

Oregon, awash in marijuana, takes steps to curb production

By ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon is awash in pot, glutted with so much legal weed that if growing were to stop today, it could take more than six years by one estimate to smoke or eat it all.

Now, the state is planning to curb production.

Five years after voters legalized recreational marijuana, lawmakers have given the Oregon Liquor Control Commission more leeway to deny new pot-growing licenses based on supply and demand.

The bill passed in Oregon's House late Thursday in a 39-18 vote after it was approved earlier in the Senate. It is aimed not just at reducing the huge surplus but also at preventing diversion of unsold legal marijuana into the black market and forestalling a crackdown by federal prosecutors.

"The harsh reality is we have too much product on the market," said Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, who intends to sign the bill.

Supply is running twice as high as demand, meaning that the surplus from last year's harvest alone could amount to roughly 2.3 million pounds of marijuana, by the liquor commission's figures. That's the equivalent of



AP Photo/Richard Vogel

A bud tender shows a top cannabis strain at a dispensary in Portland.

over 1 billion joints.

Oregon has one of the highest such imbalances among the 10 states that have legalized recreational marijuana since 2012, in part because it had a big head start in the weed business.

With its moist climate and rich soil, Oregon has a long history of pot growing. When it became legal, many outlaw growers went legitimate, and others jumped into the business, too.

They are now all cultivating weed in a multitude of fields, greenhouses and converted factories, with 1,123 active producer

licenses issued by the OLLC over the past three years.

The legislation could be a lifeline to some cannabis businesses that are being squeezed by market forces.

Retail prices in Oregon for legal pot have plummeted from more than \$10 per gram in October 2016 to less than \$5 last December. At the same time, smaller marijuana businesses are feeling competition from bigger, richer players, some from out of state.

Officials worry that some license holders will become so desperate they will divert their product into the black market rather than see it go unsold.

"We're a very young industry," said Margo Lucas, a marijuana grower and vendor in the Willamette Valley who is hoping the measure will give her business breathing room.

She noted that growers can't seek federal bankruptcy protection — pot is still illegal under federal law, and banks avoid the industry — and that many owners have taken out personal loans to finance their businesses.

"So when we go out of business, we're going to go down hard," Lucas said. "Many of us will lose our homes. ... You're going to have a lot of entrepreneurs in this state that are pretty unhappy with the way that this ends if we don't get some support with this bill."

Brown wants to divert kicker from top income earners

By SARAH ZIMMERMAN
Associated Press

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown announced a plan Thursday to limit Oregon's unique tax rebate known as the kicker, saying she wants to divert \$500 million in tax credits away from the state's top income earners to pay down pension costs and invest in rural housing.

"It's fiscally responsible and makes common sense," the Democrat told reporters. "Most Oregonians would get their full kicker back."

Excess revenue is automatically returned to taxpayers in the form of a tax rebate whenever the state takes in more revenue than what state economists forecast. Oregon's facing a historic year for state revenue, and the so-called "kicker" rebate is expected to be the highest in state history at \$1.4 billion.

The governor is proposing to limit refunds at \$1,000, which would reduce expected payments for approximately 20% of all taxpayers. Brown said it's a way to provide most Oregonians their full refunds while retaining \$500 million in extra revenue for the state.

Some Democrats have long criticized kicker payments for disproportionately favoring the wealthy. Under this year's historic kicker, the median taxpayer would be expected to receive \$330 dollars while the top 1% of income earners could enjoy rebates up to 40 times higher than that — nearly \$14,000.

Under Brown's plan at least \$250 million of the kicker funds would go to help pay down the state's pension debt. The rest would be dedicated to rural housing and beefing up broadband infrastructure in more remote areas of the state.

There's still no formal legislation for the proposal, and Brown said she's open to changes. She also said she's met with Republican leaders but didn't specify if they supported the move.

Republicans have recoiled at any attempt to cut the kicker, saying the rebate is meant to be a safeguard against rampant government spending.

"Our state income tax revenue is at an all-time high," said House Majority Leader Carl Wilson, of Grants Pass. "This is no time to begin skimming off money that hard-working Oregonians have earned."

Brown admitted that diverting any amount of the kicker is politically difficult, as it requires a two-thirds vote from the House and Senate.

Cormorants: 'This problem is only just starting'

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Island from the more than 13,600 pairs in 2014 to about 5,600 by 2018 to protect fish.

The cormorant colony abandoned the island several times in 2016 and 2017, a dispersal the Army Corps blamed on predators, such as eagles, and that opponents of the agency's management plan blamed on the Army Corps.

This year, the Army Corps has focused on modifying the terrain of East Sand Island to discourage mass nesting and maintain colony numbers at the target established in 2015.

"We have discouraged the few birds attempting to nest in the central portion of the island, which was previously the eastern area of the colony, with minimal hazing activity," Henon said.

Eagles have been observed dispersing cormorants, he added.

Each year since hazing at East Sand Island began, the number of birds nesting at the Astoria Bridge has grown — a situation that could cause significant expense

to the state Department of Transportation.

The state just finished repainting the bridge's span in 2018, a lengthy and expensive process that caused routine traffic delays. More work is planned in 2021 on the under truss, where many of the cormorants now appear to be nesting.

The birds' droppings are corrosive and reduce the life span of the bridge's protective steel coating. State officials worry that if the birds continue to nest in such high numbers on the bridge, both the expense and the frequency of painting will increase.

It is too late in the year to haze the birds off the bridge, but, internally, the Department of Transportation is still looking at its options for next spring ahead of the 2021 work.

"We have not come up with a plan yet to address the cormorant problem," said Lou Torres, a department spokesman. "We are currently working very closely with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on a variety of possible deterrents and tools that include hazing the birds."

Cormorant kingdom

Rex Ziak, who lives in Washington state's Pacific County, said he didn't fully grasp the dilemma until last week, when he saw the nests for the first time while stuck in traffic. Looking down, he had a perfect view of the structures undergirding the bridge and the cormorant kingdom.

He saw dozens and dozens of cormorants and nests full of eggs. He grabbed his wife's phone and started taking pictures.

"It's just like it awakened me to the dangerous situation that has occurred," Ziak said. "Dangerous in terms of just the integrity of the bridge's expensive paint job."

One of his photos shows a nest full of eggs cozily tucked in a corner. A spray of white bird droppings surrounds the nest and obliterates the new, green paint.

The bridge cannot host an infinite number of cormorants, but Ziak, looking at all the eggs below him, kept thinking, "This problem is only just starting."

Port: Exploring outsourcing dredging

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The marina could reopen 18 more slips with dredging, said Janice Burk, the Port's marina manager. Each slip brings in around \$2,000 in annual revenue, Isom said.

Port commissioners comprise half of the 10-member budget committee, with the other five appointed from the community. Every member of the committee voted Wednesday to support the West Mooring Basin project except Port Commissioner Bill Hunsinger, who lodged a protest vote over the agency's lack of investment at the ailing East Mooring Basin.

The east side marina sits mostly empty. Last year, the Port closed the causeway providing access after state engineers found a severely rotting substructure and

judged it unsafe to walk on. The proposed budget contains no new major investments at the east marina, which the Port is considering leasing to a private development group led by Pier 39 owner Floyd Holcom.

The Port could take care of its entire waiting list of boaters by improving the east marina, which doesn't require as much dredging because of a self-scouring hydrology, Hunsinger said.

"This is going to be a definite loss to the Port of Astoria and to the community, because that other 100 people that would like to come here are also going to spend money in Clatsop County," he said.

Budget committee member John Lansing and Port Commissioner Dirk Rohne commiserated with Hunsinger's concerns, but said the Port has the opportunity to keep a full west marina in business and provide a better return on investment.

Keeping the marina in working order is also important for the Port's efforts to sell the surrounding Astoria Riverwalk Inn, Chinook Building and former Seafare Restaurant to a private developer.

The dredging project at the west marina comes as the Port explores how to outsource dredging entirely rather than maintain its aging, outdated dredge, the Felkins.

Operating the dredge takes much of the Port's maintenance staff off the docks for a large portion of the year. But contracting out for dredging costs significantly more money.

CLATSOP ANIMAL ASSISTANCE'S 20th Anniversary Gala Dinner

June 13th • 5:30-7:30 • \$75
Seaside Convention Center, 415 First Ave, Seaside

Join us for dinner, drinks, dessert & fun!

An incredible evening hosted by longtime NBC co-host of the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show & the National Dog Show, David Frei, and KATU Meteorologist Mary Loos & her four-legged forecaster, Willis the Weather Dog.

CAA will recognize the volunteers who make it all possible & look back on the animals we have been able to help heal, love & get ready for adoption. Some of our favorite furry success stories will be joining us!

Fabulous live auction items, a paddle raise and more!

Live auction items include:

- Seven nights in Kona & round trip airfare for 2
- A day with a Columbia River Bar Pilot for 4
- Private dinner for 8 prepared in your home by Chef Andy Catalano
- PNW Staycation that includes luxury lodging, dinner out & two tickets to the Liberty Theatre!

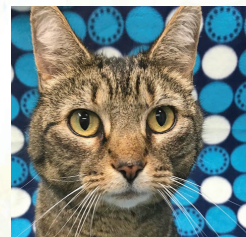
All proceeds to directly benefit the animals at the Clatsop County Animal Shelter.

Meal choices include pork tenderloin, chicken cordon bleu & stuffed summer squash (vegan).

A limited number of tickets will be sold, so DO NOT WAIT!
Get your tickets for June 13th NOW!



For more information about this event or to host a table, contact Crissy Christian (Christian_crissy@yahoo.com) or Natalie Hannam (natahubbard@gmail.com). If you are hosting a table we will contact you for your menu choices. For more information about Clatsop Animal Assistance go to dogsncats.org



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