposal, such as issuing temporary emergency water use permits and temporary water exchanges. Alan Mikkelsen, deputy commissioner of reclamation for the Department of

the Interior, also attended Gov. Brown's meeting with Klamath officials and committed federal assistance to the basin.

"As we brace for another record-breaking drought year, collaboration with our federal partners will also be critical as we work toward locally sup-

ported, long-term solutions," Brown said.

Scott Cheyne, assistant manager of the Klamath Irrigation District, said the declaration is a step in the right direction.

"Now it's important for the federal government to follow along the lines and declare a drought that may open up some relief for the farmers here through federal programs," Cheyne said.

The district received early irrigation information on March 9 from the Bureau of Reclamation, which emphasized that low snowpack and dry conditions have resulted in low water inflows to Upper Klamath Lake. The NRCS projects inflow to be about 54 percent of average between March and September.

While an irrigation schedule has not yet been set, Jeff Nettleton, manager of the Bureau of Reclamation's Klamath Basin Area Office, said they are

working to provide more information in the coming weeks.

"We would like nothing more than to be able to provide our Klamath Project contractors with an allocation for the year as soon as possible, and I assure you we are all working hard to get there," Nettleton said in a statement released by the bureau. "We have been working hard with stakeholders and partner agencies to find a path forward this year despite the dire hydrological conditions."

The Klamath Irrigation District includes 33,000 acres, with farmers and ranchers growing a variety of crops such as alfalfa hay, potatoes, garlic, onion and mint. Irrigation season usually starts April 15, Cheyne said, but he is not certain exactly how the drought will affect this year's timing.

"We're hoping for a miracle March, but we're in a pretty deep hole right now," he said.

Oregon county approves scaled-back rural housing zone

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Oregon's Douglas County has approved a scaled-back plan to allow more rural housing on land currently zoned for farm and forest uses.

The change to the county's comprehensive land use plan would allow 20-acre home sites to be carved out from 22,500 acres in mixed farm-forest zones, down from the originally proposed 35,000 acres.

It's unlikely the full 22,500 acres will ever be developed due to limitations on water availability, appropriate septic tank sites and landowner consent to sell or divide property, said Keith Cubic, the county's planning director.

The most likely scenario would be 25 percent utilization of the available acreage, creating 375 new housing parcels, said Cubic.

Even so, Cubic acknowledges the county's experiment with the "rural open space" designation is a test case for Oregon.

The county has tried to resolve concerns raised by Oregon's Department of Land Conservation and Development, which administers the statewide land use planning system, he said.

"I don't know if we got there," Cubic said. "We'll find that out."

Douglas County will soon formally submit the "rural open space" plan amendment to DLCD for review, then wait until April 21 before rezoning any properties under the new designation.

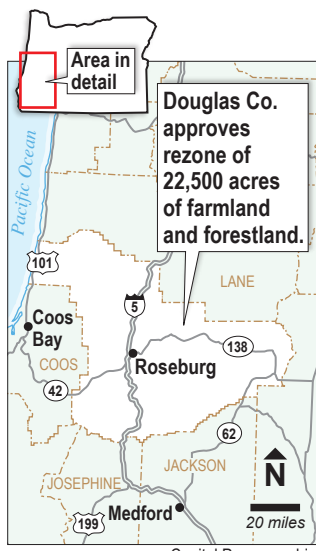
If the agency or another party objects to the change before Oregon's Land Use Board of Appeals, proposed zone changes will be put on hold until the challenge is resolved.

A remand from LUBA requiring modifications to the "rural open space" designation could provide a helpful interpretation of the law and make the plan amendment more successful, Cubic said.

In comments submitted on the proposal last year, DLCD worried the county had too narrowly defined agricultural land and set an excessively high productivity standard for livestock and forest land to be protected under the plan.

It's unclear whether the plan considered the environmental and wildlife benefits of lower-productivity soils, the agency said.

According to DLCD, the county "loosely" concluded that development in rural areas would be economically positive, creating a "discrepancy" with studies that found



Capital Press graphic

that added service costs may outweigh any benefits.

The plan refers to accommodating demand for rural housing, which isn't required under statewide planning goals and may be in "direct conflict" with some of them, the agency said.

Due to these and other concerns, DLCD said the proposal "is not consistent with state statutes and rules."

Cubic, of Douglas County, said the revised plan used additional data overlays to exclude higher-quality farm and forestland from acreage available for 20-acre parcels.

Eligible "rural open space" parcels must be within two miles of existing cities and unincorporated rural communities.

However, three towns were disqualified due to the high proportion of surrounding farm and forest zones, inadequate road access, habitat concerns and other issues, he said.

The plan change is also expected to increase housing availability within existing "urban growth boundaries" due to people moving from cities to the rural parcels, Cubic said. "It does provide some rural housing opportunities."

While the county can approve larger zone changes, most re-designations will occur after requests from individual landowners, he said.

The county didn't shift all available 22,500 acres into the "rural open space" designation to avoid raising expectations in the event the plan is challenged, he said.

Aside from DLCD, the conservation group 1,000 Friends of Oregon has also been apprehensive about aspects of Douglas County's proposal.

Greg Holmes, the group's food systems program director, said he doesn't yet have the basis to comment on the plan because he hasn't seen the final adopted version.

Berry boycott organizers restate unsupported claim against grower

Probe cleared farm in worker's death

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A self-described anti-capitalist organization has revived discredited claims that a Whatcom County, Wash., berry farm caused a Mexican worker's death last summer. The group is seeking to rally opposition to hiring foreign farmworkers and support for a consumer boycott.

Community to Community Development, based in Bellingham, emailed an "action alert" Saturday asking supporters to not purchase berries with the Naturipe label. The organization also said it will campaign to stop farms in northwest Washington from employing more foreign nationals on H-2A visas.

The organization restated accusations it made last summer that Sarbanand Farms, owned by California brothers Baldev and Kable Munger, denied Honesto Silva Ibarra of Mexico medical treatment and caused his death. The state Department of Labor and Industries investigated those claims and concluded the farm was not at fault.

"For any organization to suggest otherwise is simply false and would seem to be nothing more than a desperate attempt to mislead the public," the farm said in a statement.

Efforts to reach Community to Community Executive Director Rosalinda Guillen were unsuccessful. Immediately after Ibarra's death at a Seattle hospital, Guillen in media interviews accused the farm of overworking Ibarra in the heat and smoke from wildfires.

Gerald Baron, director of Save Family Farming, an advocacy group with no connection to Sarbanand Farms, called the continuing accusation a "vicious lie."

"It's absolutely not true,



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A man holds a sign for Community to Community during an event Feb. 5 in the Capitol Rotunda in Olympia, Wash. The Bellingham, Wash., organization has revived unsubstantiated claims that a farmworker was worked to death and to boycott the farm's berries. A state investigation cleared the farm in the worker's death.

and she knows it's not true," Baron said.

Munger Bros. is the largest grower of blueberries in North America and one of four berry companies in North and South America that form Naturipe, according to Naturipe's website.

Munger said last summer that a farm supervisor called for an ambulance right after learning Ibarra, 28, was sick.

Ibarra died four days later on Aug. 6 at Harborview Medical Center. The King County Medical Examiner's Office ruled Ibarra died of natural causes unrelated to his work, according to L&I. A nephew working at the farm said Ibarra was diabetic, according to the company.

L&I investigators, responding at least in part to accusations posted on Facebook, exonerated the farm in Ibarra's death. A spokesman for the agency said workers were provided water, shade and heat-illness training. The investigation did find that workers missed one rest break and were served one meal late in late July. The company was fined a total of \$149,800 by the state and Whatcom County. The department has not released a

copy of its investigation.

Community to Community's action alert urged supporters to contact L&I Director Joel Sacks and demand he reopen the investigation into Ibarra's death. Department spokesman Tim Church said Wednesday that the agency met its obligation to complete the probe within six months and did not have authority to reopen it.

"We stand by the conclusion that we found no violations of safety rules," he said.

Community to Community has been in previous disputes with Western Washington farms. The organization was active in boycotting Driscoll's berries and organizing a union to represent workers at Sakuma Brothers Farms in Skagit County.

"We are reaching out to you now to again ask you to use your powers as active consumers and activists to right another great wrong," the action alert stated.

According to Community to Community's website, its goal is to "end settler colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy in their external and internalized forms."

The organization told supporters in Saturday's email that it was "launching a cam-

aign to block the expansion of the H-2A guest worker program" in Whatcom and Skagit counties. The group did not specify what it would do beyond asking consumers to not buy Naturipe products and to contact Sacks and other state leaders.

"We will be in touch again soon as we expect this to be a big fight!" the action alert stated.

Baron said Community to Community is hurting workers who earn more by coming to the U.S.

"Everyone needs to know the harm caused by those who cynically claim to be working on behalf of these workers," he said.

About 70 foreign workers with H-2A visas walked off the job in protest after Ibarra was taken away for treatment. The farm fired the workers.

Columbia Legal Services has filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Seattle alleging Sarbanand Farms underpaid and overworked employees, and illegally fired the ones who walked out. The lawsuit does not blame the farm for Ibarra's death, though the suit does allege that Ibarra's hospitalization heightened concern over working conditions.

Weekly fieldwork report

Item/description	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
• Snow water equivalent*	58.6%	107.9%	88.5%	41.6%
• Percent area in drought	76.1%	11.7%	44.3%	91.5%
• Avg. temperature, 6-10 day outlook (Percent chance deviation from normal)	40-60% below	33-40% below	33-40% below	60-70% below
• Precipitation, 6-10 day outlook (Percent chance deviation from normal)	33-40% above	33-40% above	33-40% above	40-50% above
• Soil moisture anomaly (Monthly deviation from normal)	Normal/ Below normal	Normal/ Above normal	Normal/ Above normal	Below normal

*Aggregate average percent of median as of March 6. Medians calculated for the period from 1981-2010. Sources: USDA, NRCS; NOAA, www.ca.gov; www.drought.gov/

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