

Bill would boost access to financial aid

By MEERAH POWELL
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Roughly 11,000 more students would have access to a state financial aid program in the next two years thanks to increased state funding in a higher education budget bill continuing to make its way through the Oregon Legislature.

The Legislature's Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education voted Monday, June 14, to send Senate Bill 5528 to the full Joint Ways and Means Committee with a "do pass" recommendation.

If passed, the bill would increase funding for programming and operations at Oregon's public universities and community colleges over current levels. The bill also allocates more money to the Oregon Opportunity Grant, a state-funded grant program for low-income students.

Connie Green, interim President at Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton, said this is an investment in Oregon that can help so many students.

Oregon has 17 community colleges, but the funding is not split evenly between them. Rather, Green explained, the funding will

be based on a community college's three-year average of full time enrollment. Under that formula, Portland Community College, the largest in Oregon, would get the most funds.

Blue Mountain's enrollment during the past three years has slipped, Green said, and the college will not know just how much it gets until sometime in July, when the final tally for spring term enrollment comes in.

But the college does know what it will do with the funds — build back its reserve.

"We've been using the reserves to balance the budget," Green said.

Putting the funds into the reserve coffer gives BMCC a buffer in case the funding is not part of the next biennium.

"That way we're ready for the next session," Green said.

Tim Seydel, vice president for university advancement at Eastern Oregon University, said the budget does not give the college a big bonus but allows it continues services.

"For EOU, it means we were able to hold tuition flat for the upcoming year," he said.

According to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, from 2009 to 2019, more than 2 million applications for financial



The Observer, File

Students walk through a courtyard on the Eastern Oregon University campus in La Grande. Nearly 11,000 more students would have access to a state financial aid program in the next two years thanks to increased state funding in a higher education budget bill continuing to make its way through the Oregon Legislature.

aid were eligible for Oregon Opportunity Grant funds, but only about 16% of those students received grants because of limited available funding.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown initially recommended funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant at about \$171 million last December. If lawmakers pass the most recent iteration of a budget bill, the grant would stand at \$200 million for the upcoming two-year budget period.

The Oregon Higher Education Coordinating

Commission says that extra bump of funding would increase the total number of grant recipients from roughly 65,600 to about 76,600 in the upcoming biennium.

"That is really important, especially for students in this region because we have a lot of students with financial need who want to go to college," Seydel said. "That Oregon Opportunity Grant makes it possible."

Seydel said the pandemic has many students having to make tough financial decisions, but the increased funds

could make college a reality for more of them.

Along with the increased funding to the Oregon Opportunity Grant, lawmakers are also examining changes to another state financial aid program — the Oregon Promise.

The Oregon Promise was created in 2015 to help cover most tuition costs at Oregon community colleges for recent high school graduates and GED recipients. At the time it was announced, Oregon Promise was touted as the state's "free community college" financial aid program.

Another bill in the Legislature would broaden the program's focus and change who's eligible to use it. House Bill 2093 would expand the eligibility requirements for the program and make other changes such as: lowering the grade point average requirement for students from 2.5 to 2.0, doubling the minimum grant award to \$2,000 and cutting a \$50 per term copay.

Notably, the bill also would expand the permitted uses of the grant funds to include students not only looking to attend community colleges, but also public universities and nonprofit, regionally accredited private institutions.

Still, key changes remain

between the Oregon Promise and the Oregon Opportunity Grant — the Oregon Promise is only available to recent high school and GED graduates, while the Opportunity Grant is available to students of all ages. In addition, the Oregon Promise only offers up to two years of grant funding, while the Opportunity Grant offers grants for up to four years.

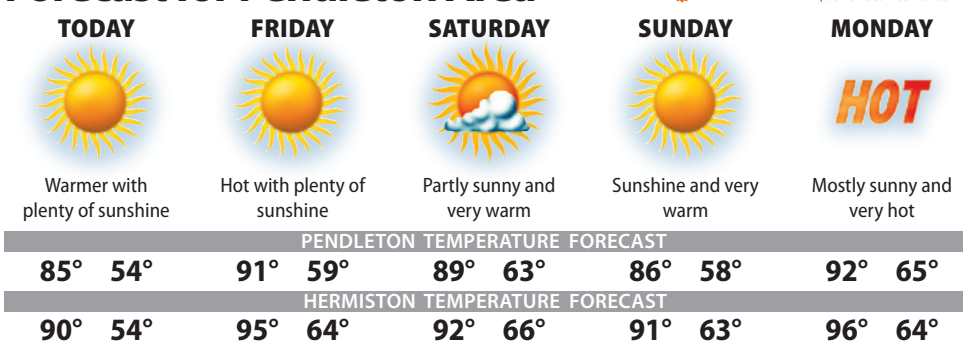
The Higher Education Coordinating Commission said the bill looking to tweak the Oregon Promise has undergone some changes since it was first introduced at the beginning of this year, but regardless, the agency says the bill would "improve the equity of the Oregon Promise program and its flexibility for students."

"These are important positive steps," the commission said. "But even if this bill passes in current or amended form, financial aid programs will still need to be funded at increased levels to fully address the serious affordability challenges students and families face."

The commission said policy changes such as this are a "first step toward a more wholesale redesign of financial aid to meet the needs of Oregonians."

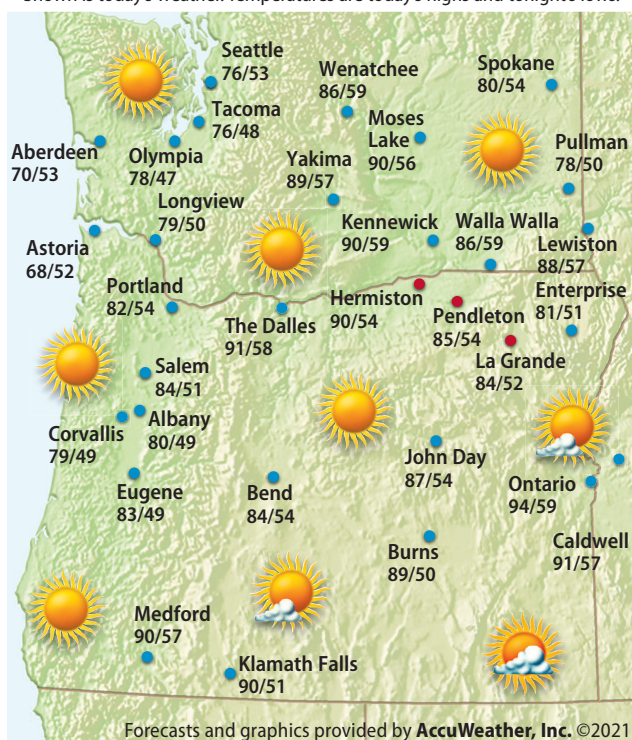
—EO Media Group contributed to this report.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

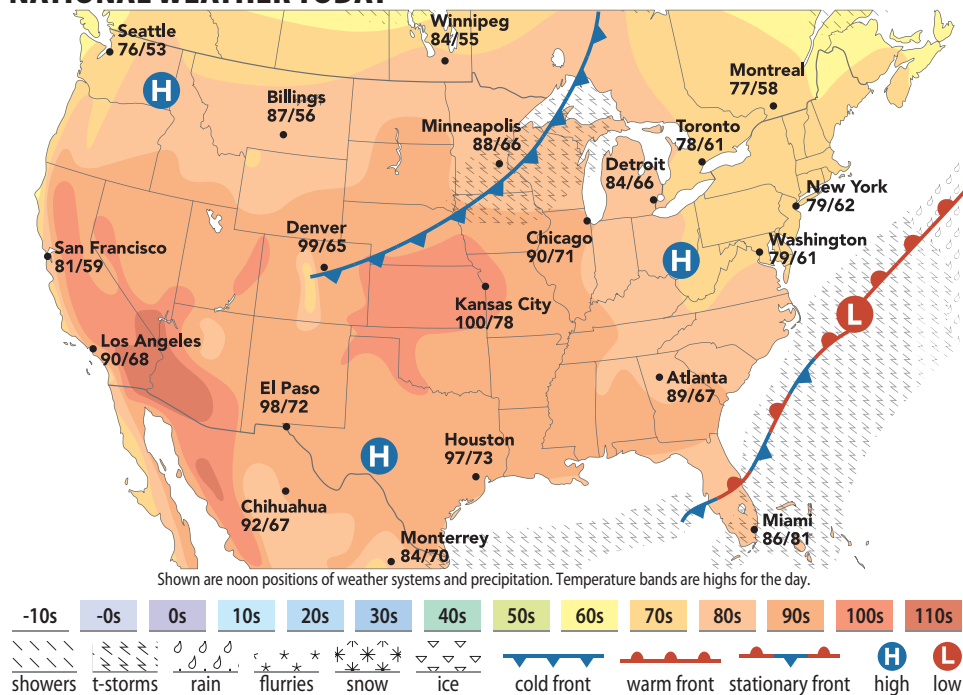
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	76°	48°	
Normals	79°	52°	
Records	106° (1961)	40° (1893)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.27"		
Normal month to date	0.80"		
Year to date	4.30"		
Last year to date	8.55"		
Normal year to date	7.31"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	77°	44°	
Normals	80°	53°	
Records	102° (1961)	38° (2004)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.23"		
Normal month to date	0.38"		
Year to date	1.93"		
Last year to date	1.61"		
Normal year to date	5.49"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	Fri.		
Boardman	SW 4-8	SW 7-14	
Pendleton	NW 6-12	WNW 7-14	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	5:05 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	8:47 p.m.		
Moonrise today	12:18 p.m.		
Moonset today	1:11 a.m.		
First	Full	Last	New
June 17	June 24	July 1	July 9

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 117° in Bullhead City, Ariz. Low 26° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon governor signs bill to explore liability changes for prescribed fire

By SIERRA DAWN
MCCLAIN
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Monday, June 14, signed into law House Bill 2571, which could potentially lead to a change in liability standards for prescribed fire.

The new law may help expand the use of prescribed fire in Oregon.

Prescribed fire, also known as "planned," "RX" or "controlled" fire, is a fire set intentionally to limit hazardous fuels on the landscape — for example, by burning brush under trees in the spring to prevent a larger wildfire in the summer or fall.

House Bill 2571 directs agencies and forest industry leaders to study liability options for prescribed fires. This is important because landowners nationwide cite liability concerns as one of the top reasons they're reluctant to use prescribed fire.

"Stricter liability standards deter people from doing prescribed burns because they're afraid of getting sued if there's an escape," said Lenya Quinn-Davidson, who directs the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council. "As a burn boss, you take on a lot of personal responsibility."

Liability means the legal responsibility a person holds for their acts or omissions.

The U.S. has three main liability standards for prescribed burning: strict liability, which holds a person responsible for harm even if he wasn't negligent; simple negligence, which holds a person responsible only if he showed reckless disregard for safety.

Most states, including Oregon, have simple negligence standards. Eight use a



Kyle Kosma/High Desert Museum, File

U.S. Forest Service firefighters carry out a prescribed burn on the grounds of the High Desert Museum, near Bend, on May 14, 2021. House Bill 2571, signed into law on Monday, June 14, directs agencies and forest industry leaders to study liability options for prescribed fires.

gross negligence standard.

In states with lower liability standards, people do more prescribed burns. Oregon, for example, a simple negligence state, burned only 200,629 acres in 2019, while Florida, a gross negligence state, burned more than 1 million acres the same year.

To incentivize more prescribed burning on private lands, Oregon is exploring making the shift from simple to gross negligence.

But the bill law passed June 14 won't automatically change Oregon's liability standard. Instead, it'll open the conversation and prompt a study — first steps.

"It's not 100% clear yet if changing the standard will enable more prescribed fire, but we do want to have that conversation," said Jenna Knobloch, administrative coordinator at the Oregon Prescribed Fire Council.

The new law directs the Department of Consumer and Business Services to consult with the state Forestry Department, Oregon Forest and Industries Council, Oregon Small Woodlands Association, Oregon State University, the Oregon

Prescribed Fire Council and a representative of the insurance industry to study liability and insurance coverage options for prescribed fires.

The study's results will be used to craft future prescribed fire policies and incentives.

"We totally support the concept of more prescribed fire on the landscape," said Kyle Williams, director of forest protection at the Oregon Forest and Industries Council. "So, we did voice support for (House Bill) 2571 to start those conversations. To ask those questions about liability is important."

But Williams has some concerns about changing the liability standard because it's important to him that burners should also get voluntary "rock-solid" burn training.

A separate Oregon bill moving through the Legislature, House Bill 2572, deals with this concern. The bill, if passed, would create a program to train private residents to become burn bosses. If Oregon changes to gross negligence standard, experts say the lower standard would likely only be offered to people trained as certified burn managers.

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

EAST OREGONIAN
— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays
EastOregonian.com
In the App Store:
EO **EO**
East Oregonian (USPS 164-980) is published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, by the EO Media Group, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, OR. Postmaster: send address changes to East Oregonian, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801.
Copyright © 2021, EO Media Group

Circulation Dept.
For mail delivery, online access, vacation stops or delivery concerns call 800-781-3214

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Local home delivery	Savings (cover price)
EZPay	\$10.75/month	50 percent
52 weeks	\$135	42 percent
26 weeks	\$71	39 percent
13 weeks	\$37	36 percent

Single copy price:
\$1.50 Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

ADVERTISING
Regional Sales Director (Eastside) EO Media Group:
• Karrine Brogoitti
541-963-3161 • kbrogoitti@eomediagroup.com
Multimedia Consultants:
• Kelly Schwirse
541-564-4531 • kschwirse@eastoregonian.com
• Audra Workman
541-564-4538 • aworkman@eastoregonian.com
Business Office
• Dayle Stinson
541-966-0824 • dstinson@eastoregonian.com

Classified & Legal Advertising
1-800-962-2819 or 541-278-2678
classifieds@eastoregonian.com or legals@eastoregonian.com
NEWS
• To submit news tips and press releases: call 541-966-0818 or email news@eastoregonian.com
• To submit community events, calendar items and Your EO News: email community@eastoregonian.com or call Renee Struthers at 541-966-0818.
• To submit engagements, weddings and anniversaries: email rstruthers@eastoregonian.com or visit eastoregonian.com/community/announcements
• To submit sports or outdoors information or tips: 541-966-0838 • sports@eastoregonian.com
COMMERCIAL PRINTING
Commercial Print Manager: Holly Rouska
541-617-7839 • hrouska@eomediagroup.com