

IDEA PAPER
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RURAL OREGON
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INTRODUCTION: Rural Oregon is in trouble. The lack of jobs, medical services, educational opportunities and the depletion of many of the nature based industries has delivered a very serious blow to the potential survival for rural Oregon. Affordable and safe housing is in great demand and opportunities for families to stay in Eastern Oregon are needed, along with focused and concentrated political influence.

Recently, all of the political jurisdictions in Eastern Oregon have banded together under the banner of the Eastern Oregon Alliance. In the western part of the state, about 40 small cities are working to create an organization that will help them deal with issues. Both organizations are focused on the needs of the small and rural community and are seeking solutions to long standing as well as new issues. Survival of small and rural communities is key to the efforts of both groups and vital to the long term health of all of Oregon.

Current state efforts to help are not working. The discoordinated delivery of services by state agencies and central decision making, make it difficult for locals to work with the state. Issues that are critically important to rural communities are not being addressed. A whole new way of assisting the rural area needs to be developed and implemented. National studies regarding rural development indicate that the future of the rural area is bleak at best, devastating is more accurate. Research by the many rural development centers indicate that our rural areas will not fare well unless we do something new, innovative and different. Change and leadership are needed!

Lacking the resources to track, monitor and apply for some grants, being long distances from important meetings, and with professional staff being totally locked into day to day survival, leaves the rural area with few opportunities to create solutions to long standing problems. And, the issues affecting our rural areas also have a direct impact on our metropolitan areas. The two different types of communities are tied together. A coherent, strategic and viable state policy and vision statement dealing with our collective commitment to the rural areas is needed.

Oregon, along with many other states must find a new way to assist rural areas that enhances the livability of the rural area and slows the out-migration to the larger population centers. This will be difficult given the financial crisis of State Government, but not impossible. The potential now exists for new and innovative ways to deal with these issues. With vision, commitment and leadership, State Leaders can deliver new strategies!

NEW STRATEGIES: Here is a list of some new strategies that could 1.) Provide leadership for the enhancement of the rural areas, 2.) Increase the Governor's standing, 3.) Help stem the tide of out-migration from rural areas and 4.) Refocus existing resources to make a difference.

1. **STATE SERVICE DELIVERY:** Establish **standard administrative and sub-districts** for the delivery of all state services.

2. **STATE POLICY:** For the **Governor to adopt a state policy stating a commitment** to have state resources work with local government to enhance the livability and survival of the rural area.

3. **GRADUATE STUDENT INTERNS:** Request that the Oregon Congressional delegation **seek earmarking for at least \$2 million in education funds to create a program** to funnel **graduate students** from the state university system to local rural communities to help supplement the limited staffing capability in most rural communities.

4. **DECENTRALIZE STATE AGENCIES:** Decentralize ODOT, DLCD, Economic Development, housing, employment, workforce programs and tourism as well as other state resources and agencies **reassigning staff to rural areas** in teams to work shoulder to shoulder with local government and business interests to help the rural areas. Divide work into district and sub-district areas.

5. **FUNDING:** Allocate limited funds to each of the rural areas for improvements based on the development of local strategies (sound familiar) developed in collaboration with local communities. Develop strategic plans in collaboration with the local community.

6. **EXPERIENCED EXPERTISE:** Create a special program fund to recruit and pay retired city managers, private business folks and others so that they will move to the rural areas and share their expertise and knowledge. \$1000 to \$2000 per month as a supplemental income (and /or provide them with health insurance) could get many retired managers to move to the rural area where their expertise, knowledge and ability to get things done could make a difference. These skilled resources could be strategically located in teams of 4-5 and focused on making things happen. Teams could be sited in Burns, Prineville, and other small communities. Such skilled professionals could help small and rural communities consolidate services, provide skilled analysis, and help in making solid decisions.

7. **THE LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY:** Re-energize the land grant university by creating a new and focused rural development center at OSU in Central Oregon. This focus could be used to get the environmentalists together with local communities and business interests to find ways to return some of the lost industries and jobs to the rural area. The land grant school could do all sorts of research to help the rural area. Research what it would take to make a middle income wage from 640 acres. Research how we provide more opportunities for rural families to stay in rural areas. Research could find

ways to re-energize the timber industry within the strict laws currently in place. Develop the opportunity for an environmentally clean slaughterhouse so that Eastern Oregon cattle do not have to be shipped to other places for processing.

8. ENHANCE DECISION MAKING: Mount a major educational program for local elected officials significantly enhancing their ability to make decisions and work together to enhance the rural areas ability to survive. (We have The Pacific Program, RDI, PSU etc. and all sorts of other programs that nibble at this, but no coordinated coherent effort.) Let's begin to certify local elected officials and enhance their skills and ability to lead and move their communities. [See # 16 below]

9. HEALTH CARE: Create new health care concepts that would ensure high quality health care for the rural areas. Reform liability insurance, leverage SAIF into a more aggressive effort to help to do this and other concepts yet to be developed. Open up the government health insurance programs to the private sector in rural communities in a community approach and tie all government employees into one health insurance program. Tap into current efforts in the private sector to analyze current health delivery. Build health services into the total fabric of the rural community so as to strengthen the livability of rural communities. Create mobile health clinics staffed with health professionals.

10. HOUSING: Create new housing concepts, tapping into what is currently being done by the private sector, and include financing that would allow more people in the rural area to qualify for and afford housing. Make better use of manufactured, panelized and frame housing. Research and introduce less expensive and more effective water and sewer treatment methods. Make housing a part of the rural community fabric and focus this element on the creation of economically viable communities over the next 100 years.

11. LAND USE: Rethink the land development policies to be less restrictive and to provide more flexibility for healthy growth in the rural areas. Encourage the private sector to plan, develop and produce whole new towns that would relate to existing communities while not diminishing the livability of the existing communities. (For example, new towns of from 2,000 to 5,000 people could be developed outside of a one mile radius from Burns or other small cities. Focus more effort on the survival of the rural area and the creation of economically viable communities over the next 100 years. The opportunity to do something new and innovative but that works is now at hand!

12. RURAL POLICY AND VISION: Create, through collaboration of all parties (rural and urban) a state **policy statement and vision** dealing with the long term survival of the rural areas. Make the 100 year commitment to deliver.

13. NATURE BASED ECONOMIES: Working with environmentalists, bring rural communities and nature based economy leaders together to **invent and implement new** economic development efforts that would return a portion of lost economies to rural areas. (Capitalize on the lessons learned in pilot efforts in other places that have done this).

14. **INDIAN NATIONS: Partner with the Indian Nations** to help create the strategies necessary to ensure the long term survival of the rural areas.

15. **INVESTMENTS:** Allocate a certain percent of **state investment funds to local rural areas**. Encourage and assist local governments to re-invest their reserves in a local community bank to facilitate local job growth and investment.

16. **PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING: Create four local leadership training centers** supported by college level credit through PSU/Hatfield Center. Recognize the need to train local leaders, business managers and community members. College credit will help keep quality leaders in the community. Link this effort with Indian Nation Training currently being provided by PSU. Use the Tech Group or CEF model to ensure long term operation.

17. **INFRASTRUCURE OPTIONS:** Research and approve the use of **less expensive but more effective infrastructure options** such as the package sewer treatment plant to allow small and rural communities to solve current wastewater issues without acquiring the burden of long term “mortgages”. Refocus job training and development on production of storm water drain solutions such as the “**wool project**” creating cottage jobs while providing communities with a more cost effective solution to the problem.

FINALLY: The first answer will be “we are broke!” Well, we are not broke!. There are lots of different ways to use existing resources that the state and particularly this Governor and the legislature, in partnership with local leaders could implement while providing some dynamic and helpful leadership to assist the rural areas in their current dilemma. In fact, it is the current crisis that opens the door for massive change in how we do business. **Now is the time for the changes to be made.**

If we continue to hide behind our financial situation, we are in effect determining what the future of our rural areas will be. And, no-one wants what is ahead, it is time to act. However, if we change how we think and do our work, we can make a significant difference in how the rural areas of our state survive and work. And, it can be done with existing resources.

The challenges are in front of us. Now is the time for bold innovative efforts and this Governor has the door of opportunity right in front of him.

This list of ideas developed by Paul Koch.
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