

Drought emergency declared in Grant County

Gov. Brown cites low snowpack and precipitation

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Gov. Kate Brown issued a drought emergency declaration for Grant County April 10 following a March 14 request by the Grant County Court.

"I find that the continuing low snowpack, lack of precipitation, low streamflows and warming temperatures are likely to cause natural and economic disaster conditions in Grant County, resulting in a severe, continuing drought emergency in that county during 2018," Brown said in her executive order.

The declaration followed a three-step process that began with the Grant County Court's request and underwent a review by staff at the state Water Resources Department and Office of Emergency Management. The declaration allows the Water Resources Department to offer options to water-right holders in Grant County to help them cope with conditions.

Weather patterns change

According to the federal Natural Resources and Conservation Service's April 1 statewide basin report, storm systems in the Pacific Northwest this winter deposited most of their snow north of the Columbia River, leaving Oregon with only 72 percent of normal snowpack.

Gov. Brown described the bleak consequences of this weather pattern in her executive order.

"Forecasted water conditions are not expected to improve, and drought is likely to have significant economic impacts on agriculture, livestock and natural resources in Grant County," she said. "Dry conditions will place agricultural and livestock investments at risk, threaten natural resources and recreational and tourism activities, and subject the regional economy to widespread and severe damage."

The Grant County Court described similar conditions in its March 14 letter requesting a drought declaration by the governor.

"Current predictions by (the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) are that seasonal drought within our region will persist or intensify and could dramatically increase wildland fire danger," the court said. "Additionally, a large share of the county's economy is dependent upon the agriculture sector, which is adversely affected by low

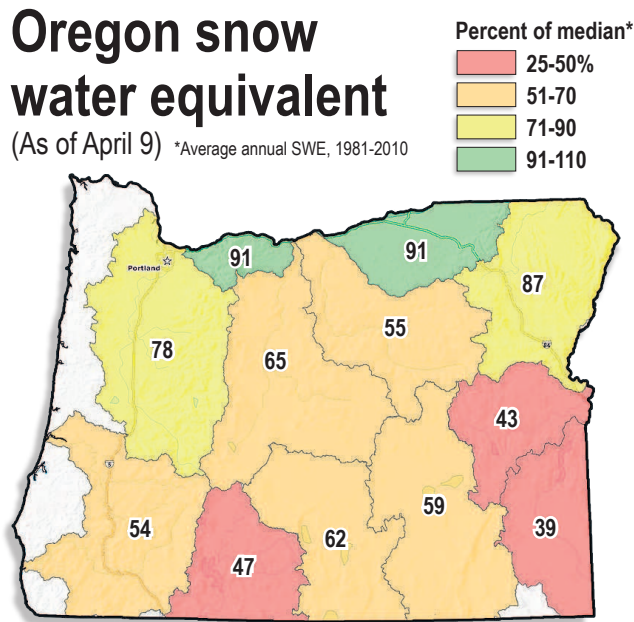


Gov. Kate Brown signs House Bill 4023, which increases broadband for rural schools, as education and technology leaders look on Friday at the Pendleton Technology and Trade Center. Brown has declared a drought emergency in Grant County.

EO Media Group/Kathy Aney

Oregon snow water equivalent

(As of April 9) *Average annual SWE, 1981-2010



Source: USDA NRCS

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

rainfall. Our initial assessment of impacts indicates imminent and significant damages and losses to the agricultural economy of Grant County."

Snowpack data

According to the National Resource Conservation Service, March precipitation in the John Day Basin was 99 percent of average, and precipitation from Oct. 1 to April 1 was 85 percent of average. Most streamflow forecasts in the basin for April through September range from 49 to 81 percent of average.

"Water managers in the basin should expect well below normal to below normal streamflows this summer," NRCS said in its April 1 basin report.

NRCS reported April 19 that snow water equivalent at eight of 13 SNOTEL sites in the John Day Basin averaged 60 percent of the median from 1981 through 2010. Data for other basins included Harney, 62 percent; Malheur, 57 percent; Klamath, 55 percent; Upper Deschutes and Crooked, 73 percent; Rogue and Umpqua, 61 percent; Lake County and

Goose Lake, 70 percent; and Owyhee 35 percent.

Precipitation at the 13 SNOTEL sites in the John Day Basin averaged 89 percent of average from 1981 through 2010. Precipitation data from the basins cited above were also below average.

Oregon's first drought emergency of the year was declared by Gov. Brown in Klamath County March 13. As state and local officials coordinate with federal partners, conditions will be closely monitored by

the state's natural resource and public safety agencies, including the Water Resources Department and OEM.

"For portions of Oregon, including Grant County, drought forecasts are already predicting a troubling year ahead," Gov. Brown said. "To minimize the impacts drought, severe weather and wildfire conditions could have on the local economy, I'm directing state agencies to work with local and federal partners to provide assistance to the Grant County community."

Among the tools provided to water-right holders under a drought emergency are a temporary permit allowing the use of groundwater instead of surface water; an expedited process that allows a water user to change the type of use, place of use or location of a diversion; permission to convert all or some of a water right to an instream use for one year or the length of the drought declaration; special-option agreements that allow a water-right holder to provide water to another party; a temporary exchange of existing water-rights from direct flow in a stream to stored water; and the authority to temporarily give human consumption or stock-watering uses preference over other uses.

Campaign finance reform key for Starnes

Independent governor candidate hopes to provide third choice

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle



Patrick Starnes

Campaign finance reform is the top issue for gubernatorial candidate Patrick Starnes of the Independent Party of Oregon.

Until "big money" is removed from politics, he told the Eagle, no other reforms will have much chance of success in the current two-party system.

With large donations from special interest groups fueling the campaigns of the Democrat and Republican parties, Starnes said voters are left with a choice of the lesser evil, rather than "a true third choice," which he hopes to change. Starnes said he is modeling campaign finance reform by limiting donations to his campaign to \$100.

He is touring the state, town by town, focusing on "solutions, not politics," he said. Lifetime political party members have approached him at events and told him they plan to vote for him, he said.

"People want to really change it," he said of the political system. "They're tired of these arguments."

Secondary priorities include open primary elections and the preven-

tion of gerrymandering, he said.

A freelance cabinet-maker for 30 years with school board experience, Starnes said state politicians should be required to have served on school boards to learn about the issues facing communities.

After campaign finance reform, he said the state Public Employees Retirement System could be reformed through a nonpartisan committee, which would alleviate the PERS burden on school districts and provide more dollars in classrooms, which would lead to better graduation rates.

Health care, tax and economic reforms would all follow, he said, but wouldn't be possible until campaign finance was reformed.

Starnes said he believes the general election will be interesting because 38 percent of Oregonians are not registered as Democrats or Republicans.

"I know I'm a dark horse," he said, "but other dark horses have won."

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-Coach Linda Studtmann

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Thanks to the Grant County Court and Northeast Oregon Forests Resource Advisory Committee, Grant Weed Control is able to offer a **25% Cost share program for Noxious Weed Control on Private Grazing Lands**, through a Title II funded Grant Project. This program will provide a maximum \$5,000 of noxious weed control services with a \$1,250 maximum landowner contribution to qualifying participants. To be eligible for participation, the treatment property must not be actively irrigated and must be primarily managed for livestock grazing, minimum of 20 acres in size, located within Grant County, and must contain priority noxious weed species. Applications for this limited weed control assistance opportunity will be ranked and funded according to a priority noxious weed list.

Contact the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District Office at (541) 575-1554 or visit 721 S. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845 for applications and additional information.

The application deadline for this program is May 4th, 2018.

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