

## GRAZING: Farm Fair wraps up Friday at EOTEC

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amount of livestock grazing on federal land has decreased since the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 and resulted in a buildup of dry grass ready to ignite.

Between less grazing, more human development and longer, hotter summers, Strand said it is difficult to tease out just what exactly is driving the explosion in large fires. However, her research is yielding results that show how grazing lowers fuel loads and keeps the height of flames at a more manageable level for firefighters.

Yet one size does not fit all on the landscape. Her results from a project conducted in 2014 and 2015 in the Reynolds Creek Watershed of southwest Idaho showed less difference grazing around heavier, woody fuels, such as juniper shrubs.

“Shrub cover is a really important part of whether grazing is going to be helpful or not,” Strand said.

April Hulet, also with the University of Idaho, agreed that grazing doesn’t always work, but there are times when it is appropriate. Winter grazing can be especially beneficial not only because it helps mow down flammable grass, but helps the plants retain their fuel moisture longer into the following year, which makes them less likely to burn in early summer.

Grazing can also open gaps in grass on rangeland, making it harder for fires to spread such long distances. Since the effects of grazing vary based on vegetation and weather, Hulet said it is important to have flexibility in where and how to use grazing as a tool.

“With this addition to the scientific literature, hopefully we can influence policies a little more,” Hulet said.

“People really want to do the right thing.”

— **Racel Frost,**  
Missouri River  
Conservation District

Another session at the Farm Fair livestock seminar featured Rachel Frost, coordinator for the Missouri River Conservation District in Montana. She provided information about a pilot program among the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana called Ranching for Rivers, helping ranchers to graze their livestock in riparian areas.

The program is voluntary, and gives cost-share funding for projects such as fencing or water improvements that protect natural resources, while also allowing cattle to access forage along streams and rivers.

When it comes to riparian areas, exclusion of livestock is not the only answer, Frost said. In some cases, it’s not even an option. Sometimes, it is the only place where ranchers can get high quality forage, shade and water for their animals.

And grazing in the areas can be done right, she added. The program provides technical assistance and planning, and Frost said she’s been impressed with the conservation ethic among landowners.

“People really want to do the right thing,” she said.

The Hermiston Farm Fair wraps up Friday, with the last seminars running from 8 a.m. to noon at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

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## WINTER: Downtown stores stayed open late, tree included more lights and decorations

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to the event after getting an email notification about it from the city.

“I think it’s really nice,” Courtney said. “The kids like the cookies, the tree’s beautiful and it’s nice to have a fire to warm up with.”

Not everyone came with children. Virginia Salter brought her dog instead, and said she was enjoying walking around downtown and shopping for special Winter Festival deals.

“It’s First Thursday, which I was glad was coming at the same time,” she said.

She said she thought the tree and the festival area around it looked better than the year before, especially the number of lights and decorations on the tree.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

People gather around a fire pit to warm their hands Thursday during the Winter Festival in Hermiston.

## BUDGET: 2015 ruling scuttled PERS reforms

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the Department of Administrative Services.

Agencies are charged with finding specific reductions, such as attrition of nonessential positions and reduction in travel, Brown said.

Other cost-cutting measures call for closing the state psychiatric hospital in Junction City and the youth correctional center in Clatsop County, slashing funding to a program that helps people with developmental disabilities and eliminating a program for families with children who have special needs.

Brown moderated the cuts by proposing several increases in targeted taxes and assessments and closing two tax loopholes. Those measures bring in about \$897 million in new revenue.

The tobacco tax would increase by 85 cents per pack under her plan, and a liquor surcharge would climb from 50 cents to \$1 a bottle. The plan also involves increasing assessments on hospitals and insurers to the tune of \$530 million.

Greg Smith, R-Heppner, who chairs the budget committee for the House Republicans, issued a statement urging both parties to thoroughly review the budgets of every state agency down to the line item.

“That means being hyper vigilant in making sure we do not repeat some of the mistakes we have made in the past,” he said, “such as the Business Energy Tax Credit program and Cover Oregon, and truly prioritizing the programs Oregonians rely on from their state government.”

Republican House Leader Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, said the state continues on “an unsustainable fiscal path.”

“Despite record revenues and despite what has been described as a roaring state economy, we are being told we don’t have enough tax revenue to cover the tab,” McLane said.

He said lawmakers need to reduce spending before asking for more taxes.

Much of the state’s short-

fall stems from reductions in federal funds for the Affordable Care Act and the unfunded liability of the Public Employees Retirement System.

And the business community has signaled it wants PERS reforms before accepting any new business taxes.

An Oregon Supreme Court ruling in 2015 scuttled many of the reforms lawmakers had sought to make in the past, and lawmakers will be curtailed by that ruling in any future attempts at reform.

The governor had endorsed a corporate sales tax measure in November that would have boosted state revenue by \$6 billion every two years. With Measure 97’s defeat, Brown has backed away and taken a hands-off approach to revenue reform and proposing any additional taxes on business. Lawmakers on the Legislature’s revenue committees are discussing potential revenue packages.

Brown’s proposal “will definitely prompt debate,” said Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, in a Dec. 1 statement. “Oregon faces enormous budget challenges for the next two years. Meeting those challenges will require us all to work together. The process doesn’t end today. It is just beginning.”

The next step is for the Legislature’s Joint Ways and Means Committee to propose a budget early next year. Committee members will seek public input on those proposals.

Lawmakers have yet to make any concrete proposals for other forms of revenue. Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, chairman of the Senate revenue committee, said lawmakers are discussing reviving a proposal for a commercial activity tax that he and Rep. Mark Johnson, R-Hood River, tried to pass in 2016 as an alternative to Measure 97. The tax would have less of an impact on corporations but also would raise significantly less revenue than Measure 97.

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