



2019 Issue Summaries

Investing in Rural Oregon

Oregon House Democrats, representing diverse communities across our state, have long been committed to serving every Oregonian, no matter who they are or where they live. The Legislature made key investments designed to benefit rural Oregon during the 2019 legislative session.

Passed Into Law

Land Use Flexibility for Eastern Oregon

SB 2 gives Eastern Oregon communities the ability to grow business and industry while still maintaining Oregon's land use laws. Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, Sherman, Union, Wallowa, and Wheeler counties will each be allowed to develop up to 50 acres outside of the urban growth boundaries (excluding high-value farmland) for commercial or industrial use.

STEM and CTE Teacher Recruitment/Retainment in Eastern Border Region

HB 2457 directs Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, Oregon Department of Education and Office of Child Care to make specified evaluations to increase the number of educators in Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region who are available to teach courses in secondary math and science and in career and technical education programs. The goal is to make educator positions in the region more competitive with positions in Idaho.

Broadband Internet Access Support from the PUC

SB 69 adds broadband internet access support to the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP), which the Public Utility Commission (PUC) runs to assist low-income customers. OTAP is a federal and state government program that reduces the monthly cost of phone and broadband service for qualifying low-income households. Under SB 69, the PUC may give low-income customers broadband internet access assistance under the OTAP.

Small-Scale Processing on Farms

HB 2844 allows farmers to add small-scale processing on their farms to vertically integrate and support farming operations.

County Road Safety Corridors

HB 3213 directs ODOT to establish a pilot program to increase safety on county roads.

Preventing Poaching

HB 3035 increases penalties under specific circumstances for poaching. Poaching has significant economic impacts throughout Oregon communities. Legal hunting and fishing are significant drivers for rural economies, and much of Oregon's wildlife management and conservation is funded through hunting and fishing fees. Increased poaching penalties better align with neighboring states and act as a deterrent.

Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund

HB 2829 establishes the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund within ODFW for activities that serve to protect, maintain, or enhance fish and wildlife resources across the state. A \$1 million match will be allocated by the Emergency Board should the fund receive \$1 million in private funds.

Support for Tillamook Bay

SB 1025 requires ODFW to complete a survey of bay clam populations in Tillamook Bay and establishes an advisory committee balanced between conservation groups, recreational interests, and commercial interests. The advisory committee will make recommendations to ODFW to ensure the area's clam population is sustainable.

Support for the Oregon FFA

HB 2444 directs the Department of Education to coordinate with the Oregon Future Farmers of America Association to increase student achievement and improve college preparation and career readiness. The bill appropriates \$1.43 million to the Oregon FFA Association and a grant program will extend funding for agriculture science and technology programs during the summer.

Funding for Emergency Communications and 9-1-1 Services

HB 2449 renews and expands the Emergency Communications Tax, providing funding for critical 9-1-1 services throughout the state of Oregon.

Rural Broadband

HB 2173 codifies the Oregon Broadband Office in statute and eliminates the sunset for the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council, which will help expand critical broadband access across the state.

Farm-to-School Program Expansion

HB 2579 expands the types of entities that may receive a noncompetitive Farm-to-School grant to purchase food produced or processed in Oregon. Possible recipients will include Child and Adult Care Food Program center-based providers and Summer Food Service Program meal providers – two federal programs that feed children and adults in need.

Agricultural Channel Maintenance

HB 2437 allows farmers to provide notice to ODA, ODFW, and DSL for channel maintenance, instead of obtaining a removal-fill permit in certain conditions.

Tax Credits

HB 2164 (tax credit package) featured support for rural Oregon, including:

- Short line railroad rehabilitation tax credit to help railroad owners maintain, reconstruct, or replace critical short line rail infrastructure across Oregon.
- Cultural trust tax credit to reimburse Oregonians for their contributions to the Oregon Cultural Trust that match donations toward other arts and culture causes in the same tax year. The cultural trust supports heritage and cultural programs for every county and federally recognized tribe.
- Volunteer emergency medical services providers tax credit of \$250 for those providing service in rural areas.
- Agricultural workforce housing construction tax credit of 50% of the eligible construction, rehabilitation, or acquisition costs provided to workers.
- Crop donation tax credit for growers who donate crops to food banks or other charitable organizations. Growers are eligible for a credit of 15% of the donated crop value.
- Food processing equipment is exempted from property taxation for five years.

Funded

Business Oregon budget

SB 5524 includes:

- \$750,000 lottery funds for the Rural Opportunity Initiative grant program to support entrepreneurship-based economic development in Oregon's rural communities.
- \$581 million for Business Oregon's Infrastructure Division to fund municipal infrastructure, water and wastewater facilities that ensure compliance with federal law, seismic rehabilitation for schools and emergency facilities, port and airport facilities, levee improvements, marine navigation improvements, and other facilities that support economic and community development.

Made Progress, Not Signed Into Law

Support for the Eastern Border Region

HB 2456 would allow counties within the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region to rezone up to 200 acres of farm land for housing. HB 2454 would give additional time to out-of-state applicants seeking licensure in Oregon, if they are licensed in another state and seeking to work within the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region. *Both passed the House and did not come up for a Senate vote.*

Rural Broadband

HB 2184 would expand the Oregon Universal Service Fund to provide funds for rural broadband in addition to basic telecommunications service. Combined with HB 2173, these bills help provide desperately needed broadband service to rural communities, schools, and businesses. *HB 2173 was signed into law, but HB 2184 did not come up for a Senate vote after passing the House.*