

Budget: Wallowa Dam gets \$16 million earmark

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and workforce in non-metro areas of Oregon are aging, according to a report last year from the state Employment Department.

While the income of rural Oregonians is about equal to other rural areas of the country, state economists say, housing is about 30 percent more expensive.

The governor wants to offer a carrot to developers to build more affordable housing across the state.

She wants to boost funding for loan programs and for public-private partnerships to build housing for people who can't find affordable homes in the communities where they work. Brown wants the state to borrow \$130 million through bonds to build up to 2,100 affordable homes for communities of color and in rural areas.

The governor has also proposed millions in water projects.

Brown's budget allots \$16 million to replace the Wallowa Dam, which is more than a century old and whose operators keep less water than it was built to hold to avoid a failure.

Todd Nash, chair of the Wallowa County Commission, said that replacing the dam could help increase water for irrigating crops such as timothy hay and alfalfa.

"That would mean additional water for some of those areas that have been underserved by water...to continue to irrigate and that is a big win for Wallowa County," Nash said.

And Brown wants to divvy millions for rural community colleges across the state, with a focus on career readiness.

Brown's wish list includes an agricultural workforce center at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton and an industrial trades center at Klamath County Community College in Klamath Falls.

Oregon's 17 community colleges had about 280,000 students in the 2016-17 school year, according to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. They primarily serve rural areas.

But unless the Legislature raises nearly \$2 billion in new taxes for her major education revival plan, Brown's budget would reduce money that community colleges say they need to continue current operations for the next two years.

It would also cut funds to Oregon Promise, which covers tuition for certain students.

Ron Paradis, head of college relations for Central Oregon Community College in Bend, said the college would get less money under

the basic budget than it currently does.

"It would definitely mean cuts, or tuition increases," Paradis wrote in an email.

The college operates campuses in Bend, Redmond, Prineville and Madras with an enrollment this fall of about 5,000 students.

The governor wants more rural Oregonians to have high-speed internet that could "literally bridge the urban-rural divide," she said in October.

Joseph Franell, CEO of Eastern Oregon Telecom who chairs the state Broadband Advisory Council, said that he was "thrilled" about the governor's proposal to create a Broadband Office and allocate \$5 million to a broadband infrastructure fund.

for companies to invest in high-speed internet in rural or frontier communities. There's a lot of space and not many people per square mile to pay for the service.

And getting federal money is tough. Green found out last week that the city hadn't been awarded a federal grant to help bring broadband to the area. It had spent about \$100,000 to prepare the grant application.

Internet is so sluggish at John Day City Hall that he couldn't directly upload that application.

He hopes that more support from the state would help communities like his get federal dollars to close the broadband service gap, which impacts schools, libraries and other government functions.

lish, through the executive order, a council on wildfire response to evaluate Oregon's system for responding to large fires.

The council's job would be to figure out whether Oregon's current mode of fighting fires is "sustainable" and recommend changes.

Senate Republican Leader Jackie Winters, of Salem, said that while the governor's efforts to address fire issues were "long overdue," she didn't think decreases in the fire protection budget would help.

The governor's budget attributed the dip to one-time costs for recent large fires.

Jonathan Sandau, government affairs specialist at the Oregon Farm Bureau, pointed to a number of proposals in the governor's proposed budget that could be a boon for rural communities.

He was encouraged by her support of economic development projects in rural Oregon through the Regional Solutions program and efforts to expand broadband service. She also wants to extend tax credits for farmers who house agricultural workers and donate crops to food banks or other charities.

Those credits are set to expire in the next budget.

But Sandau worried that the governor's push for education funding — if new taxes don't pass — could sideline funding for natural resource agencies like the state Agriculture Department, the Fish and Wildlife Department and the state's watershed enhancement board.

Those agencies do everything from regulating the pesticides that farmers use to managing wolves that prey on livestock.

"Oregon is a natural resources economy, and a lot of lives, and jobs and communities depend on that," Sandau said.

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Jonathan Sandau, government affairs specialist at the Oregon Farm Bureau

The Broadband Office would develop partnerships between government and private companies to expand high-speed internet to rural Oregon, pursue federal funding and support local efforts to develop faster internet.

There's a technical advantage in having a dedicated broadband office. It could help the state qualify for more federal funding, Franell said.

As the economy and daily life depends more on the internet, reliable and fast internet service can connect rural Oregonians to services like health care and education, Franell said.

"If the Colt .45 revolver was the great equalizer of the 1800s, broadband is the great equalizer of our era," Franell said, "And when I say that, there's no one thing other than broadband that has such potential for positive impact on people's lives."

For example, instead of traveling for hours to see a specialist, more rural residents could use medical video conferencing, often called telehealth.

"If you have good, reliable, fast access to broadband, regardless of location, you can get educated, literally all the way up to a Ph.D.," Franell said. "Regardless of where you live, you can get health, you can connect with government in ways you couldn't before."

Rural communities have had problems enticing private companies to build high-speed internet infrastructure.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said that there is not much incentive



American Farm Bureau Federation/Capital Press
President Donald Trump has signed the new farm bill.

Trump: Farm groups express relief as Trump signs 2018 Farm Bill

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The National Association of Wheat Growers said the signing marked a historic event for all of U.S. agriculture.

"The 2018 Farm Bill provides farmers with the certainty and stability they need to continue producing a safe and nutritious food supply while using fewer resources and maintaining healthy soil for crops," Jimmie Musick, NAWG president, said.

National Corn Growers Association said farmers will be able to look forward to a new year with the certainty of a new farm bill.

"Between depressed commodity prices, record-low farm incomes and tariffs and trade uncertainty, today's signing is very welcome news," NCGA stated.

The American Soybean Association said it's a success to have the legislation signed before the end of the year.

"We appreciate the level of assurance the bill provides and will now be able to better focus on working with the administration and Congress on other issues affecting the competitiveness and profitability of U.S. beans," Davie Stephens, ASA president, said.

The National Milk Producers Federation said the bill enacts necessary reform for dairy farmers.

"By signing the farm bill, the president has acknowledged the problems dairy producers face and has put his stamp on improving their circumstances," Randy Mooney, NMPF chairman, said.

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition said it is grateful that Trump didn't impose any further delays on an already prolonged process.

"America's family farmers, rural communities and food-insecure families have waited long enough for a new farm bill," Juli Obudzinski, NSAC interim policy director, said.

"We took our daughter to Dr. Allen on several occasions, and we were extremely happy with the care we received..."

-Enterprise Mom

Dr. Allen is a family practice physician and doctor of osteopathic medicine.



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Devin Greer
This week's athlete of the week is Enterprise High School basketball player, Devin Greer. The EHS junior guard led the Outlaws to a well-earned 54-47 win over the Joseph Eagles on Wednesday, Dec. 19. Greer scored 14 points in the effort.

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