

Walmart removes guns from its shelves in Oregon stores

By ALEX WITTEW
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE—It is unclear why, but Walmart has stopped selling guns and ammunition in its Oregon locations.

Walmart could not be reached for comment, but did release a statement to KATU news stating, “We are proud to serve hunters and outdoorsmen and women and will continue to serve them with an assortment that reflects our heritage of supporting hunting and outdoor sports.”

The retail giant stopped selling firearms in November. Before that, the store had seen some complaints against

it for refusing to sell firearms to residents under the age of 21, including residents in St. Helens and Medford in 2018, who had tried to purchase a firearm, only to be turned away by store associates.

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries slapped Walmart with a fine of \$5,000 after refusing to sell a firearm to Hannah Brumbles, 18, according to reporting by The Oregonian. After a circuit court ruled in favor of Walmart, it was struck down in the Oregon Court of Appeals earlier this year, and returned to the lower court.

Similar retail stores such as Dick’s Sporting Goods and Bi-Mart also implemented a

policy where they refuse to sell firearms to residents under the age of 21, but continue to keep ammunition and guns for sale. Walmart stores in Washington and Idaho, however, continue to sell firearms and ammunition through their stores.

The decision for Walmart to deny the sales of firearms and ammunition to those under 21 came after a deadly shooting in 2018 at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which killed 17, including 14 students and three staff members.

It is unclear if the removal of firearms and ammunition at Walmart will affect sales on local gun shops.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Walmart stopped selling firearms in November 2021. Before that, the retail giant had some lawsuits against it for refusing to sell firearms to residents under the age of 21, including residents of St. Helens and Medford in 2018.

Meta seeks ways to boost water reserves in Crook County area

By MICHAEL KOHN
The Bulletin

PRINEVILLE — Crook County is situated in one of the driest parts of the state — it’s one of two counties in Oregon to be completely in the highest level on the U.S. Drought Monitor. Now, one of the county’s biggest employers is trying to combat the drought with an aggressive water restoration program.

Facebook’s parent company Meta, which operates a data storage center on the outskirts of Prineville, is implementing two projects it says will improve water availability in Crook County.

The social media giant reported the projects will help it to achieve its water conservation goals, which include being “water positive” by 2030, meaning it will return more water to the environment than it consumes at its facilities.

Meta, which also owns Oculus, Instagram, Messenger, and WhatsApp, plans to accomplish this feat by partnering with environmental groups and federal regulators to restore degraded habitats in Oregon and five other states. It also is upgrading its technologies to make its data centers more water efficient.

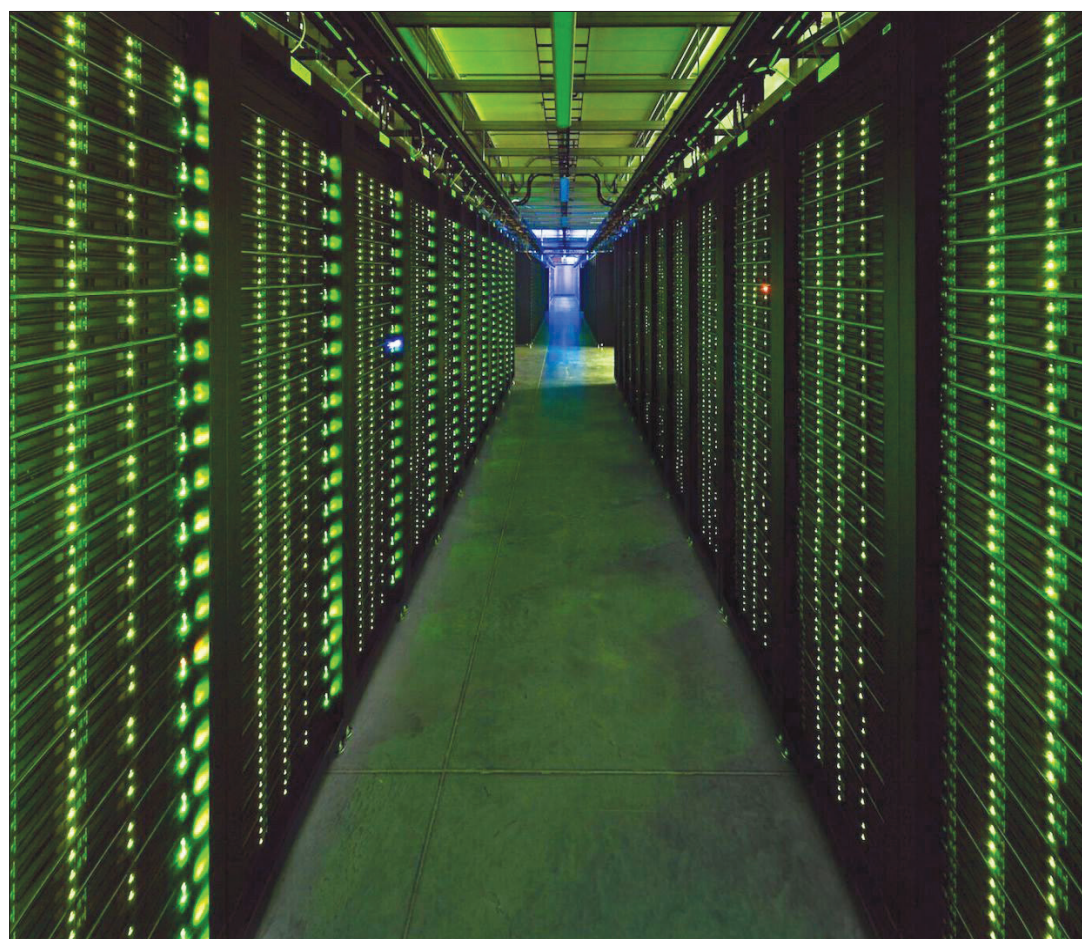
Aquifer recharge key component

Technological developments in the last decade, as well as the use of outside air for cooling, have allowed Meta’s data centers “to operate 80% more water efficiently on average compared to the industry standard,” said Melanie Roe, a spokesperson for Meta.

“We see opportunities for additional gains in the coming years, particularly as our infrastructure grows, and we’ll need to develop water-efficient designs for different climates,” Roe added.

Meta is under a microscope in the places where it operates as its data centers use large amounts of water to cool their servers and maintain optimal humidity levels. In Prineville, data centers source their water from the municipality.

In Prineville last year, Meta used 117.5 million gallons of water — enough water to fill 178 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Meta’s use of water is increasing. The data center, a collection of buildings, still is under construction and when complete will be a 4.6 million



Alan Brandt/Contributed Photo

A view inside Facebook’s Prineville Data Center.

square foot campus.

To counter that water use, Meta is helping to fund an aquifer recharge project with the city of Prineville. A second project is restoring the degraded Ingram Meadow in the Ochoco National Forest.

Meta says the aquifer recharge project utilizes the natural storage found underground in the city to store water during cooler, wetter winters. A portion of the water can be recovered during hotter summer periods when water is less available.

The project, which became operational earlier this year, works by conveying a portion of winter stream flows in the Crooked River to the local groundwater supply through injection and extraction wells.

Authorities in Prineville are confident the work won’t leave Prineville high and dry.

“The water management tool allows the city to meet peak demands by taking advantage of the natural storage space found in geologic formations underground,” said Eric Klann, Prineville’s city engineer.

Klann said the project recharged 34 million gallons of water in 2020 and 98 million gallons this year. Next year, 140 million gallons will be

recharged, he said.

The system is cost-effective and resilient, said Klann, and he sees it as a good long-term solution for the city to manage its water needs.

“We are committed to continually exploring ways to support the community’s water needs in an environmentally sustainable way,” he said.

Apple water project also helps

Bruce Scanlon, manager for Ochoco Irrigation District, added he is not aware of any impacts on local water resources that can be attributed to the data centers.

“My guess is that if we were going to see something, it would have become clear last year because of the severity of the drought,” said Scanlon.

Meta’s other project in the area, the Ingram Meadow Restoration Project, spans 15 acres in the headwaters of Auger Creek, in the Ochocos northwest of Prineville.

Logging and overgrazing dried out most of the meadow in the early 1900s. Meta’s goal here is to refill the water table and increase water availability in the late summer months.

Meta says in addition to improving a water source for humans, rehabilitating Ingram Meadow also will benefit elk,

as well as fish in the streams and creeks downstream from Auger Creek.

Prineville also has received help from Apple, which has a data center in the city. Similar to the Meta project, the Apple-sponsored program stores drinking water in the airport area aquifer for use during peak demand in summer.

These and other conservation projects have helped Prineville keep a lid on its water use. In 2008 the city used 625 million gallons of water from its Valley Floor Aquifer. In recent years the city’s demand has ranged from 582 million gallons in 2019 to 665 million gallons in 2020, according to data provided by Klann.

While Prineville residents may be concerned about the data center’s water use, few in town question the positive impact these massive facilities have on the local economy.

Since Meta opened the data center in 2011, the company has invested \$2 billion in the facilities and employed hundreds of workers. Prineville now boasts more than 370 jobs in data processing, hosting, and related services, according to the Oregon Employment Department.

Gubernatorial candidate Drazen predicts ‘Republican year’

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

REDMOND — Surging homelessness and excessive regulation have primed Oregon voters for Republican leadership, according to Rep. Christine Drazen, R-Canby.

Drazen aims to take advantage of that opportunity and urged farmers to support her candidacy for governor in what’s expected to be a crowded Republican primary race.

“I would not get into this race if there were not a path to victory,” Drazen said at the Oregon Farm Bureau’s convention in Redmond on Thursday, Dec. 9. “This is a Republican year in the state of Oregon. It is a Republican year across this nation.”

The lack of an incumbent in the race and low approval numbers for the Biden administration bode well for Republican chances, she said.

The unaffiliated campaign of Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, also is likely to give the Republican candidate a boost, Drazen said. “You’re going to split even farther that part of the vote.”

Drazen drew a clear distinction between herself and Johnson, saying she’d be “all in” on issues important to farmers.

In comparison, Johnson is “working on getting you a little better on a bad deal,” said Drazen, the House minority leader.

Her harshest criticisms were reserved for the Democratic supermajority in the state legislature, which Drazen said is more interested in an “exertion of power” than serving Oregonians.

“There’s not going to be change without a change in the governor’s office,” she said. “The metro area, the I-5 corridor, think they are Oregon. What’s good for them is good for everyone.”

When asked how she would handle state agencies such as the Water Resources Department, Drazen said she’d “clean house” by replacing agency heads.

“That is absolutely what we need down the line. What we have now is a state government that is pushed by agendas,” she said. “There is going to be a bloody Monday. You won’t make change unless you make someone cry.”

If she became governor while Democrats still dominated the Legislature, Drazen said she’d be in a position to force them to compromise.

The possibility of a Republican veto also would help stop the “runaway train” of left-leaning bills, she said.

“I think Oregon could use some deadlock right now,” Drazen joked.

However, Drazen said she’s optimistic Republicans also will pick up legislative seats due to voter disaffection with the current leadership.

“Supermajorities — I don’t care who the party is — are not good for the state,” she said.

Denver Pugh, a Linn County farmer, said he expects Drazen to get a lot of support in the agricultural community.

Pugh said he likes Johnson, who also spoke at the convention, since “she doesn’t hide anything and she tells it like it is.”

However, he’s leaning toward supporting Drazen because he shares her optimism about Republican chances in 2022.

Kotek backed for governor by group that gave Brown \$800K in 2018 race

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — A group that gave Gov. Kate Brown \$800,000 in her 2018 re-election bid has endorsed House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, for governor in 2022.

EMILY’s List, a Washington, D.C. based group that advocates for progressive women candidates to run for political office, said early Friday, Dec. 10, that Kotek was their candidate to succeed Brown as the next governor.

“Tina Kotek is a proven fighter for opportunity and justice,” Laphonza Butler, EMILY’s List president wrote in statement announcing the endorsement.

EMILY’s List is an acronym for “Early Money Is Like Yeast,” comparing initial fundraising to yeast that makes dough rise.

The organization was formed in 1985 to prime the pump of campaign donations for female candidates running for local, state and federal office. The founders believe women were at a disadvantage in drawing crucial early donations that can motivate other donors to give.

EMILY’s List has grown to five million members and raised \$700 million for successful campaigns across the nation. Their list of victories include Vice President Kamala Harris, 16 governors, 26 U.S. Senators and 159 U.S. House members.

The endorsement cited what the group said was Kotek’s support for affordable housing and health care, raising the minimum wage, ensuring pay and benefit equity, and championing a reduction in carbon

emissions that cause global warming.

Maya Krishna-Rogers, the communications director for EMILY’s List campaign efforts, said the group does not disclose what it plans to spend on any given race.

2018 race raised \$40M

EMILY’s List was one of the largest backers of Brown’s 2018 race against the Republican nominee, former state Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend. A campaign wallet war raged, with Buehler receiving \$2.5 million from Nike founder Phil Knight. Brown was able to match the pace in part through repeated refilling of her coffers by EMILY’s List, which had given \$800,000 by the November election.

Together they raised nearly \$40 million for the race, which

some political websites in late October rated as “too close to call” despite voters having last elected a Republican governor in 1982. Brown won 50.1% of the vote, while Buehler received 43.7% and the remainder went to minor party candidates.

The endorsement of Kotek noted she would be the nation’s first openly lesbian governor and a force for progressive policies in Salem.

“Oregon will reckon with the legacies of injustice, move past the politics of division, and become a better place for families to work and live,” the EMILY’s List endorsement said.

Kotek was cast as one of the “left-wing liberal” candidates running against “right-wing Trump apologist” Republicans by Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, when she announced last month she was

planning to run as an independent in 2022.

Buehler endorsed Johnson on Dec. 7, saying she was the only alternative who could break the streak of Democratic victories made easier by the rightward tilt of the Republican Party that was out-of-step with the moderate majority of Oregon voters.

“It is vital that we break the iron grip monopoly of the radical left on power, politics, and policy in our state,” Buehler said of Johnson.

Buehler’s endorsement raised the question of whether Knight might support Johnson in a governor’s race where spending might blow past the totals from 2018. Knight has not expressed a public preference for any candidate for governor.

Even without Knight’s millions, Johnson had a built-in advantage in running as an independent.