

Firefighting plan aims to protect sage habitat

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell has released the initial plan for a new wildfire-fighting strategy to protect a wide swath of intermountain West sagebrush country that supports cattle ranching and is home to a struggling bird species.

The 27-page report released Tuesday calls for prioritizing and protecting areas most at risk by using veteran crews, rural fire departments and fire protection associations made up of ranchers who can respond quickly. The previous strategy didn't call for specific efforts to protect the habitat.

The plan heading into the 2015 wildfire season also calls for accelerating efforts to restore burned rangelands by developing a strategy for storing and distributing locally adapted seeds to try to keep invasive species such as cheatgrass from returning.

"Cheatgrass and other invasive species have contributed to making rangeland fire one of the greatest threats to the Great Basin — not only to sagebrush habitat, but to wildlife, ranching and other economic activities that depend on a healthy landscape," Jewell said in a statement.

"As we head into the 2015 fire season, the actions recommended in this report will help ensure that our preparedness, response and recovery strategies better align with the threats facing the West."

The Boise-based National Interagency Fire Center, which assigns resources throughout the nation during wildfire season, is already adopting new strategies. One of them is a plan to preposition fire crews in the Great Basin ahead of fire season.

"That's the key thing that we will be doing differently," said Randy Eardley, a Fire Center spokesman. Previously, he said, fire crews only responded — some-



In this 2010 file photo, a horse grazes while a wildfire burns in the distance near Lebac, Calif. On Tuesday, U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell released the initial plan for a new wildfire-fighting strategy to protect a wide swath of intermountain West sagebrush country.

times from great distances — once wildfires had started and spread. "If we have more crews available in the area, then yes, it could be very effective," he said.

The plan requires making a priority the protection of sage-steppe ecosystems where sage grouse live. Wildfire managers are still working out the specifics of how some aspects of the plan will be put in place, Eardley said.

In the last decade, rangeland fires have been especially destructive in the Great Basin region of Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon and California. Jewell in October toured southern Idaho and saw firsthand the giant swaths scorched by wildfires. In January she issued an order seeking a "science-based" approach to find a way to stop wildfire and other threats while also protecting habitat for greater sage grouse.

The wide-ranging bird is under consideration for

federal protections, and just the potential listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has already put on hold development of wind farms and oil and gas drilling plans in some areas. Experts say an endangered-species listing could damage Western states' economies.

The football-sized bird once numbered in the millions, but current estimates put the population between 200,000 and 500,000.

The plan released Tuesday stems in part from a conference last fall in Boise that brought together scientists and land managers to find collaborative ways to protect Great Basin rangelands from the plague of increasingly intense wildfires.

John Freemuth, a Boise State University professor and public lands expert who took part in that conference, on Tuesday analyzed the resulting plan.

"This is a reordering because of the possible sage

grouse listing," he said. "Nobody wants a listing because so much key habitat burns that (a listing) just gets out of everyone's control."

Besides sage grouse habitat, the gigantic wildfires have destroyed rangeland that ranchers rely on to graze cattle.

Bill would make it easier to expunge pot convictions

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — As Oregon prepares for legal recreational pot, state lawmakers are looking to make it easier for people convicted of marijuana-related crimes to get their criminal records expunged.

A bill to help people convicted prior to a 2013 reclassification of marijuana offenses passed the state Senate with broad support on Tuesday.

Three Republicans — Sen. Alan Olson, R-Canby, Sen. Chuck Thomsen, R-Hood River and Sen. Doug Whitsett, R-Klamath Falls — were the only senators to vote "no" on the bill. It will next head to the House where it will be assigned to committee.

Senate Bill 364 would require judges to consider the 2013 reclassification of some marijuana crimes in Oregon when a person seeks to have those crimes expunged from his or her record. Currently, the reclassification of many pot-related crimes to lower-level offenses only applies to offenses committed since that law took effect July 1, 2013.

For example, the law lowered possession of 4 ounces or more of marijuana from a Class B felony to a Class C

felony. The bill now in the Legislature would also reinstate a provision that had been removed from state law, which would allow judges to reclassify convictions of Class B felony marijuana possession as misdemeanors.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, carried the bill and said his intention was to extend the benefits of the 2013 law to people with previous convictions.

Prozanski said people convicted of marijuana crimes want to take advantage of the reclassification, but "because of when they were convicted of it, the way the new language came out they wouldn't be able to take advantage of it. ... This was just a corrective measure."

Separately, some district attorneys in Oregon decided last fall to dismiss pending cases for marijuana-related offenses that will no longer be illegal under Measure 91. Voters passed the measure on Nov. 4 to legalize recreational marijuana for adults 21 and over starting July 1. Cannabis retailers will begin to sell marijuana products sometime in 2016, after the Oregon Liquor Control Commission begins to accept applications for business licenses Jan. 4, 2016.

BOOKS: 'It's the way of the future'

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darned expensive — somewhere between \$100 and \$200," Hawman said. "With four or five classes, that kills you."

Digital textbooks saved BMCC students more than \$100,000 in since fall term began, said the school's E-Learning Coordinator Bruce Kauss, who helps instructors connect with resources.

"It's the way of the future," Kauss said.

Oregon's community colleges are increasingly offering open education resources, or OERs, an acronym that rolls easily from the lips of BMCC Director of Library and Media Services Jacquelyn Ray. Ray believes expensive traditional textbooks may be pricing students out of education.

"Some students have said they've had to choose between textbooks and food," she said.

Ray and Kauss helped organize this week's conference on OERs at BMCC's Pendleton campus. Attendees will include curious educators, administrators, students and members of the public. Keynote speaker Cable Green, Director of Global Learning at Creative Commons, believes students will start demanding open-source textbooks.

"You'll see very few \$200 calculus textbooks being assigned three years from now," Green said. "Students won't put up with it."

The lack of affordability is hurting learning, he said.

"The average cost of the top 50 textbooks sold in U.S. college bookstores is \$175.46," Green said. "The average amount of savings for students when a course moves to open textbooks is \$128." The difference is because students often choose to print some material.

The cost is driving a stampede to OERs. Textbooks could soon become old school.

That doesn't mean textbook writers are working for free. In fact, Green said, they are getting a better deal being financed by educational, industry and government

grants.

"They get paid better than the existing structure where they get a small advance from a publishing company and royalties of 10 percent of sales," he said.

OpenStax, a non-profit affiliated with Rice University, is one source of OERs. The Applied Math and Science Education Repository, the Institute for Mathematics and Education, GeoGebra and Creative Commons are others on a long list. The list of faculty-written, peer-reviewed course offerings is growing.

It's the publishers that are worried about an open-source movement.

"The bottom's going to drop off the gravy train," Ray said.

BMCC Associated Student Government President Jason Lange thinks open-source textbooks bode well for him and his fellow students. With rising tuition and cost of living increases, lower textbook prices are something of an equalizer. When a student is struggling financially, a few hundred dollars is a hardship. Sometimes groups of students buy one and share. Lange described the experience of a friend who couldn't afford a \$200 textbook.

"He was barely making it. He didn't buy the book," Lange said. "He actually ended up dropping out."

Kauss can barely contain his excitement about the movement toward OERs at BMCC. While the percentage of instructors who use them is still low, that number is growing.

"The whole science department is moving that direction," he said. "In Biology 101, it took a \$200 textbook down to \$32."

He said instructor Linc Debusch was the first to use open-source textbooks at BMCC about two years ago, but now many science, business, math and humanities courses assign digital resources.

Green believes education, really the world as a whole, has gone digital. And the implications are stunning.

While building and maintaining educational material can be expensive, he said "it's

the same cost to share with one or one billion. Through the Internet, you can move digital works around the world at the speed of light. The owner keeps the intellectual property and the world can use it for free."

Green will speak from 6-8 p.m. Wednesday in Science and Technology 200 on the BMCC campus. The conference continues Thursday and Friday. The public is welcome.

For more information about the conference, visit <http://goo.gl/forms/M0O-VDF5Sqg>,

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

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Learn the 411 on Medicare Coverage
TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 3:30 PM

Medicare is a government-sponsored program that people over the age of 65 and those who meet their special criteria turn to for their social insurance. This program provides health insurance, normally to seniors. Come and learn more about what it covers and what it does not.

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TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 3:30PM

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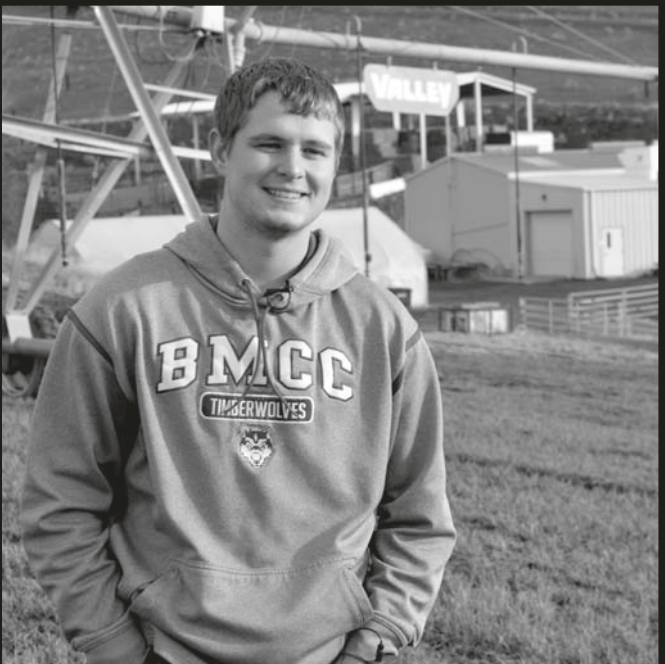
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