



Students walk on the Eastern Oregon University campus during the 2021 fall term.

Eastern Oregon colleges agree to strategic plan to close equity gaps

EAST OREGONIAN

LA GRANDE — A collaboration between three Eastern Oregon schools aims to close equity gaps for Eastern Oregon students at two- and four-year colleges and universities by 2030.

Gov. Kate Brown announced Monday, June 27, an investment of \$1.6 million for Blue Mountain Community College, Treasure Valley Community College and Eastern Oregon University to launch an initiative called “Moon Shot for Equity.” The three schools will work together as part of a five-year, student-centered comprehensive strategic plan to identify and remove systemic barriers that are preventing access and attainment to a post-secondary education degree.

BMCC President Mark Browning said open and equitable access is what the Pendleton-based institution strives for.

“We are excited about how Moon Shot for Equity can help us reach those goals and deliver even greater success for students,” he said.

“Every student in Oregon, no matter who they are or where they come from, deserves equitable access to higher education,” Brown said in a press release announcing the initiative. “We must invest and innovate to break down the barriers that have kept too many Oregonians from succeeding in higher education. This initial investment is just the start of a program to deliver lasting and meaningful change this year and in years to come. Every person in Eastern Oregon — and throughout the state — should be able to attend college and earn a degree.”

The initiative is part of Brown’s work with

public universities and community colleges to embrace innovation and focus on working smarter across education sectors to support students through every stage of education. The \$1.6 million will be funded with federal Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund dollars, which are reserved for allocations by governors through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act.



Browning



Brown

“This initial investment is a critical first step to launching this five-year initiative,” Eastern Oregon University President Tom Insko said. “Together, I believe we can reshape the future of post-secondary education in eastern Oregon, which means eliminating the equity gap and making sure all students reach their attainment goals in less time and money and set the path to better career outcomes.”

The Eastern Oregon University Board of Trustees convened via Zoom for a special meeting on June 27 to authorize Insko to enter into a contract with educational consulting firm EAB Global Inc. Board authorization is required because the contract exceeds \$1 million.

EAB Global launched the Moon Shot project in the fall of 2020 with a focus on removing systemic barriers to graduation among first-generation students as well as students of color.

“Our work with this new cohort of institutions in Eastern Oregon adds a new focus around bridging the rural versus urban divide that too often leaves students from more remote areas with reduced access to higher education,” EAB Vice President of Partnerships Tom Sugar said, “and all of the opportunities that go along with that.”

‘Biblical’ insect swarms spur Oregon push to fight pests

BY CLAIRE RUSH

Associated Press/Report for America

ARLINGTON — Driving down a windy canyon road in northern Oregon range-land, Jordan Maley and April Aamodt are on the look out for Mormon crickets, giant insects that can ravage crops. “There’s one right there,” Aamodt says.

They’re not hard to spot. The insects, which can grow larger than 2 inches, blot the asphalt.

Mormon crickets are not new to Oregon. Native to western North America, their name dates back to the 1800s, when they ruined the fields of Mormon settlers in Utah. But amidst drought and warming temperatures — conditions favored by the insects — outbreaks across the West have worsened.

The Oregon Legislature last year allocated \$5 million to assess the problem and set up a Mormon cricket and grasshopper “suppression” program. An additional \$1.2 million for the program was approved earlier this month.

It’s part of a larger effort by state and federal authorities in the U.S. West to deal with an explosion of grasshoppers and Mormon crickets that has hit from Montana to Nevada. But some environmental groups oppose the programs, which rely on the aerial spraying of pesticides across large swaths of land.

Maley, an Oregon State University Extension Agent, and Aamodt, a resident of the small Columbia River town of Arlington, are both involved in Mormon cricket outreach and surveying efforts in the area.

In 2017, Arlington saw its largest Mormon cricket outbreak since the 1940s. The

roads were “greasy” with the squashed entrails of the huge insects, which damaged nearby wheat crops.

Rancher Skye Krebs said the outbreaks have been “truly biblical.”

“On the highways, once you get them killed, then the rest of them come,” he explained. Mormon crickets are cannibalistic and will feast on each other, dead or alive, if not satiated with protein.

The insects, which are not true crickets but shield-backed katydids, are flightless. But they can travel at least a quarter of a mile in a day, according to Maley.

Aamodt fought the 2017 outbreak with what she had on hand.

“I got the lawnmower out and I started mowing them and killing them,” she said. “I took a straight hoe and I’d stab them.”

Aamodt has organized volunteers to tackle the infestation and earned the nickname “cricket queen.”

Another infestation last year had local officials “scrambling,” Maley said.

“We had all those high-value crops and irrigation circles,” he explained. “We just had to do what we could to keep them from getting into that.”

In 2021 alone, Oregon agricultural officials estimate 10 million acres of rangeland in 18 counties were damaged by grasshoppers and Mormon crickets.

Under the new Oregon initiative, private landowners like farmers and ranchers can request the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) survey their land. If ODA finds more than three Mormon crickets or eight grasshoppers per square yard

it will recommend chemical treatment. In some areas near Arlington surveyed in May soon after the hatch there were 201 Mormon crickets per square yard.

State officials recommend the aerial application of diflubenzuron. The insecticide works by inhibiting development, preventing nymphs from growing into adults. Landowners can be reimbursed for up to 75% of the cost.

Diana Fillmore is a rancher participating in the new cost-sharing initiative. She says “the ground is just crawling with grasshoppers” on her property.

ODA recommended she treat her 988-acre ranch in Arock in southeastern Oregon. As the program’s protocol calls for applying insecticide to only half the proposed area, alternately targeting swaths then skipping the next one, this means nearly 500 acres of her land will actually be sprayed.

Fillmore decided to act, remembering last year’s damage.

“It was horrible,” Fillmore said. “Grasshoppers just totally wiped out some of our fields.” She was forced to spend \$45,000 on hay she normally wouldn’t have to buy.

Todd Adams, an entomologist and ODA’s Eastern Oregon field office and grasshopper program coordinator, said as of mid-June ODA had received 122 survey requests and sent out 31 treatment recommendations for roughly 40,000 acres.

Landowners must act quickly if they decide to spray diflubenzuron as it is only effective against nymphs.

“Once they become adults it’s too late,” Adams said.

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