



April 11, 2025,

TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means

RE: Community Hearing on HB 5006 in La Grande at Eastern Oregon University

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brenda Smith, I am the director of High Desert Partnership, a nonprofit organization that serves Harney County and rural Eastern Oregon. I am also a trustee on the board of Eastern Oregon University. I believe in our rural university and how it serves the residents of Harney County. I urge you to support EOU this legislative session.

Today, I am here to talk about the power of community and collaboration and share our plan to expand the work of High Desert Partnership and to ask for your support for our capital construction request for an Eastern Oregon Collaborative Center.

High Desert Partnership proposes establishing the Eastern Oregon Collaborative Center to serve ever increasing requests from groups in this region to work collaboratively using a model we have been practicing for nearly 20 years. A center in our region will benefit the state by providing more place-based coordination with state agencies in our rural outposts. Increased ability to leverage state resources to implement collaborative projects and also by reducing litigation when people are not working together. No other organization provides the level of support across a variety of topics that High Desert Partnership does. A center such as this does not exist anywhere in the region.

The center will be a base for collaborative partners, agencies and organizations working in eastern Oregon and will provide economic benefit in the region. This center will connect and grow community-based resources leading to greater community resilience in the region.

I believe this is no better time than now to invest in cultivating collaboration and building relationships in rural eastern Oregon. In Harney County, we have been through it all, floods, droughts, economic hardships, groundwater concerns, wildfires and more. Yet, we keep coming though and I believe this is in part due to our culture of collaboration. Let us show how we can expand collaboration for rural Oregon through our Eastern Oregon Collaborative Center.

Sincerely,

*Brenda Smith*

Brenda Smith, Ph.D. Director, High Desert Partnership

*High Desert Partnership*

235 Highway 20 North Hines, Oregon 97738 | P.O. Box 252 Burns, OR 97720

[highdesertpartnership.org](http://highdesertpartnership.org)

541-573-7820



# HIGH DESERT *Partnership*

## **BUILDING EASTERN OREGON'S FUTURE:** *High Desert Partnership's Collaborative Center*

**High Desert Partnership—a proven catalyst for rural progress in eastern Oregon through collaboration—seeks your support to establish the Eastern Oregon Collaborative Center, a vital hub that will transform how communities solve complex challenges, seize opportunities and create lasting prosperity across the state.**

Contact: Brenda Smith, High Desert Partnership Director  
[director@highdesertpartnership.org](mailto:director@highdesertpartnership.org)  
541-589-4220

### **Eastern Oregon's Collaborative Success Story**

For 20 years, High Desert Partnership (HDP) has emerged as a nationally recognized leader in solving complex rural challenges through collaboration:

- HDP's network of six collaboratives bring essential resources to eastern Oregon's rural communities.
- HDP maximizes every dollar by strategically leveraging federal, state, and philanthropic funding.
- HDP's collaborative model builds community resilience and delivers tangible results.



### **The Power of High Desert Partnership's Collaborative Model**

- Successful collaboration requires four key elements: **relationship-building, neutral facilitation, adequate meeting space, and administrative support.**
- HDP ensures diverse stakeholders have a seat at the table and invest in building lasting relationships.
- While collaboration takes time, collaborative participants understand this investment creates durable, resilient solutions.

#### **Relationship-Building**



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IS THE HEART OF HDP COLLABORATION

#### **Neutral Facilitation**



EFFECTIVE FACILITATION ENSURES INCLUSIVE, CONSENSUS-DRIVEN COLLABORATIVE ACTION

#### **Adequate Meeting Space**



MEETINGS GATHER DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES, COMMITTED TO WORKING TOGETHER

#### **Administrative Support**



SUPPORTING PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER BEGINS WITH A HDP COORDINATOR AND FUNDING

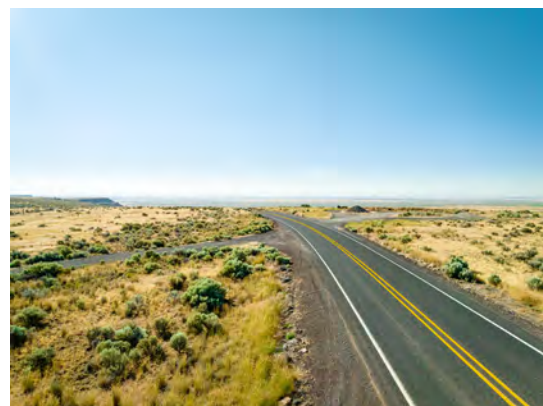


## High Desert Partnership's Vision: The Eastern Oregon Collaborative Center

- HDP proposes establishing a dedicated Eastern Oregon Collaborative Center in Harney County.
- This center will build upon HDP's proven track record of transcending conflicts and achieving progress in one of Oregon's historically divided regions.
- The center will provide:
  - A physical facility with meeting, office, and work spaces.
  - Staffing to manage operations.
  - Resources to support both new and existing collaborative initiatives.
  - A learning hub for collaborative strategies.
  - A base for collaborative partners, agencies and organizations working in eastern Oregon.

## Why Oregon Needs This Investment

- Currently, the demand for HDP's collaborative services exceeds HDP's administrative and physical capacity.
- No other organization provides these essential collaboration services in eastern Oregon.
- This center will connect and grow community-based resources leading to:
  - Greater ecological resilience
  - Economic growth
  - Social vitality in remote rural communities
- The center will make efficient use of limited resources by:
  - Leveraging state funding with private and federal dollars
  - Reducing costly litigation and conflict



HIGH DESERT  
*Partnership*

### Contact Information

Brenda Smith  
High Desert Partnership Director  
[director@highdesertpartnership.org](mailto:director@highdesertpartnership.org)  
541-589-4220



[Land Water Sky Soul,  
3 minute film of Harney County](#)

“ Collaborative work done in Harney County has transcended deep seated conflicts, survived generational transitions and resulted in real progress on the ground. A collaborative center will build upon the innovative and effective work to date.”

~Bob Sallinger