Oregon’s future depends on you.
Broadening Our Base: Bringing a Diverse State Forward, Together

Oregon Environmental Council is pleased to announce that Diana Nuñez has been selected as our new Executive Director. Nuñez has served as OEC’s Interim Executive Director since April. She brings a wealth of knowledge from more than two decades of leadership in both the public and private sector, along with a passion for creating a healthy and sustainable future for all Oregonians. Diana is committed to broadening the reach of our work to be more inclusive and offer greater opportunity for engagement from all communities across the state.

What comes to mind when you hear the word environmentalist? How do we define who is equipped to speak on behalf of science and policy to protect the land that we love? I think the answer should be all of us.

As Oregonians, the legacy for protecting our air, water, land, and health belongs to us all. We are in an unprecedented time in the environmental movement, and OEC plans to carry that responsibility. Building on our 50-year history, we see a new horizon of partnerships. We stand eager to amplify the voices of the many families, businesses, and justice movements around the state that rarely get a seat at the table.

My first seven months at OEC have shown—especially after the 2019 legislative session—that Oregon needs environmental policies that are inclusive and equitable, now more than ever. I believe that we are called to expand the way we define environmental advocacy and reframe our approach at every level in order to create transformative solutions for all our communities.

Engaging people across our differences is critical to building a sustainable and effective organization and environmental movement that ensures we reach our shared goals. We will continue to engage people and communities from all parts of Oregon to grow individual capacity and build core relationships that are transformative and not transactional.

As a statewide organization, OEC is committed to remaining on the frontlines of the fight to preserve and protect our environment. OEC policy priorities in 2020 position the state as a leader in the nation on climate change, sustainable economies, and clean air and water.

Diana Nuñez
Executive Director

Weigh in on Oregon’s 100-Year Water Vision

Make sure your priorities are part of the vision for the future of our water resources. Visit OregonWaterVision.org and tell the Governor’s team to:
• Ensure no one living in Oregon is without running water for basic needs
• Expand the use of natural infrastructure and restore healthy ecosystems
• Eliminate water pollution and maximize water conservation and reuse
• Encourage integrated and adaptive approaches to water management
• Make sure most-impacted communities can meaningfully participate in decision-making
• Ensure economic benefits of investments are felt locally and equitably
Oregon’s 100-Year Water Vision Moves Forward

By: Stacey Dalgaard, Water Outreach Director, and Karen Lewotsky, Rural Partnerships and Water Policy Director

Last fall, Governor Kate Brown announced the beginning of a multi-year effort to develop and implement a 100-Year Water Vision to meet the needs of healthy communities, a sustainable economy and our environment for today and future generations. Now state leaders have launched the first phase of public input gathering to shape the vision and how it can guide decision-makers as we face a more uncertain water future than ever.

Our water system is at a critical tipping point. Every major river in Oregon is out of compliance with one or more of the water quality standards that protect human health and aquatic life. Local fish in many waterways are contaminated with mercury, PCBs and other chemicals, making them unsafe to eat and threatening their survival.

Toxic algae blooms are becoming more frequent. Irrigation systems are leaky, sometimes losing as much water as they deliver to the farm. In parts of the state, wells are going dry or groundwater is unsafe to drink, and climate change is bringing more damaging drought and flooding to communities big and small.

In the 1970s and 80s, the federal government helped with about 60 percent of the cost for water infrastructure. The federal share has now dropped to 10 percent, leaving locals to foot the bill on water treatment and delivery upgrades that are long overdue.

And in Oregon—like the rest of the country—past resource and infrastructure decisions have not included or affected all Oregonians equally. This summer, old pipes on the Warm Springs Reservation burst, leaving tribal members without running water for more than three months, closing schools and daycares, putting elders at risk, and forcing people to improvise for basic human needs.

We need a better system to deal with water crises today while also making investments that set us up for a safer, more sustainable and just water future.

OEC’s water and rural partnerships team has been traveling around the state over the past year listening to the needs and priorities of tribes and communities from Wallowa to Coos County. Oregonians across the state are calling for transformative action, not just in the solutions identified and investments promised, but in how we get there, together.

Oregon’s Integrated Water Resources Strategy identifies 18 critical water issues and more than 50 recommendations for meeting the state’s water needs. Simultaneously, emerging priorities around affordability, workforce development, natural infrastructure solutions and “One Water” approaches to integrated water management must be elevated to achieve the future we want for all Oregonians.

We believe that any vision for Oregon’s water future should be bold enough to protect and restore healthy watersheds for people and environment; broad enough to deliver integrated, cross-sector solutions; collaborative and community-driven; and designed to be equitable and lasting from the start.

More at: Bit.ly/Oregon100Vision

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Transportation in Rural Oregon

By: Sara Wright, Transportation Program Director

When we think of rural Oregon, we typically think of people driving long distances every day. It is generally true that people living in rural areas do tend to drive farther when they drive. But it’s also important to remember that many people walk, bike, share rides, and take local transit in small towns. People living and working in rural Oregon have a lot of different ways to get around.

Many small towns across the state grew up before cars were widely used, and are built for walking and horse transportation. Their downtowns are easy to get around, and people who live close in may be able to meet many of their needs without driving for every trip.

There is a wide variety of transportation options around the state, too. You can use Amtrak to travel between Portland and Klamath Falls. You can use local dial-a-ride systems, shuttles to resorts or big employers, local transit, and trains, vans and buses running between towns. Some systems are working to connect and coordinate their operations. If you’re planning to travel in Northwest Oregon, the Northwest Connector page is a great place to start out, full of information about getting around using the five transit agencies in the area. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) funds and manages the POINT bus system, a five-route, intercity bus service, and is working on ways to connect and coordinate these systems to fill in gaps. And if you’re interested in getting to outdoor recreation sites without a car, check out the PSU student “Cascadia Connect” project.

No matter where they live, many Oregonians are not able to drive at all times. Children, of course, can’t drive, but many adults don’t drive due to disability, lack of a driver’s license, or preference. And many more adults can drive but do not have continual access to a car. They may not own a car, or another member of their household may need the car for much of the day.

Whether you are a rural, urban or suburban Oregonian you may need to or choose to get around without a car. Every trip made on foot, by bike, by transit, or in a shared ride is a trip that emits less greenhouse gas and less air pollution, is less dangerous for the people around us, and is better for our health. Everything we can do to make those trips safer, more convenient and more affordable is great for all of us.

More at: Bit.ly/Transportation-Rural-OR

Air Quality Alert: Wood Smoke Pollution

While many of us enjoy the warmth and coziness of a wood stove or fireplace, few realize just how dangerous wood smoke is. Burning wood releases high levels of tiny particles and gases that harm our health. The cancer risk from a lifetime of exposure to wood smoke is 12 times greater than being exposed to the equivalent amount of cigarette smoke.

While wood smoke is a serious health issue anywhere wood is burned, several Oregon communities have violated (or are in danger of violating) federal air quality standards due to wood smoke pollution, including Burns, Eugene, Grants Pass, Hillsboro/Washington County, Klamath Falls, La Grande, Lakeview, Medford, Oakridge, Pendleton and Prineville.

Oregon Environmental Council supports the good efforts of these communities and the state’s air quality agencies (Department of Environmental Quality and Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority) to help people understand the dangers of wood smoke, provide incentives to replace wood stoves, and curtail burning on the worst air quality days.

Learn more about wood smoke and how you can protect your health on our blog: Bit.ly/OR-Wood-Smoke
The Impact of Clean Energy Jobs on Rural Communities

By: Tony Hernandez, Communication Manager

Southern Oregon communities and residents have shown nothing but true grit and resilience in the face of wildfires and the unhealthy smoke that blankets the air during the peak of wildfire seasons, which have gotten longer and more dangerous in recent years.

Ashland City Councilor Tonya Graham shared some of her community’s stories this September during Legislative Days in Salem as dozens of other experts testified to lawmakers about the need for funding to protect the state from the worst impacts of climate change. The Clean Energy Jobs bill would provide much needed resources.

The smoke from wildfires threatens all Oregonians, especially the health of children, seniors, and people with respiratory problems; costs Oregonians millions of dollars every year in firefighting; and impacts Oregon’s economy. This proposed law would lead to investments in reducing fire risks and improving forest health to protect our communities.

“Parents struggled with how to keep their children active in the summer when they were all trapped in the house together. Anybody who’s had small children understands the intensity of that experience,” Graham said to a few chuckles in the hearing room in Salem. “My son’s soccer team, along with the football team, had to be bused out to the coast in order to get a couple of days of practice out on an actual field and out of a gym because the smoke was so bad for so long.”

Oregonians must all take personal responsibility for reducing pollution—it’s why we have our car emissions checked. This proposed law requires big corporations, like oil companies, to show the same level of responsibility for cutting pollution that we do.

“We’ve become aware of the critical need: a culture of personal responsibility among our residents regarding wildfire preparedness,” Graham said. “My neighbor’s home is much safer if my home is not going up in flames. So my responsibility is not only to myself and my family but to my neighborhood and in the larger sense, my entire community.”

The proposed law guarantees communities most impacted by climate change—like rural, coastal, low income, and tribal communities—will receive funding to create jobs and protect against climate impacts. For instance, the program will pay for forest management to prevent wildfire, upgrading irrigation to save water, and changing out farm and manufacturing equipment to less polluting technology.

The Clean Energy Jobs bill benefits the entire state by reducing harmful climate pollution while also creating investments that will help specific communities thrive. The list of harms to rural Oregonians from climate impacts are long: sea level rise and coastal erosion that is eating away property and roads on the coast; rivers that top their banks, including one this year that flooded a family-owned nursery; extreme heat and wildfire smoke that make outdoor workers, including farm workers, vulnerable to respiratory illnesses; droughts in 2018 that left Prairie City without water and required the National Guard to truck in drinking water; ocean acidification that could make oyster hatcheries disappear in the Pacific; and changes in temperature that are changing the timing and location of first foods that Oregon Tribes harvest.

Fortunately, Oregon can create opportunities for rural parts of the state while reducing climate pollution. The Clean Energy Jobs bill would benefit rural Oregonians by paying for programs and work in the following areas:

• Funding efforts to reduce vegetation near communities and structures to reduce wildfire risk.
• Improving forest health, such as funding family forestland owners to protect and improve forests near streams.
• Funding career-technical programs in forestry and agriculture.
• Providing resources and technical assistance for irrigation modernization and other water projects.
• Dedicating resources to Oregon Tribes to reduce climate pollution and build resiliency.
• Helping Oregon’s shellfish and other fisheries counter the effects of ocean acidification.
• Increasing funding for home and business weatherization and energy efficiency improvements.
• Funding to repair or protect critical roads and bridges from fires, floods, and landslides.
• Creating demand and funding for renewable energy projects throughout Oregon.
• Millions of dollars to help farmers make their equipment cleaner and healthier for workers.

The Clean Energy Jobs bill has been crafted with all Oregonians in mind. Rural communities will benefit from Clean Energy Jobs. The climate crisis is not a partisan issue or a rural versus urban issue. It is a human life issue and we are all running out of time to get things right. There is no perfect solution, but inaction is not an option anymore. 2020 must be the year legislators pass comprehensive action on climate.

More at: Bit.ly/CEJ-Rural
Rural Partnerships Initiative
By: Karen Lewotsky, Rural Partnerships and Water Policy Director

For many Oregonians, rural Oregon is a mostly pretty place they travel through on their way to somewhere else. Portlanders heading southeast to Bend/Redmond for a ski weekend, folks from Eugene heading northwest for the annual Cannon Beach Sandcastle Contest, and birders from the Ashland/Medford area heading east to Malheur Wildlife Refuge for the spring songbird migration pass through farm fields, rangelands, privately owned timber lands and rural communities.

We all enjoy the scenery, but rural Oregon is much more than scenery to the twenty percent plus of Oregonians who live and work there, scattered in small communities across the landscape. Of the 354 communities in Oregon, only 55 have populations over 10,000 and only seven have populations over 100,000. The challenges facing small rural communities are many, and often they are very different from the challenges larger towns and cities face. Working lands owners and operators often live far outside the boundary of their nearest community— their challenges are even more complex.

OEC has been reaching out, listening to and working with rural landowners and communities for over 18 years. In 2001 we spent a year traveling to farms and ranches across Oregon to hear what agricultural community had to say. That led to the launch of our Sustainable Food and Farms Initiative. In 2007, we launched a Carbon Neutral Initiative for Wineries & Vineyards. We worked with cranberry growers on the southern coast in 2008-2010 to help increase market access for their product based on documented sustainable practices that reduced water pollution. In 2011 we worked with nursery owners to develop a Climate Friendly Nurseries program that verified practices for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from nursery operations. We sat on agency technical committees related to water pollution from nitrates, pesticides and soil erosion, and we helped secure funding for the Pesticide Stewardship Partnerships program, a voluntary program for reducing pesticides in surface water.

In 2018 we launched our Rural Partnerships Initiative, focused on building relationships with rural communities and rural lands managers. We listen to learn what challenges rural communities and land managers face, what kinds of support and assistance they want. We seek out local/regional projects that are underway to address water issues, climate change or toxics in the environment, and where appropriate we seek to partner with those efforts by bringing OEC’s expertise in policy, regulation and legislation to support those on-the-ground efforts.

OEC isn’t just passing through rural Oregon – we’re here to stay! More at: Bit.ly/Rural-Partnerships

Give! Guide
Your support is vital to the work we do to advance policies that protect the health of all Oregonians. We are very excited to be in the Willamette Weekly’s Give Guide again this year and the season of giving has only just begun! How will you support your community and give back this year? Please consider making an online gift during Give Guide this year: Bit.ly/OECgg2019

Business Forum
Climate change is a formidable threat to our environment – but also a business opportunity and an economic imperative. To remain competitive, businesses and government must plan and adapt. Join Oregon Environmental Council for our 2020 Business Forum. Contact kevink@oeconline.org for more information.
Dear friends of OEC,

I bid you a fond adieu. I joined Oregon Environmental Council in 1996 because I believed that if we don’t treat our environment right, we harm our own health and wellbeing. And I’ve stayed with OEC because the organization’s approach matches mine: think holistically, be collaborative, and shoot for the moon.

My original position was transportation program director. When we get transportation right, we not only keep our air clean and our climate cool—we also advance equity and community vitality. I’m proud of my role in passing a first-of-its-kind tax incentive for per-mile car insurance, establishing clean car standards that require new cars to emit fewer greenhouse gas emissions, passing the low-carbon fuel standard that requires oil companies to reduce the carbon content of their fuels, spurring ODOT and metropolitan areas to address transportation-related greenhouse gases, and supporting passage of the state’s first significant dedicated source of funding for public transit.

I’ve also greatly enjoyed my role as deputy director—supporting a remarkable, laughter-filled workplace environment that attracts high-quality, mission-driven staff; working with the team to pass important legislation like the Toxic-Free Kids Act; shepherding our strategic planning process and board policy development; and earning the nicknames GrammarBaumer and PlannerBaumer along the way.

OEC will remain my fave—a multi-issue organization that develops transformative, lasting solutions geared toward triple-bottom line outcomes (social, environmental and financial) and a leader of environmental policy-making in Oregon with a clear and competent leadership role in the state legislature.

Thank you to everyone who has helped and mentored me in my years at OEC. Nothing is achieved alone—as Halford Luccock said, “No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.”

Yours truly,

Chris Hagerbaumer

P.S. I’m thrilled that Jana Gastellum, our climate program director for a decade, will take my place. Jana has the moxie to achieve practically anything. She keeps her cool through the ups and downs of policy advocacy, and she treats everyone—both inside and outside the organization—with great respect.

Jana will manage our fantastic team of program staff, including our legislative director Morgan Gratz-Weiser, who stands up for Oregon’s environment in the state capitol; water outreach director Stacey Dalgaard, who makes sure the voices of people all over the state are heard in water conversations, especially communities that haven’t had a seat at the table in the past; rural partnerships & water policy director Karen Lewotsky, who builds bridges between rural and urban Oregonians and forwards an integrated approach to addressing the state’s water challenge; transportation program director Sara Wright, who promotes a transportation system that supports clean air, climate stability, and healthy families living in economically vibrant neighborhoods; brand-new environmental health program director Jamie Pang, who protects communities and children from toxic chemicals in our air and consumer products; and soon-to-be-hired climate program director, who will continue OEC’s advocacy to make Oregon a true leader on addressing climate change.
We bring Oregonians together to protect our water, air and land with healthy solutions that work for today and for future generations. Founded in 1968 by concerned Oregonians across the state, we are a membership-based, nonpartisan nonprofit.

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