

# Eastern Oregon regaining lost jobs

By ALEX WITTEWER  
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon is back on track to recovering jobs lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to state economists.

Regional economists Christopher Rich and Dallas Fridley at the Oregon Employment Department reported unemployment rates have dipped to the lowest level since the pandemic began in the spring of 2020.

Union and Wallowa counties saw a 1.5% and 1.6% decrease in

unemployment from September 2020 to September 2021, respectively, closing out with 5.3% and 5.4% total unemployment rates. Baker County saw a 2.2% drop during the same period, from 7.1% to 4.9%, the largest drop of the Northeastern Oregon counties. Grant County saw a 1.5% decrease, down to 6.6%.

Morrow County recorded one of the lowest year-end decreases with just 0.9%, down to a 4.4% unemployment rate since September 2021. Morrow County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate ranked sixth out of 36 Oregon counties,

tied with Clackamas and Yamhill counties.

Umatilla County with an unemployment rate of 5% placed 14th in September among Oregon's 36 counties, tied with Jackson County. During the year, Umatilla County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell by 1.2 percentage points since September 2020. Umatilla County led job growth primarily through public sector jobs, adding 470 government jobs during the year.

Union County is largely back on track, according to economists, but not fully recov-

ered from the 1,400 jobs lost at the start of the pandemic. Leisure and hospitality regained 87% of jobs lost, but remained roughly 60 shy of full recovery.

Evidence of those statistics can be found in persistent help wanted signs at fast food chains such as McDonald's and Dairy Queen, while job advertisements have largely disappeared from the windows of local restaurants downtown. Restaurants such as Mamacita's International Grill, La Grande, have had to close down temporarily due to staffing shortages, while others such as local bistro and

eatery Wine Down have closed permanently.

The total increase across Northeastern Oregon counties was approximately 1,450 jobs over the year ending in September. Of those jobs added, 700 were in the private sector.

Across the state, unemployment rates fell to 4.7%, down from its high of 13.2% in April 2020 when government-mandated shutdowns halted economies across the United States. The unemployment rate sits slightly higher than its pre-pandemic level of 3.5%, flirting with the idea of a full recovery

as COVID-19 infections fall across the state, and vaccination rates rise to 80%, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Unemployment claims in Eastern Oregon fell dramatically over the year, tumbling from 1,918 unemployment claims in September 2020, to just 794 in September 2021, a nearly 60% drop in claims numbers. Those numbers had been continually dropping since January 2021, and the last three months, starting in July, have had marginal decreases as federal unemployment benefits dry up.

# Rancher gets back in the saddle

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
Capital Press

SENECA — Despite an accident nine years ago that left him paralyzed from the sternum down, Alec Oliver is busier than ever at his family's fifth-generation cattle ranch in Eastern Oregon.

Oliver, 33, rides tall in a modified saddle that allows him to continue roping cows on pasture and forestland east of Seneca. When he's not managing his own herd, Oliver is usually connecting with other ranchers across the West as membership director for Country Natural Beef.

A rising star in the livestock industry, Oliver was named 2021 Agriculturist of the Year by Oregon Aglink, a nonprofit group dedicated to agricultural education and promotion.

"It's shocking and very humbling," he said. "I still feel I have a long ways to go, a lot to prove and a lot to achieve."

Getting to this point almost didn't happen for Oliver, who was 23 when he rolled his pickup truck one night after having too much to drink at a fundraiser in Seneca, population 262.

Prior to the accident, Oliver had actually gotten a ride home but decided later he would return to town. He remembers the truck fishtailed, and he swerved to avoid hitting their fence. That's when the vehicle flipped, pinning his leg between the steering wheel and gear shifter.

Instead of being ejected, Oliver had his hip pulled out of the socket and broke the T7 vertebrae in his spine. The truck landed back on its wheels, and his parents, alerted



Alec Oliver working cattle on the ranch near Seneca.

J.C. Oliver Inc.

by the noise, ran outside to find him hanging out of the driver's window.

"If (the truck) had gone another quarter-turn on its side, I'd have been underneath it," Oliver said.

Oliver was flown from the hospital in John Day to an intensive care unit in Bend, where he had surgery. After two weeks, he was flown again to Craig Hospital in Englewood, Colo., to begin rehabilitation as a paraplegic.

Even then, Oliver said he never gave up hope he would eventually get back to ranching.

"I never thought about quitting," he said. "It was just a matter of how do I do it."

The biggest moment of inspiration for Oliver came when he was visited by his neighbors and fellow ranchers Mike and Linda Bentz. To

be a rancher, they told him all he needed was his brain — he could always hire help for physical tasks.

In 2013, the year after the accident, Oliver went to Indiana, where he had a lift installed in the back of his truck that could maneuver him on and off a horse. He also had a custom saddle made by Randy Bird in Texas, with a high back and a strap to keep him from falling.

Today, Oliver runs the ranching business, J.C. Oliver Inc., after his father, J.C. Oliver III, died in 2017. Another silver lining of the accident, Oliver said, is it put him in touch with Country Natural Beef, a co-op with more than 100 rancher-members from Hawaii to Texas.

Networking with other ranchers has helped to refine practices on their own ranch,

Oliver said, such as grazing plans and regenerative agricultural techniques to increase the land's overall resiliency and drought tolerance.

"I think grazing has been a huge thing, just managing the grass and soil to create healthier landscapes and allow for more production," Oliver said.

The goal, Oliver said, is to keep the 132-year-old ranch along Bear Creek healthy and productive for another century.

"We've been here since 1889," he said. "My hope is by 2189, there's new generations taking even better care of the land than I am."

Oliver will be recognized by Oregon Aglink on Nov. 19 during the organization's annual Denim and Diamonds event at the Salem Convention Center.

# Western lawmakers set conservation goals

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Western lawmakers are voicing their concerns about the Biden administration's stated goal of conserving 30% of public lands and waters by 2030 and have offered an alternative.

In addition to being ambiguous and confusing, the Senate and Congressional Western Caucuses contend the initiative threatens to "preserve" lands and waters and does not address much-needed landscape restoration.

Instead, the caucuses have developed the Western Conservation Principles as an alternative.

The principles take a holistic approach to conservation based on restoring healthy and resilient landscapes versus yet-to-be-defined land statuses.

The principles are based on "collaborative, innovative and time-tested approaches" that leverage local expertise, creative tools and dedicated partners to achieve well-balanced, tangible outcomes. They are rooted in western values with numerous locally led success stories, the caucuses stated.

"It's important that we have a proposal in terms of what we are for, what we want to move forward with," said Steve Daines, R-Mont., chairman of the Senate Western Caucus who serves on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

"We can talk about what we are opposed to but then we have to lay out a vision for what we want to see happen, that reflects the common sense of most westerners and most

Montanans," he said during a podcast on the alternative to the administration's initiative.

"We support conversation. It's tied to our western way of life," he said.

But the 30x30 plan allows some elements from the left that aren't really in tune with western values to define westerners' future, he said.

"Those closest to the land know best how to manage it," he said.

More of the decision making needs to be moved out of Washington, D.C., and closer to communities and locals. Bureaucrats in D.C. don't understand the western way of life, he said.

The principles serve as a strong, conservative blueprint for conservation and effective land management, said Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus.

It's an alternative that "represents the work already being done by land managers and using scientific-based management practices to ensure our lands are conserved," he said.

The principles help outline where to go from here, said Hannah Downey, policy director for the Property and Environment Research Center, which promotes free-market environmentalism.

She hopes the administration adheres to the principles it identified in the "America the Beautiful" report, she said.

"I want them to live up to these ideas of respecting property rights, conservation over preservation, being truly locally led, incentive based in these approaches," she said.

She also hopes the administration respects private property and the role they and land owners play in conservation, she said.

"I really hope that the Western Conservation Principles are able to guide what the administration does, is able to actually be implemented on the ground so we're able to actually focus on management and conservation outcomes rather than just designations," she said.

The Western Caucuses are calling on the administration to address management shortfalls in the areas of forest health, invasive species, wild horses and burros, superfund sites, park visitation, abandoned mine and orphan well reclamation, checkerboard and landlocked management, biodiversity and species recovery and promoting and protecting water infrastructure.

## FIREWOOD PRICING:

<p><b>YOU LOAD:</b></p> <p><b>\$90 a ton</b></p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p><b>PRE-PACKAGED PALLET OF KILN DRIED FIREWOOD:</b></p> <p><b>\$50 a pallet</b></p>	<p>You pick from pile of wood rounds.</p> <p>We will load on trailer/pick-up.</p>
---	---

★ 20% OFF FOR SENIORS AND VETERANS ★

Monday – Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

See Chance Finley at the Norco Office at Iron Triangle,  
60643 Highway 26, John Day (cross the bridge and go straight to large shop)  
or call the Iron Triangle Office for more information, 541-575-2102.

5265493-1

## UNITED METHODIST CHURCH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS SALE

November 10th - 11th  
9 am - 3 pm

November 12th 9 am - Noon  
1/2 Price Day

MASK REQUIRED  
15 CUSTOMERS AT A TIME

5268045-1

### BACKED BY A YEAR-ROUND CLOG-FREE GUARANTEE

EXCLUSIVE LIMITED TIME OFFER!

15% OFF & 10% OFF

5% OFF

CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE ESTIMATE

1-855-536-8838

5267671-1

### A Smarter Way to Power Your Home.

REQUEST A FREE QUOTE!

ACT NOW TO RECEIVE A \$300 SPECIAL OFFER!

1 (844) 989-2328

5267670-1

### Prepare for unexpected power outages with a Generac home standby generator

REQUEST A FREE QUOTE!  
877-557-1912

FREE 7-Year Extended Warranty\*  
A \$695 Value!

Limited Time Offer - Call for Details

5267669-1

### Your home is only as smart as your Internet.

\$40/mo

CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE ESTIMATE

888-486-0359

5267676-1

### BRING EVERYTHING YOU LOVE TOGETHER!

2-YEAR TV PRICE GUARANTEE

\$64.99 MO.

190 CHANNELS

CALL TODAY - For \$100 Gift Card

1-866-373-9175

5267674-1

### One solution for oxygen at home, away, and for travel

Introducing the INOGEN ONE - It's oxygen therapy on your terms

Call Inogen Today To Request Your FREE Info Kit

1-855-839-0752

5267672-1