



The Facebook data center in Prineville.

# Facebook's footprint continues to grow in central Oregon

By SUZANNE ROIG  
The Bulletin

It's been a decade since social media giant Facebook opened a data center in Prineville, taking advantage of tax breaks.

Today that center is poised to become Facebook's largest data center in the United States in this central Oregon town of 10,000. And over the same period of time, other companies have located and expanded, namely Apple.

When Facebook launched in 2011, timber industry was waning and the city needed to fill the employment gap. Since then, 400 direct family-wage jobs have been added, hundreds of construction jobs, renewable energy jobs and ancillary construction jobs, said Steve Forrester, Prineville's city manager.

"Facebook's investment over the past decade has transformed our community for the better," said Forrester. "Their long-term commitment has created economic stability."

Facebook's center sits on a 120-acre parcel that initially was built in two phases. During the heyday of initial construction more than 250 workers a day were on-site. Initially the data center said it would hire 35 full-time employees to run and maintain the center, according to press statements made in 2011.

Two new buildings are expected to be completed next year and three others are under construction, bringing the total number of buildings to 11 with 4.6 million square feet spread out among them, said William Marks, community development regional manager of Meta, the corporate title of Facebook.

"The Prineville data center represents more than a \$2 billion investment in the state of Oregon, which in turn supports hundreds of long-term construction jobs and hundreds of operational jobs," Marks said.

The jobs are in an industry sector that the Economic Development for Central Oregon courts, said Roger Lee, CEO of the nonprofit that works to encourage new businesses to relocate. The information industry is fairly new in Crook County, but accounts for 17.5% of all private wages, Lee said.

Prineville was able to attract data centers like Facebook by using an incentive like the Oregon Enterprise Zone that gives property tax waivers to developers who provide

an investment and employment. These data centers also like Prineville because of access to cooler temperatures and reliable sources of electricity.

According to the county's economic development website, an enterprise zone tax exemption can go for up to 15 years, but a businesses must make a minimum of \$12.5 million investment, create a minimum of 10 to 35 new jobs and pay workers a wage that is 130% of the average county wage of \$45,661 a year.

Only new investments qualify for enterprise zone exemptions, according to the conditions approved by state lawmakers. A business may use the enterprise zone tax exemption multiple times for expansion projects as long as the employer adds at least 10% to the existing workforce each time the program is used and invests a minimum of \$50,000, according to the explanation of the exemption.

"The enterprise zone program has been one of the few tools available for economically distressed rural and urban communities to attract new, higher-paying jobs and property tax base," Lee said. "The data center industry is a major contributing factor for Crook County being among the first counties in the state to surpass pre-pandemic employment levels."

As of June, Prineville had 372 jobs in data processing, hosting and related services, as well as computer systems design services, said Damon Runberg, Oregon Employment Department regional economist.

In five years the number of jobs in this sector has increased four times, Runberg said. The numbers don't include the indirect construction jobs.

One such construction company was San Jose, California-based Rosendin Electric, an employee-owned company that located an office in Prineville and even recently purchased the Rimrock Lanes after it closed.

Many of these employees holding these jobs may not live in Prineville; they do commute from other central Oregon communities, Runberg said.

In fact, as of June, this job sector accounted for about 5.3% of the total employment in Crook County. In 2016, it only accounted for 1.5% of total employment, Runberg said.

"The positive impact only continues to grow," Lee said.

*'THE PRINEVILLE DATA CENTER REPRESENTS MORE THAN A \$2 BILLION INVESTMENT IN THE STATE OF OREGON, WHICH IN TURN SUPPORTS HUNDREDS OF LONG-TERM CONSTRUCTION JOBS AND HUNDREDS OF OPERATIONAL JOBS.'*

William Marks | community development regional manager of Meta, the corporate title of Facebook

# Senators propose national monument in central Oregon

By BRADLEY W. PARKS  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon's U.S. senators have proposed a new national monument at Sutton Mountain near central Oregon's Painted Hills.

Sutton Mountain stands in the backdrop of the iconic view overlooking the autumnal hues of the Painted Hills. The hills themselves are already featured as one of three distinct units of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, both Oregon Democrats, announced legislation last week to protect an even larger area surrounding the Painted Hills as part of a new Sutton Mountain National Monument.

"With this legislation, we'll make sure the public will be able to experience some of Oregon's most incredible landmarks for generations to come, while also creating jobs and economic opportunities in the county right now," Merkley said in a press release.

The 66,000-acre monument would include Sutton Mountain itself along with

several popular recreation sites like Pats Cabin, Sand Mountain and Priest Hole.

The area has long been a target for conservation. Thousands of acres are already protected as Wilderness Study Areas, which are places identified by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management as having wilderness characteristics eligible for further protection.

The Bend-based Oregon Natural Desert Association has long supported additional safeguards for Sutton Mountain. The region provides habitat for a wide array of plant and animal life, including herds of pronghorn, elk and mule deer.

"Many folks don't know what it's named or what it's all about," said Ryan Houston, executive director of the Oregon Natural Desert Association, "but it's a pretty unique feature out there and it's a pretty wonderful place to explore."

Past attempts to create a federal wilderness at Sutton Mountain in 2015 and 2019 have died in Congress. This latest effort takes a different approach by proposing it as a national monument.

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