

# Climate coalition gains momentum as nonprofit

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One year after becoming a formal nonprofit organization, the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition is ready to broaden its outreach on climate change issues affecting farms, forests, businesses and communities across the region.

The group, which goes by the shorthand EOC3, originally formed in 2006 as the Umatilla County Climate Change Focus Group, an ad hoc citizen's committee to discuss local climate impacts and how to adapt moving forward.

EOC3 filed for nonprofit status in January 2017, and its nine-member board of directors has produced a strategic action plan outlining goals and programs. That plan will be unveiled at the group's 2018 annual meeting Saturday, Jan. 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Oregon State University Extension Service conference room at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton. The meeting is open to the public.

Colleen Sanders, EOC3 board chairwoman and the newly hired climate adaptation planner for the Confederated Tribes of the



Photo contributed by Colleen Sanders  
**The Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition, or EOC3, participated in a clean energy jobs rally Nov. 4 in Pendleton, organized by Don Sampson and Renew Oregon to raise support for a proposed Oregon cap-and-invest energy policy.**

Umatilla Indian Reservation, said their primary mission is to provide education and understanding about climate change, especially as it influences rural Eastern Oregon.

"So much of our human society has been built on the predictability of our climate and the seasonal weather patterns," Sanders said. "What climate change is doing is completely throwing a wrench in those."

Looking ahead to 2018, Sanders said EOC3 plans host monthly luncheons and build a network of speakers versed in different aspects of

climate change to promote a greater knowledge of the issues.

"The idea is to create a conversation space for climate change issues," she said.

Dave Powell, vice chairman of the EOC3 board and a retired silviculturist with the Umatilla National Forest, gave a climate presentation Tuesday for students at Weston-McEwen High School in Athena. Though his main topic was forestry, Powell said the impacts kept coming back to one crucial element: water.

"When you think about all of the benefits and ecosystem services that a forest provides, it's becoming more and more clear to me that water is the most valuable," Powell said. "The webs that reach out from that are huge."

According to one climate model from OSU, average temperatures in the Blue Mountains could increase anywhere from 1 to 3 degrees Celsius over the next 75 years. The most obvious impact, Powell said, will be more moisture falling in the form of rain instead of snow.

Lower snowpack, which is needed to replenish streams for farms and fish into summer, means faster runoff at higher elevations.

Bruce Barnes, EOC3 board member and executive director of the Pendleton-based nonprofit Flora ID, said studies show that peak water flow in the Umatilla River has come 30 days earlier than it did in the 1980s.

"There are so many different factors to consider," Barnes said. "They're interwoven. Each one may affect several different factors, or vice-versa."

Less snow and more rain has already affected the timing of timber harvest, Barnes said, since loggers prefer to work when the ground is still frozen.

Don Wysocki, fellow EOC3 member and extension soil scientist for OSU in Umatilla County, said changes in snowpack and water availability will drive changes in local agriculture, pushing back irrigation seasons and ripening dryland crops earlier than usual.

"Harvest will occur earlier. Winters will probably get more heat units, so that changes the growth cycle of wheat," Wysocki said. "We'll probably favor wheat

varieties that mature earlier to try to escape drought or water shortages."

There is some debate, Wysocki said, on how climate change may affect precipitation during the growing season, which could have a positive or negative effect on regional production.

"I've seen projections going both ways on that," he said. "But I suspect there's some evidence that we may have a little better growing season precipitation."

Sanders said she worries that changes in water availability may exacerbate existing conflicts between industries, such as irrigation and fisheries. The public has to start thinking about adaptation to ensure the long-term health of those resources, she said.

Registering EOC3 as a nonprofit has helped to give the group a new energy, Sanders said, and they hope to give rural Oregonians a voice on climate issues and policies.

"We want Eastern Oregon residents and industries to be informed and empowered around climate change," Sanders said. "Climate change is going to impact everything, and everybody needs to be involved."