

# Earth Day Oregon partners with Eastern Oregon

BY ALEX WITTWER  
EO Media Group

JOSEPH — Eastern Oregon is joining in Earth Day Oregon for the first time.

Wallowa Land Trust joined the nonprofit coalition this year, and has partnered up with Terminal Gravity Brewing, Moonlight Graphics and Wild Carrot Herbals. As well, Greater Hells Canyon Council and Farmers Ending Hunger — which has several participating farms in Hermiston and Echo — have joined Earth Day Oregon for this year's campaign.

"Oregon Earth Day came about more to celebrate the work that's being done specifically in our state that's helping to conserve our lands and care for a planet," said Sarah Kleinhanzl, communications and outreach coordinator for Wallowa Land Trust. "As Wallowa Land Trust, our mission is to conserve and promote healthy landscapes here in Wallowa County, and so those missions obviously interlock pretty well."

One of the ways Wallowa

Land Trust is raising funds is through an in-person fundraising event on Friday, April 22.

"We haven't had any in-person fundraisers for a couple of years because of COVID-19, so we're really excited about it," Kleinhanzl said.

The fundraiser will include silent auctions for local art, live music, drinks, food and beer donated by Terminal Gravity Brewing. Kleinhanzl said it would be "a chance to reconnect with our community and raise the money for our conservation work."

"We're really grateful for the local support," she said. "The three partners that we partnered with have been really supportive throughout the years, and we're really glad that they joined us."

The land trust does not have specific projects for the fundraiser, but money raised will be used to help maintain ongoing operations and contracts with local landowners for their continuing involvement with Wallowa Land Trust.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

**Evening light sets over Crow Creek Road, Wallowa County, on the road from Zumwalt Prairie on Sunday, May 23, 2021. Two Eastern Oregon nonprofits have joined Earth Day Oregon, including Greater Hells Canyon Council and Wallowa Land Trust. Earth Day Oregon is scheduled for April 22 and will include a fundraiser by Wallowa Land Trust at the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce office in Enterprise.**

Earth Day Oregon, founded in 2019, is a revitalization of previous efforts to localize Earth Day in the state, according to Kelly Stevens, executive director. The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, and

it has become a global event celebrated across dozens of countries.

"It's not the first time Earth Day has happened in Oregon, certainly," she said, "but I would say that we really see an oppor-

tunity to make it a day, make it a time for bringing the state together and to have a really inclusive version of Earth Day."

Earth Day Oregon has a variety of nonprofit organization partners — ranging from land trusts to food bank donations. A majority of those organizations are in the Portland metro area, but Stevens has been focusing on expanding the campaign to include more rural communities and nonprofits.

"When people look at our website, when they see who our partners are, they're going to see opportunities with conservation nonprofits, including two in Eastern Oregon," she said. "And they'll also see groups that are working to end poverty, spur local economies and reduce inequality. And then, also, preserve our forests and our oceans and things like that."

What we're really excited about at Earth Day Oregon is this more holistic view of what we can all do together every April."

Stevens said the campaign has doubled the number of nonprofits outside of the Portland metro area that had allied with Earth Day Oregon. Roughly one-third of the nonprofits are from areas outside Portland, she said.

"As Oregonians, we've got a pretty good-sized state, but no matter where we live, we all care about the beauty of this state and our communities," she said. "By supporting the nonprofit partners and the many business partners in Eastern Oregon, people are ensuring that Eastern Oregon stays beautiful and those ecosystems are healthy and people are able to still work those rural lands, and have vibrant local ecosystems and vibrant local economies."



Kleinhanzl



Stevens

## Rain

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Baker County remains in a serious drought following one of the drier winters since World War II.

The most recent month that was wetter than average is October 2021, with 0.77 of an inch, compared with an average of 0.64.

And most of that rain fell on a single day — Oct. 22, which set a record with 0.59 of an inch.

From Dec. 1 through March 29, precipitation at the airport (melted snow and rain) totaled 1.03 inches. That's just one-third of the long-term average of 3.13 inches for that period.

And the National Weather Service isn't forecasting any more rain during March. The next mention of possible rain is for late on Sunday, April 3.

March did interrupt a trend of weather that's cooler than average as well as drier.

Following December, January and February, all of which were chillier than usual, March has been a bit milder than average.

The average high temperature through the first 29 days of the month was 51.6 degrees. The long-term average is 49.9.

The average low temperature in March is 27.6 degrees, compared with the long-term average of 26.2.

## Learning

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"We feel really strongly about getting students as many certifications as possible," Dalton said.

In healthcare, Dalton said BTI has mobile labs that allow instructors to work inside hospitals across the region, including in Pendleton, Heppner, Wallowa, John Day, Burns and Ontario.

"We're now building labs to be able to teach medical classes from here into even smaller rural communities," Dalton said.

### Hands-on training

Participants in Monday's tour experienced the mobile heavy equipment simulators, including truck driving and logistics training.

"These trailers go all over the Northwest," Dalton said.

Patrick Raimondo, plant manager at Behlen Country's livestock equipment factory in Baker City, attended the tour along with the plant's human resources manager, Stacy DeLong, and Angi Boruch, quality and safety manager.

DeLong and Boruch chose the truck driving simulator. Users settle into an authentic truck seat that moves just as a real truck

would depending on terrain and road surface.

Three screens showed the view through the windshield, windows, and rear view mirrors.

An instructor chooses different driving scenarios for the student to deal with, including inclement weather, a deer leaping into the road, or a blown tire or other mechanical problem. "I've got to give it to the truck drivers, this is not easy," Boruch said after her turn on the simulator.

"This is wild," DeLong said.

### Agriculture, health care offerings continue to grow

Dalton led the tour from the simulators to the FFA greenhouse, where students were tending to flower baskets for the Mother's Day sale. It will be held in person.

"90 percent of our ag program is directed at high school students, (the) FFA program here," Dalton said. "We've got a full plant science pathway and a full animal science pathway, both. And then we offer ag business and ag technology and innovation classes."

The BTI ag program was voted program of the year for Oregon and the region.

BTI also has an ESports team, the first in Oregon. The team par-



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

**Doug Dalton, president of Baker Technical Institute, talks about a computer-controlled milling machine assembled by students, during a tour on Monday, March 28, 2022.**

ticipates in electronic sports tournaments.

In health care, BTI has courses focusing on rural medicine, including wilderness first aid.

"We train everybody from physicians that need continuing ed and we're approved through the American Medical Association to give them rural life support skills," Dalton said.

Dalton said BTI has a student base of about 2,000 students around the area and they are continuing to grow.

# Prosecutor: driver who killed 4 homeless people was drunk

BY ANDREW SELSKY

Associated Press

SALEM — The man who allegedly drove into a homeless encampment in Salem, killing four people, had roughly double the legal limit of alcohol in his blood, prosecutors said Monday, March 28.

Enrique Rodriguez Jr., 24, was ordered jailed without bail by a judge on Monday after being charged with four counts of first-degree manslaughter, second-degree assault, reckless driving and driving while under the influence of intoxicants.

The 2 a.m. Sunday, March 27, crash left a scene of chaos, with people trapped under the car. Two people died at the scene and two died at the hospital, police said. After the dead and injured were taken away, flattened tents, an overturned shopping cart and a deeply scarred tree marked the scene. Mourners left bouquets of flowers at the base of the tree.

"My friends are dead and I don't know what to say," Mike Wade, who came to the camp on Sunday after hearing about the crash, told the Salem Statesman Journal newspaper.

Authorities identified those killed as Jowand Beck, 24; Luke Kagey, 21; Joe Posada III, 54; and Rochelle Zamacona, 29.

Derrick Hart, 43, and Savannah Miller, 18, were seriously injured, police said.

Rodriguez had 0.15% or more alcohol in his blood, according to a charging docu-

ment filed with the Marion County Circuit Court. A blood alcohol level of 0.08% or higher constitutes driving under the influence, according to Oregon law.

The Salem Police Department said on Sunday "alcohol may have been a contributing factor" in the crash. Judge Jennifer Gardiner appointed a public defender to represent Rodriguez. The attorney, Aaron Jeffers, didn't immediately return a call seeking comment.

The crash happened on a small triangle of trees and grass near the Willamette River and near a new men's shelter and a program that offers emergency housing assistance, showers, food and other services for the homeless.

On March 3, the city of Salem cleared dozens of homeless people from a makeshift campsite located just a block away, at Marion Park. City officials had posted notices about the pending action, and community providers walked through the camp offering to connect them with services, the Statesman Journal reported.

A new law that takes effect next year restricts how cities and counties — including Marion County, where Salem is located — can react to homeless camps.

In 2021, Gov. Kate Brown signed a bill passed by the Legislature to protect homeless campers in public spaces from being removed. It mandates

that any city or county law must be reasonable if it regulates "sitting, lying, sleeping or keeping warm and dry outdoors on public property."

Under the measure, a homeless person charged with violating a ban on camping or loitering would have an affirmative defense against a law that is not objectively reasonable.

The Marion County Board of Commissioners opposed it, however, saying the measure "would limit local control of the homeless crisis facing Oregon."

# Report: no recidivism spike for inmates released due to COVID-19

PORTLAND (AP) — A preliminary report by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission found some people released early from prison because of the COVID-19 pandemic were not more likely to commit crimes.

Gov. Kate Brown commuted the sentences of 963 people mostly considered medically vulnerable or near the end of their sentences between July 2020 and October 2021.

Nonpartisan state agency, the Criminal Justice Com-

mission, looked at the first 266 people granted release between July and November of 2020, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.

The agency found 18% were arrested within one year of their commutation, 8% were convicted of a new crime and 2% were reincarcerated.

Commission executive director Ken Sanchagrin said those numbers are similar to figures from 2019 involving people granted release or parole.

The report found of the

commuted people who re-offended, 10 involved a crime against another person.

"It doesn't appear that being let out early for these folks had any type of negative impact as far as higher rates of recidivism that we would normally expect," Sanchagrin told OPB.

The agency will issue another report in the next year, he said.

Brown has faced some criticism, and a lawsuit, over the pandemic-related commutations.

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